

Grace Bliss Tribute

“Our bodies are a gift from God – a very precious gift. ... Living as healthfully as you can is a vital part of being a Christian.”

Abounding in health and vitality, Grace Bliss spoke those words when she was eighty-five years young, and she remained her own best example of stewardship of the physical body until the day that she finally drew her last breath at the age of ninety-eight. A great woman of God, Grace dedicated herself to learning and teaching the art of healthful living. For over forty years, she researched the field of health and nutrition, traveling extensively throughout the United States and abroad as she sought answers from the most notable experts of the twentieth century in areas such as: nutrition, organic gardening, soil conservation, and holistic medicine. She applied those lessons in her own life, and shared her knowledge with others, helping countless people achieve and maintain good health. Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille believed that she held “the finest knowledge on organic foods and lessons in living in the entire world.” And with the great depth of understanding of the principles from God’s Word relating to physical wholeness that she learned from him, Grace Bliss reached the pinnacle of expertise in her field.

Born Grace Josselyn Ludman on February 2, 1898, she enjoyed a happy childhood growing up in the rural communities of Central Ohio as part of a close, fun-loving family of ten. Her parents, Wilbur and Harriet, laid a firm foundation for her life, instilling in Grace a love for God, family, education, and hard work. After graduating high school in 1917, she studied home economics at Maryville College in Maryville, Tennessee; Boston School of Domestic Science, Boston, Massachusetts; and Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Returning home to Delaware, Ohio, from 1920-1924, Grace taught home economics, biology, history, and English at the local high school and dietetics at Jane Case Hospital. It was during this time that she met Lawrence Bliss, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) who was then studying at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. They married on June 18, 1924, and moved to Malden, Massachusetts, where Lawrence started a dry-cleaning business. Two daughters were added to the family: Louise was born on June 16, 1925, and Betty the following year on October 6, 1926. For nine years, Grace enjoyed life taking care of her family, attending church activities, and taking in the occasional play performed by the local theater groups.

Life changed dramatically in 1933 when Grace suddenly found herself without her husband, responsible for the care and support of her two young daughters all by herself during the worst point of the Great Depression. Trusting God, and determined to work in a place where she could have her children with her, Mrs. Bliss took the position of dietician at Aloha Manor in Fairlee, Vermont. There, at this family camp owned by Rev. Eugene Pierce, associate pastor to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, Grace and her girls spent their next five summers. The family’s first winter was spent in New Haven, Connecticut, where Grace supervised the kitchen of the dining room for the Hotel Duncan. She enjoyed the work, but decided that hotel life was not the place she wanted to raise her children. So in 1934, with her characteristic determination and persistence, Grace secured a position back in Ohio as the dietician and general building supervisor at the Columbus School for Girls, the finest private school for girls in the Midwest. Overseeing a staff of twenty-five workers, she was responsible for all the meals served at the boarding school, the hiring and firing of personnel, the main grounds, the school farm, and purchasing. Grace returned to teaching in Delaware, Ohio in 1942. During World War II, she became

the assistant regional director of a blood donor center for the American Red Cross. In 1947, she started a new career in Real Estate, which she thoroughly enjoyed and worked at until her retirement in 1987.

It was around the time that Grace's daughters were attending college that she embarked upon a course that would immeasurably change her life and those who came to know her. In 1944, Grace attended a few meetings of "Friends of the Land." This vanguard group of agricultural conservationists organized in the 1940's is widely recognized for planting the seeds of the modern ecological movement and educating the public concerning the interrelationship between the soil, food, health, and prosperity of the people of the land. Initially, Grace Bliss resisted their message, unwilling to give up her cherished sweets.

That all changed, though, after she attended a meeting in 1947 with two prominent speakers, Dr. Jonathan Forman, president of "Friends of the Land"; and Louis Bromfield, founder of Malabar Farm. Dr. Jonathan Forman was the Professor of History of Medicine at Ohio State University and the editor of the Ohio State Medical Journal for twenty-five years. It was on this occasion that Dr. Forman made the statement that Grace Bliss never forgot: "Our food is no better than the soil where it is grown, and poor soil always means sick plants, sick animals, and sick people." Louis Bromfield was a world famous, best-selling author of thirty novels, the winner of the Pulitzer Prize, and early proponent of organic and self-sustaining gardening. As many as 20,000 people a year visited the 1000 acres of Malabar Farm, including film stars, artists, politicians, writers, and conservationists. Malabar Farm became a national model for sustainable agriculture and organic gardening. Grace Bliss regularly visited the farm to either attend "Friends of the Land" meetings, or to simply learn more from listening to Bromfield and observing the soil conservation practiced there.

