

Make Dinner a Winner

By Celestia Shumway

“She could, transform a dinner into a kind of love affair; an affair that made no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite.” -*Babette's Feast*

Dinnertime is a key element to creating a family culture in your home that nurtures love, family bonding, curiosity, a love of learning, patriotic and family values, and just plain fun! Studies show that families who regularly hold dinner have children who are less likely to get into drugs/alcohol, sexual promiscuity, and crime. These children are more likely to get higher education and be happier.

In General Conference of October 2009, President Monson told the story of Dr. Jack McConnell, a medical doctor who grew up with a father who always asked his family every night at the dinner table, “What have you done today to help someone else?” President Monson suggested that parents ask their children the same question. Can you imagine the life of service and unselfishness you will inspire in your children by consistently asking this question at dinnertime?

In General Conference of April 2010, Elder David Bednar invited parents to discuss principles from the Book of Mormon. He reminded us that the Book of Mormon is the only book that God has testified to be true. Using Book of Mormon principles, you could ask, “Have you noticed this principle play out in any books that you've read lately? How about in your own life or in civilizations of world history?” (The January and July 2004 *Ensigns* have charts with Book of Mormon principles, entitled, “Book of Mormon Times at a Glance, Some Statements of Gospel of Principles.” Find them here

<http://lds.org/churchmagazines/1-2004-Ensign/Jan2004Ensign.pdf>, page 20 and here

<http://lds.org/churchmagazines/7-2004-Ensign/Jul2004Ensign.pdf> page 28, print them out, and have them handy at your dinner table to discuss.)

Elder Bednar suggests that we take time to spontaneously bear testimony to our children at dinner. He says, “... a naturally occurring family conversation at dinner may be the perfect setting for a parent to recount and testify of specific blessings he or she received during the course of relatively routine activities that day. And a testimony need not always begin with the phrase 'I bear you my testimony.' Our witness can be declared as simply as 'I know I was blessed with inspiration at work today' or 'The truth in this scripture always has been a powerful source of direction for me.' Similar opportunities to bear testimony also can arise while traveling together in a car or bus or in a multitude of other settings.”

(“Watching With All Perseverance,” General Conference April 2010) These discussions of Book of Mormon principles can be an “early warning system” to help us parents know if something is wrong in our children's lives. Then we can take it to the Lord and know how to proceed with that child.

The movie *Babette's Feast* features the story of one woman who has a passion for making a dinner that nourishes both body and spirit. Babette inherits a fortune and uses it to create her life's masterpiece, a huge lavish feast. So she imports boatloads of the finest foods and spends

days preparing for the feast. She invites several neighborhood guests, who feast while she slaves away in the kitchen working her culinary craft, never appearing for the feast. The guests thoroughly enjoy the meal. Their hearts soften and they forgive one another of their offenses and estrangements. One of the guests, a uniformed general, stands up and talks about the glories of divine mercy. He says the main point of the whole story, “This feast reminds me of a woman chef in Paris.” (He doesn't know that she is just behind the closed door in the kitchen.) “She could, transform a dinner into a kind of love affair that made no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite.”

Sister friends, this is the work that we as women are called to do, to nurture, both body and spirit, and to do it so artfully that the line is blurred. I encourage you to watch this movie on DVD, and then read Truman Madsen's thoughts about it in a talk he gave at a BYU Women's Conference. Brother Madsen says that Elder Jeffrey R. Holland “helped me see this story as an elaborate metaphor of what the scriptures call the wedding supper—or the marriage supper—of the Lamb. Jesus, does indeed, liken the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast. He calls the church His bride. And when she is adorned as a bride, He, as the Bridegroom, will come in triumphal reunion. To this consummating feast the poor and the meek of the earth will be invited. It will be a feast of feasts. All this was envisioned by President John Taylor, who said, “In the sacrament we 'shadow forth the time when He will come again and when we shall meet and eat bread with Him in the kingdom of God' (JD 14:185, March 20, 1870).” (“The Savior, the Sacrament, and Self-worth,” BYU Women’s Conference Talk, 1999)

Brother Madsen concluded this talk on self-worth with the following, “You faithful sisters, married or unmarried, who move daily (and hardly with a break) from the garden plot to the crucial minutia of food labels to the cups and measures of cookery; you, who struggle and preside in the kitchen and keep vigil; you, who reach out to the perennial needs of your family and loved ones; you, who with artistry gather flowers and turn an ordinary table into an altar that summons prayer and thanksgiving; you, who by your very presence, turn eating into a feast--into dining in the name of the Lord, and who, therefore, bring a bountiful measure of grace to your table, lend your faith to boys and sometimes inept men who officiate at the sacrament table. Let the tables turn on your serving. Lend your faith to our trying to act as you do in Christlike dignity. For this is as close as we may ever come to your divine calling to give and to nurture life itself. Come to a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb. I can bear witness with a cloud of witnesses that in the midst of affliction, yes, even and especially in the midst of with a cloud of witnesses that in the midst of affliction, yes, even and especially in the midst of affliction, his table is spread and that with blessings unmeasured, His cup runneth o'er. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”

