

- I. <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=super+spiritual+life&qpv=super+spiritual+life&view=detail&mid=4CE9BE636541D14F22934CE9BE636541D14F2293&FORM=VRD GAR>. I share that not because I am going to try to convert you to the cult of organics but because I do want to talk to you about food and drink. And how it can if we are not careful hurt our relationship with God and the world around us. In fact, Christians from long ago saw gluttony as one of the most deadly or toxic sins. You might say, "Really? Overeating a sin?" So were the early Christians just hungry when they came up with that or was there something else going on? Let's explore that today.
- II. Let me ask us, when you hear the word *gluttony*, what immediately comes to your mind? Thanksgiving, Super Bowl parties, or eating wings while watching the ACC tournament until you're nauseous? For me it's the Golden Corral. (**images**) GC is what all the cool kids call it. How many GC fans do we have? Let's be honest. The whole set up has this almost bovine feel to it. Starting with the name "Corral," to the way you are funneled into the restaurant as if you are being herded into a barn, to the way the food bar is laid out like a feeding trough. But what really does it for me is how they announce the new desserts they put out on the dessert bar. Anyone pick up on this? They ring like a cow bell! I am not making this up. Why don't they just go ahead and yell, "Yee haw! Come and git it!" and be done with it? But did this ever stop me from being a GC patron. No, of course not. When the kids were young we were hitting GC on a regular basis since kids ate free on certain nights. Being the frugal guy, I always felt that I once I paid my ticket to the trough it was my duty to eat as much as humanly possible. I can't tell you how many times I ended up hitting the food bar like three or four times and feeling that my jeans were going to explode like C4. Yet even then upon hearing the cow bell I would somehow manage to crawl, or more appropriately roll, over to the dessert bar and cram in just a little more. So is a night out at GC a classic example of gluttony? Maybe. But first we have to answer the question, "What is gluttony anyways?" And what makes it a sin...especially one worthy of being in the top seven?
- III. The word gluttony comes from a word that means "to gulp down" like gulping down without even tasting it. Kind of like on my fourth trip to the feeding trough. One way to define gluttony then is **consuming to the point where it hurts and the enjoyment is gone**. So by that definition, I committed the sin of gluttony at GC on many occasions. Does that mean every time we hit the buffet or grandma's house we are putting our souls in peril? Not exactly. The occasional overeating can lead to some weight gain and gastronomic misery but won't necessarily destroy our walk with Jesus. I think a better definition of gluttony is this: **Making food and drink our ultimate passion...the number one thing in our life**. This can mean consuming too much, consuming too little or simply giving it too much thought, period. Let me stop here and make it very clear that just because someone is overweight it doesn't mean they are committing gluttony. It could be from genetics or a health-related issue...so we should never jump to that conclusion or judge.
- IV. Yet as a nation we do, don't we? As one author pointed out, gluttony according to mainstream society is the worst of the seven deadly sins. And not for religious reasons. No one is going to give you a beef (no pun intended) about being prideful. Or it's unlikely your

friend is going to call you out if you lust over someone in yoga pants at the gym. In our world today these are “acceptable sins.” But gluttony is almost unforgivable. Why? It’s the one sin that can have an outward impact on our body. And since in current postmodern America we value the outside more than the inside, the physical more than the spiritual, the external rather than the internal, gluttony or the appearance of gluttony is the one sin we can’t bear as a society. If you think I am wrong, just check out daytime talk shows, the magazine rack at Food Lion, or millions of diet blogs, vlogs and on and on. We are a nation obsessed with thinness, and even the appearance of gluttony makes our heads spin.