The two speakers made an indelible impression on Grace Bliss. She was shocked to realize that so much of her education and experience as a dietician had been misguided. More importantly, she realized that poor nutrition was responsible for the deterioration of her health over the years. Grace began a quest for health that she approached with a passion and dedication that few people know. She joined "Friends of the Land," attending all their meetings and learning from their distinguished guest speakers. She traveled to Washington, D.C.; Baltimore, Maryland; New York City and Ithaca, New York; San Diego, California; and Tecate, Mexico to meet with and learn from leading doctors, prestigious college professors, and other notable experts and pioneers in the field of health and nutrition, such as: Leonard Wickenden, Dr. William Albrecht, Dr. Clive McKay, Morris Beale, Dr. Gerson, Dr. Francis Pottenger, Dr. Szekely, Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, V. E. Irons, Dr. Lee, Dr. Joe Nichols, Dr. Granville Knight, and Dr. William Coda Martin.

As a result of her exhaustive research beginning in the late 1940's, Grace Bliss discovered just how critical our diets are to our health and well-being. As she wrote in her autobiography, *By Grace*:

At the beginning of the 20th century, the health of people in America was as good as in any nation of the world. However, today both physical and mental sickness are rampant in our country. Yet America has more doctors and nurses, more hospitals, and more medicines than any other country. These are not the answer to our current health problems and never will be. So many people have not educated themselves in the area of healthful eating and habits of life. Man still believes that illness is due to outside forces over which he has no control. That's one major reason the relationship between good nutrition and health has been ignored by so many.

Putting her new-found knowledge into practice, Grace's health began to significantly improve. The frequent colds and other respiratory ailments that had bothered her for years no longer plagued her life. Her painful arthritis improved dramatically. Equipped with a profound understanding of healthy habits, she also guided her daughters into greater physical well-being. And out of a heart filled with the desire to help people, she started a study group to share her knowledge with others. That group became part of a national organization when Grace Bliss was asked to start and oversee the Ohio chapter of the newly-founded Natural Food Associates.

Grace's exploration of the vital physical factors affecting health was not the only great quest of her life. Another, ultimately more important search brought even greater answers about life. Those truths not only shed further light on the keys to good health, but all things that pertained to life and godliness.

Although she was raised in a God-fearing family, attended church regularly all her life, and read the Bible faithfully, Grace Bliss had many unanswered questions about the Word of God and life. Realizing that those answers were not to be found in the Methodist denomination that she always attended, Grace began visiting other churches to gauge their understanding of the Bible. She would attend all of the services of one church for several weeks, then move on to another, as she searched church after church without ever finding any real answers.

Then one day in 1959, after her October meeting of Natural Food Associates, a man invited her to hear a minister teach the Bible. That minister was Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille, and he was coming at that time to teach the comprehensive class, *Power for Abundant Living* at the Seneca Hotel in Columbus. Grace's initial reaction was disinterest bordering on disdain at the prospect of listening to someone she had never heard of, teaching the Bible at a hotel (of all places). But after two disastrous days at work, Grace knew that she had made a mistake. So, having missed the first session, and arriving late for the second, she walked in on Dr. Wierwille's teaching. Within a few minutes, her heart thrilled as she realized, "So, this is it. This is it! This is what I've been looking for!" And by the grace of God, and a promise by Grace to attend the remainder of the class on time, she discovered the life-giving truths of all the ages.

After completing the *Power for Abundant Living* class, Grace took advantage of every opportunity to learn more of God's Word. She attended other classes, became involved in a local home-based fellowship, and traveled close to two hundred miles round-trip each week from Columbus to New Knoxville, Ohio for the Sunday evening services Dr. Wierwille held there. At the age of sixty-five, Grace packed up all her belongings to find a new home and a new job in New Knoxville in order to be close to where the Word of God was being taught. Once there, she volunteered her time to serve in any capacity needed, whether that was pounding nails to help build the Biblical Research Center, cleaning up the kitchen after the Sunday evening service, or driving Dr. Wierwille's camper as he traveled to different cities teaching.

Grace Bliss had two major goals for serving the Body of Christ set in her heart when she moved to New Knoxville. The first was to teach believers the benefits and importance of organic farming, and the second was to teach them about eating the right foods. And once again, her characteristic persistence and believing helped her to achieve her mission. As Dr. Wierwille learned more and more about naturally grown, healthy foods from Grace, he gained a greater appreciation for the role they

played in an individual's overall health and well-being. He also gained a tremendous respect for her knowledge and expertise in the field. He saw that Grace Bliss had researched the field of health and nutrition like he had researched the Word of God, and graciously remarked that "she had done more in her field." In 1965 Grace Bliss began teaching a class about proper eating and healthy habits to the believers in Summer School at The Way, called Lessons in Living. Over the years, she taught the class many times. For a number of years, it was an important part of the Way Corps training. Grace's other goal was fully realized when, through her efforts, Ira Hearne came on staff to implement organic gardening, as the ministry began growing their own food to feed the staff and Corps housed at the various campuses.

Good health is God's will for His people. Grace Bliss believed that, and she understood both the natural laws and spiritual laws governing health like few have ever done, as witnessed by her life and her words:

Next to God's Word, the greatest thing He ever put together was the human body. Doctors and scientists know so little about it compared to what God knows. The human body is a very complex organism; but if we treat it right, it will treat us right.