So we as women nurture through our mother’s milk, our service, and our mealtimes. Mealtimes can be the crowning glory of our homemaking. They can soften angry hearts, hurt feelings, and keep our family life centered on the home and the teachings that come from our home. There's almost nothing that sounds better to my ears than to hear, “Oh Mom, thank you for making this food. It is so good!” as my family shovels it down. Any faults or mistakes you make as a mom/homemaker/wife can more easily be forgiven if you learn to cook great food that keeps your family coming back home.

OK, so that's enough of the flowery inspiration. Now for the practical, nitty-gritty of how we do it. How do we plan for, shop for, and cook endless meals? Wouldn't it be easier if we shot our arms with IV drips of nutrients every day? Yes, we would get physical nutrients that way, but nothing can substitute for the emotional nutrients that come from eating together and talking.

For inspiration, I like to find cookbooks and get recipes. I found a terrific one by Liz Edmunds, LDS mother of seven from outside of Park City.* (see footnote at the bottom of this document) She does dinnertime makeovers to help families get out of their ruts of avoiding family dinner. Her excellent book, *The Food Nanny Rescues Dinner* gives solutions to the common obstacles that keep families from having dinner together. To help inspire her planning of menus, she does the following theme nights:

Monday- Comfort Food and Dessert after Family Home Evening
Tuesday- Italian Night
Wednesday- Fish and Meatless Night
Thursday- Mexican Night
Friday- Pizza Night, either take-out or homemade
Saturday- Grill Night
Sunday- Traditional food

Her book has recipes for each of these themes. She also has breakfast recipes for dinners, salads, side dishes of vegetables, and desserts. You probably won't like this cookbook if you are vegan or into the Body Ecology Diet, as she has a lot of meat and dairy. But if you are into Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* which includes animal fats, you are going to like these recipes. You can easily adapt them to suit your real food needs. I personally don't believe in eating canola oil or store-bought mayonnaise, so I will be substituting olive oil or butter for those ingredients. I also suggest the Trim Healthy Mama cookbooks for more recipe ideas for nourishing families.

Liz follows the idea of using dinnertime to nourish both body and spirit. Here are some questions you can ask during dinnertime to stimulate thought and nourish the spirit. I suggest you print this page then keep it on a bookcase close to your dining room table to pull out at the appropriate time. I have a bookcase next to my dining room chair. I keep some reference books there like an atlas and a dictionary so I can answer children's questions as they come up during dinner. (If you are more high-tech you might have your laptop or smartphone close by to Google answers.) I also keep a shelf full of recipe books close by so once a week when I am eating lunch, on the day I am going to go shopping, I will pull out the books and plan a week's worth of menus.

“What have you done today to help someone else?”

“What is a time when Heavenly Father answered your prayer and how?”

“What was your high point today? What was your low point?”

“If you had \$100 how would you spend it?”

“What is something you would like to see our family do within one year’s time? How about five years?”

“What scripture story is your favorite and why?”

“If you could talk to God face to face, what is the first question you would ask and why?”

“What is something you wish our family did more of?”

“If you could invent anything and make it work, what would you invent and why?”

“What two book characters do you wish could meet and why?”

“If you could go anywhere in the world where would you go today?”

“When was a time when you felt the Holy Ghost prompting you to do something?”

“What shall we plant in our garden this spring?”

“Have you heard about self-driving cars? What do you think about that? Are you willing to take a ride in one?”

“Someday someone's going to offer you a drink of alcohol, if they haven't already. Why do we avoid alcohol?. What can you say to someone who wants you to try a drink?”

“Tell me about something you learned in a book this week that you didn't know before you read the book.”

“When did a friend do something nice for you and what was it?”

“Who have you noticed lately who is lonely and what is something we could do for that person?”

“What relative has a birthday coming up? Let’s talk about making a card for that person and what we can write to him or her.”

For more conversations about places in the world, have a globe near the table, Spin it and pick a place to talk about once a week. Look it up on Google and find a tourist spot located in it or nearby and learn why it’s culturally significant.

*Liz has become the Food Nanny. See thefoodnanny.org. You can watch her TV show on [BYUTV](#) on Thursday nights. [Her website](#) has planning sheets to help you plan menus and shopping lists.

