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~ *Bread for the Table* ~

“Bread is a generous gift of nature, a food that can be replaced by no other. When we fall sick, our appetite for bread deserts us last of all; and the moment we recover the appetite, we have shown a symptom of recovery. Bread is suitable to every time of the day, every age of life, and every temperament. It improves other foods and is the father of good and bad digestion. Eaten with meat or with other foods, it loses none of its delight. It is so perfectly adapted to men that we turn our hearts to it almost as soon as we are born and never tire of it to the hour of our death.”

– *Antonine-Auguste Parmentier*

~ *Bread for Eternity* ~

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.’”

*John 6:35, 51*

# Foreword

“Bread deals with living things, with giving life, with growth, with the seed, the grain that nurtures. It’s not coincidence that we say bread is the staff of life.”

– *Lionel Poilâne*

“And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”

*1 Corinthians 10:16-17*

## ~ *Bread for the Table* ~

**N**ovice bakers only, please. Lionel Poilâne, perhaps the world’s greatest bread baker, never hired a baker who had attended baking school. He believed a baker’s heart – passion, a desire to learn, and hard work – was the secret recipe of a great baker.

This should bring a sigh of relief to all those who want to bake, but whose baking experience consists of frozen cookie dough, boxed cake mixes, and chocolate glazed beater licking. If you’re wondering whether you have what it takes to bake bread from scratch, you do. In fact, you don’t need any baking experience or special cooking skills to become a good baker, even a great baker. And you certainly don’t need any prior experience to enjoy this book. The only thing you need to bake great-tasting bread is a desire to learn and a willingness to practice.

I have no formal baking experience. My baking experience is summed up in 30 years of learning and burning. It started in fourth grade, glazing Georgia’s Rolls at my grandmother’s catering business. In high school, I worked at my father’s bakery, where I drank a lot of espresso and learned how to make Danish kringle.

During college, I waited tables and nabbed baking tips from four-star pastry chefs after my shift. When I returned to college at age 30 to pursue a degree in journalism, I filled my electives with classes in food science, food history, and nutrition. And when I moved to Idaho, I tried a stint at running a small bakery that made healthful snack foods for athletes.

But that’s all frosting. At the core, I attribute my ability to bake bread to practice and passion, not to any special skill or inherited gene. I learned by

rolling up my sleeves, making a mess, and masterminding experiments that looked more like crusty reptiles from sci-fi movies than loaves of bread.

I only wish someone would have shown me the shortcut up the learning curve of baking. I missed the turn. I don't want you to miss the turn. By reading *The Bread of Life*, you will take a journey and discover the road to baking bread is more fun and less complicated than you imagined, and the wayside bread you bake will be the best you've ever tasted. Plus, I promise to show you the backcountry shortcuts.

~ *Bread for Eternity* ~

Jesus chose the ordinary. It's interesting to note Jesus Christ chose ordinary men and women instead of well known theologians and scholars to be his disciples and messengers. Today, like then, Christ uses ordinary people like you and me to do the extraordinary.

This should be an encouragement to professional backsliders, like myself, and anyone else trying to live a Christian lifestyle in a cruel, mixed-up world. There is no secret knowledge, special skill, social status, or degree of purity required to start or maintain a relationship with Christ. You simply need a faithful heart, a desire to learn, and a willingness to change. If you trust and act, there is hope, and you *will* discover your purpose in life.

I have no formal theological training or degree in divinity. My relationship with Christ started in eighth grade, but it wasn't until I was 30 that I made the relationship a priority. Sure, I went to church. I even read the Bible, went on retreats, and attended Bible studies. But the whole time, I kept Christ at arm's length. Far enough away that he wouldn't interfere with my plans, but close enough to reach out and grab when I needed help. The result was lost friendships, failed businesses, and a broken marriage.

It took a near-death dirtbike crash on my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday to wake me up. While lying on a recovery bed in the boonies of Alaska with busted ribs, bruised kidneys, and a torn diaphragm, I recommitted and renewed my relationship with Christ. I faced my shortcomings and acknowledged my pride. I prayed for a changed heart and a chance to live God's way.