- V. Let’s pause for a moment and look at what Proverbs has to say about one form of gluttony. Proverbs, in the Old Testament, is considered by bible scholar types to be wisdom literature...in other words, it offers very down to earth advice on how to live. The author is traditionally believed to be King Solomon, King David’s son. **Proverbs 23:20-21 NIV** **Proverbs 25:16 NIV**. These along with a few other Old Testament passages are warning against the physical and economic dangers of the overconsumption of food. And this eventually can have spiritual implications, which I will say more about in a moment. The physical aspect of overeating or drinking shouldn’t be overlooked. I can’t tell you how many people I have visited in the hospital over the years that spent a lifetime overconsuming, and they ended up trapped in bodies that simply had had enough of having too much. So maybe then our society has it right? We should make skinny the top priority?
- VI. Here is the skinny on skinny. The ultimate irony. We are fanatical about eradicating fat and strive for model measurements while simultaneously becoming a heavier nation. **(image)** And it is literally killing us. Obesity according to the CDC is the number one cause of preventable death in America. It is costing us well over \$147 billion a year in medical costs. Not to mention the increase cost of things we never even consider, such as fuel. Since we are a heavier people, we require millions more in gas each year to get us from point A to point B. So despite the fact that the top selling books are diet and you can’t turn on daytime TV without Dr. Oz proclaiming the next miracle diet plan, we continue to overconsume at astonishing rates. It appears that our obsession with skinny is almost having the opposite effect or at the least no effect. It’s kind of like when I was a kid and our family would vacation at a house high on top of a mountain in Tennessee. My mom would always warn me not to go below the bluff and play in the caves. Which of course made me want to go below the bluff and play in the caves all the more. Same with all this food talk and fat fixation. Could part of the solution be less about calorie counting and more to do with the focus of our hearts? Maybe the problem has less to do with our bodies and more on the emptiness of our souls? Will say more about that in a moment.
- VII. Here is the rub. While many of us our killing ourselves by overeating, each year an estimated 2.6 million **(image)** children die from hunger related causes. That is more than 7 thousand children dying each day. Many experts believe that it would take approximately \$30 billion a year to solve world hunger. That is \$100 billion less than we spend a year on medical bills from overeating. Get that? **We are killing ourselves with too much food while millions are dying each year because of not enough.** There is something deeply wrong

with this. I realize it is not as simple as us cutting back on our eating and then sending that food to some Third World country. It doesn't work that way. That is like when I was a kid, my mom always said to me, "Ronnie, if you don't eat your veggies, I am going to wrap them up and mail'em to the children in Africa." Of course, I was secretly thinking, "Go for it, Mom. Send those brussels sprouts right over." But the truth of it is our overeating as a country is harming us and impacting how we can help and share with others. Paul, who at one time was a Christian hater and now is one of Jesus' biggest fans, wrote to the church in Galatia (**NRSV Galatians 5:13-14**) He is saying that we are no longer under the Jewish cultural laws, including food laws of the Old Testament. However, we shouldn't use our freedom just to eat whatever we want for our own benefit and pleasure, but rather so we can more freely serve others and truly love our neighbors whether they are next door, across the city, or across the world.

- VIII. Let me use a simple example of how it can have a wider impact. If I am overeating and indulging on a regular basis, this will eventually lead to health issues...diabetes, high blood pressure, bad heart, or whatever. So when I am asked to help out at the Salvation Army, I physically can't do it. My act of gluttony, my overconsumption, can keep me from helping the needy. And when I want to give to our church or another ministry, I can't because of excessive medical bills. This is why this form of gluttony doesn't just hurt myself, it can impact those around me too.
- IX. But for many early Christians overeating wasn't an issue. Unlike you and me, they lived in times of scarcity not times of plenty. So then how was gluttony a problem? And if I am at a healthy weight now, why should I be concerned about gluttony at all? Gregory the Great in the 6<sup>th</sup> century warned Christians not only about overeating but, as he put it, "eating too daintily." For me that conjures up images of women in gowns having tea and crumpets. What he meant about that was to be overly concerned about food period. To give too much of our time and thought to it so it distracts us from the more important things in life. Living in a very carb and calorie conscious America that ranks the Food Network as one of the top networks, this might be more of a problem for many of us than overeating. There is nothing wrong with food itself. Throughout the bible, including the beginning, middle and end, food is clearly a gift from God and always figures big in celebration. ***But it is meant to be enjoyed not obsessed over.*** And here is what I believe is the ultimate danger of gluttony and why Christians have rated it among the top seven sins. When Jesus was tempted in the desert not eating for forty days Satan came to him with a porterhouse steak. Actually he tempted him to turn the stones into bread. But Jesus refused and said this (**NRSV Matthew 4:4b**) Nothing should come before our Heavenly Father and our obedience to Him. But sometimes food and drink does just that. We give it our ultimate priority, ultimate worth and value. In a sense it becomes our god. It becomes what we run to when we are worried, scared, lonely, upset or hurt. Instead of turning to the One who loves us most, we open the fridge, we pop the cap, open the bottle or head to Baskin Robbins. We try to fill an emptiness in our hearts and souls with food in our stomachs. And then our stomach rules and dominates our life. It takes top priority...whether we are eating too much, too little or simply making it more important than God and loving our neighbors. And this is a

dangerous place to be. There is a bible word for that. Idolatry. We are replacing the Lord of the Universe with an ice cream cone, diet plan or organic smoothie. And that is sin.

- X.** Here are a few questions we might want to ask ourselves to see if this is an issue in our life. *How much time and energy do we devote to thinking about food, preparing food, and/or eating food in comparison to the time we invest in prayer, Scripture reading, serving, giving, and worshipping God or helping our neighbor? Is our overconsumption impacting the way we can serve God? Is our obsession with our diet impacting the way we serve God? Are we spending so much of our money on eating out or on designer foods (like organic) that it keeps us from giving generously to the church or other ministries? Is our overdrinking impacting our relationships with friends, family and or our spouse?* Depending on how we answer those questions, we might be struggling with gluttony, regardless of our pants size.
- XI.** I am running out of time but a quick word on alcohol. I imagine some are thinking, “Dang, I hoped he was just going to stick with fries and fatty foods!” In short, the bible says this: drinking alcohol is not sinful. Even Jesus drank wine. But drunkenness is. Why? There is this disturbing story in the Old Testament that you would never hear in our Sprouts ministry. Noah overindulged in fermented grapes and ended up sleeping with his daughter. Yes, this is in the bible. Genesis 19. Beyond making particularly us parents horrified, it serves as a potent picture of the dangers of the abuse of alcohol. Let’s be real here. Overindulgence leads us to doing and saying things we normally wouldn’t. Particularly of the immoral variety. I’ve never heard anyone say, “Yeah, I got drunk like a skunk last night and I am so proud of how I acted. Very Jesus like.” So having a margarita, glass of wine, beer or two (unless you are an alcoholic) isn’t sin. But if it leads to impairment, especially moral, it crosses the line. It’s one of the most dangerous forms of gluttony. Don’t shoot me, I am just the messenger.
- XII.** Listen to what Paul writes to the gluttonous church in Corinth. Those guys knew how to party. And not in a good way. **(NIV 1 Cor 6:19)** This idea was not a new thing for Christians but it was still a shocking concept. As we put our faith in Christ and His redeeming work at the cross, His very presence comes and lives within us. He takes up residence in our bodies. We become His temple...His home. So let me ask us. If we knew today that we were going to give Jesus a lift to the airport tomorrow in our car, what would you do this afternoon? If your car is anything like mine, I would have a serious job ahead. Dig out the French fries stuck in the seat cracks, scoop up the Chick-Fil A toys that have been under the seat for years, buy a deodorizer to get out that nasty gym bag smell, and so forth. Why would I do all that? This is Jesus. The God of the universe hanging out for an hour or so in my car. I want to make it as nice as possible to honor Him. So shouldn’t we do the same with our body, the actual place He resides, instead of treating it like a garbage disposal? This ultimately should be our motivation for taking care of our bodies. Not so we look good in our underwear in front of a mirror. Ultimately gluttony, whether it is overeating or over obsessing, is a spiritual issue. We resist not just by diet but by the Spirit, the very presence of God. It is takes more than a lock on the fridge but connecting to God Himself on a regular basis. By doing this it will keep our mind and heart in the right place.

Challenge: ***So take a week to fast from the food channel and replace it with a daily devotional. Before every meal pray, "Father, remind me that I don't live on bread alone but rather Your words and presence." Read a Psalm every night for 7 days without counting calories while sticking to a sensible diet. Sit somewhere quiet this week and meditate on the question, "What is my life ultimately about? To be the temple of God and serve Him, or to be looking good and serving self." Do whatever enables you to center on Christ. It is by the power of God and with the help of His people that you can break this destructive pattern of gluttony in our life.***