God is gracious, because this wasn't my first big wake-up call from God. The first one happened 10 years earlier, and it was just as scary. I'll share

it with you later. Though it goes to show, God doesn't give up on those he loves, no matter what you've done. We're all works in progress.

Since that terrifying afternoon in Alaska, life continues to bring its ups and downs. But now, my perspective is different. Now, I'm trusting God and taking action. Now, I understand my purpose. Now, I have passion.

If brokenness, perseverance, and lots of burned bread qualify me to write this book, instead of a divinity degree and a baking certificate, then I stand humbly before you, just an ordinary Joe, in a stained bakery apron willing to share the dough of my soul, so we may both grow together as we journey through these pages.

# Introduction

“All sorrows are less with bread.”  
– Miguel de Cervantes (*Don Quixote*)

“I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me, declares the LORD.”  
*Amos 4:6*

~ *Bread for the Table* ~

**Y**ou started young and your job was simple. To work for Grandma, your shoulders had to be at least as high as the counter top. This was around age 10. Your first job was garnishing plates with parsley and smothering her “Georgia’s Rolls” with icing. To a 10-year-old, putting weeds on a plate was boring. But painting icing on warm buttery rolls was magic, and there was always a little icing left in the bowl to lick.

Whatever the job, Grandma made sure you knew its importance and did it right. A stout Irish German with thick arms, a bold face, and a twinkle in her eye, Georgia Iselin catered with the same team of five women for 25 years. With a cross on one wall and a rosary hanging on the other, these blue-haired beauties efficiently and methodically served scientists, scholars, theologians, and politicians from around the world at the Frank Lloyd Wright Wingspread Conference Center in Wind Point, Wisconsin.

I worked at Grandma’s catering business throughout my childhood. During that time, she taught me lessons about baking and cooking. She taught me how to roast turkey, bake pecan pie, and how to buy vegetables. She also taught me simple truths about baking and cooking, the greatest of which still rings clear: “Food doesn’t have to be dressed up to taste great . . . it’s humble food that pleases the heart most.”

I’ve never forgotten those words, and this truth can be applied to baking bread. In its simplest form, bread consists of flour, water, salt, and yeast. These four humble ingredients combine to create a staple food that has fed people in every culture around the world for more than 6,000 years. The aroma of bread alone can cause the bravest will to sigh. Bread has toppled empires, won wars, and created economies. In each loaf, we find refuge; in each slice, solace; in each bite, comfort.

## Dispelling misconceptions

If bread is so popular and requires only four ingredients, a mixing bowl, a spoon, a cookie sheet, and an oven, why do so many people believe baking bread is so difficult?

I believe it's because people have misconceptions about baking bread, or have had bad experiences in their attempts to make bread. If you talk with people who have never baked bread, they will tell you making bread is time consuming, difficult, and requires a special skill.

If you talk with people who've baked bread once or twice, they will tell you the reason they gave up on baking bread was their attempts resulted in bread that turned out weird tasting, burnt, or looked and felt like a doorstop.

Can you relate? If you can, *The Bread of Life* is the bread book for you because it dispels misconceptions and difficulties facing frustrated and disgruntled bakers. It does this in a fun, lighthearted manner that is insightful and educational.

## What's ahead

The book starts off with sections on equipment and ingredients. This will help you set up your kitchen and stock your pantry. You'll be glad to know, making bread requires only a few pieces of equipment and a handful of inexpensive ingredients. Bread is good value for the bite.

The next section covers general baking principles. These are the basic guidelines that govern how you should approach breadmaking. For example, you'll learn that trusting your senses is more important than following a recipe. You'll learn that precisely measuring ingredients might be precisely why your bread falls short of fame. And you'll discover that keeping the baking process simple is the surest way to achieve consistency.

Next, I cover baking techniques. These are the basic skills you'll use over and over to make great-tasting bread with little time and effort. You'll discover no special eye-hand coordination or baking gene is required to knead dough. You'll learn how to use the process of cold fermentation to make bread of superior flavor and texture, just like bread from artisan bakeries. You'll also learn timesaving tips and insights about shaping, glazing, baking, cooling, storing, and eating bread. I'll even tell you why you should consider taking karate lessons if you're going to bake bread.

To apply what you've learned, and to start eating and sharing delicious homemade bread, I've included a recipe section with a handful of classic, easy to prepare recipes. Mastering the formulas for these seven recipes will give you the confidence to make *any* bread. I believe I covered all your favorite breads such as French, honey wheat, and milk. There are also recipes for cornbread, pita bread, and my grandmother's famous "Georgia's Rolls." Plus, there's a recipe for pizza that rivals any za you've eaten.

I end the book with a section called "Bread Basket." It covers a hodge-podge of topics including bread history, bread nutrition, high altitude baking, and common baking errors. For fun, I threw in a chapter on bread terrorism, for those carbo-phobes who believe bread is fattening. A hunch tells me, half of you will turn to this chapter first.

### **The truth about homemade bread**

The truth about making homemade bread is that it takes less "hands on" time and effort than most homemade cakes and cookies. After reading this book and baking a few loaves, you'll discover how fun and easy it is to bake memorable homemade bread. Best of all, you'll learn how to make delicious bread that satisfies the hearts and tummies of friends, family, and those in need. You may even get the chance to pass along a tradition to someone whose shoulders are just above the counter.

### *~ Bread for Eternity ~*

I believe my grandmother's advice about humble food also plays true in life. We tend to dress up our lives with things that make us look good on the outside. However, what should concern us is how we look on the inside, because that's where God looks. He's interested in our heart condition, because he wants us to maintain a healthy relationship with him.

### **Heart disease**

When it comes to a relationship with God, many of us suffer from a case of coronary heart disease (hard heart), arrhythmia (erratic heart), or pericardial disease (sore heart).

Instead of seeking God and truth, we find it safer and easier to say, "Religion is for the weak," "I don't need church, I'm a good person," "The church just wants my money," or "who needs all that hypocrisy, anyway?"

Drill a little deeper and you'll discover the reason for many hard and achy Christian hearts, or disbelief in Jesus, or distance from God, is often the

result of misconceptions or misunderstandings about Jesus, God, and Christianity.

Unfortunately, some people are frightened of Christianity because they've had a bad experience with a church, denomination, or pastor. If this has happened to you, I'm sorry, but please don't use your experience as an excuse to dodge a relationship with God. Your relationship with God has eternal significance, and your lifestyle should be modeled after Christ and the Bible, not on a particular denomination, church, or person.

### **Take a fresh look at Christianity**

The irony is, some of us do attend church, believe in God, and have a relationship with Jesus, but we still shy away from *living* a Christian lifestyle. We're afraid if we begin to trust God and live as the Bible says, we'll have to quit our job, lose our freedom, leave our family, and become a missionary in some remote village in an African desert. We feel leading a Christian lifestyle will result in a life riddled with shame, guilt, rules, and worst of all, we'll be forced to give away our money, take up bingo, and join the choir. Wrong. All wrong.

If you can relate to any of this, I want to encourage you to take a fresh look at your life and your relationship with God. As you read *The Bread of Life*, you'll discover leading a Christian lifestyle is less complicated and less frustrating than you think. A Bible, a handful of guiding principles, and a little initiative is all you need to get started. The rest will naturally unfold as you practice, learn, and grow through your experiences and relationship with God.

### **A new world unfolds**

Granted, God never said being a Christian was going to be easy, or that radical change in our lives wouldn't take place. He does say, he will give us strength and wisdom to handle life's challenges and sufferings. God also says he will help us understand and fulfill our purpose in life, and offer us grace and peace, so we can enjoy life, regardless of our circumstances. God wants us to win.

*The Bread of Life* is a journey that will give you new perspective on Christian living. Once you understand Jesus, and his purpose for your life, things will begin to fall into place. You'll learn being a Christian can be fun, exciting, and freeing. You'll learn to nourish the inside of your life, not the outside. Life will begin to have meaning, and a new world will unfold as you walk in faith.

The result is a satisfying Christian lifestyle you can humbly share with family, friends, and those in need. It's also the best way to stay spiritually healthy and avoid *heart* disease.