

# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO George

BY DENISE GEE  
PHOTOGRAPHY GARY CLARK

Flashing his trademark grin, George Foreman looks more like a movie star than a 48-year-old warhorse. His face is smooth, his eyes playful, and his size 50 extra-long suit is stylish. The only sign that the 6' 4" fighter has taken hits is his stiff gait. "Since preaching, not prizefighting, became my primary profession, life's been good," he says.

After the Sunday sermon at his small First Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in North Houston, he relaxes in the garden behind his stately home. There, and at his ranch in Marshall, Texas, he likes to reflect on his mission: helping young people. "Every kid is a potential George

Foreman," says the two-time heavyweight world champion—father of nine children ages 6 to 24, and surrogate father to 50 or 60 more at the George Foreman Youth & Community Development Center. "Kids will do the right things if people sincerely pay attention to them. I was rescued from the gutter. My mother had to work all the time to keep us fed, so the streets [of Houston] became my playground," he says. "I was mean and bad until someone

cared. I'm thankful to Lyndon Johnson and the Job Corps for helping turn my life around."

His wife, Joan, beckons him from the porch to the massive birdcage, where several newborn pigeons huddle in a nest. A curious George sticks his index finger through the bars. The birds squawk dainty pleas. "Tweet," George baby talks, wiggling his finger. The birds open their beaks for food.

**"I'll always be in Texas. I've never been able to live anywhere else. I like having my family here because Southern children have a better chance to be well mannered."**

"Look, they think you're their papa," laughs Joan, whose soft accent reflects her native St. Lucia.

The birds seem to sense the caring papa quality in this gentle man. So does his youth center, which offers a variety of athletic (boxing, basket-

ball), educational (career planning), and community programs (food drives) for area kids—plus the all-important chance to interact with George himself (call [713] 987-8743 for more information).

Although none of his youth center kids was born when he was at his best, they all say he's "magic." They've heard about his 1968 Olympic boxing gold in Mexico City, his first world title win over Joe Frazier in 1973, his left jab that



*At the champ's side in his Houston home are his children (from left) George "Big Wheel," Leola, and George "Red." "He teases us a lot," Leola says, giving her daddy a love punch, "but I guess he's all right." George's six other children are Michi, George "Little George," Georgetta, Freeda, George "Monk," and Natalie. When asked about all the Georges, he says, "Hey, the name worked for me, didn't it?"*

opponents said was like being hit in the head with a telephone pole.

George's adult fans recall the night when, decades after his first title win, he defeated 26-year-old Michael Moorer in 1994 to become the oldest heavyweight champion at age 45. "Something I'd done gave middle-agers freedom," George says. "I proved it's never too late to fight for what you believe in." Beforehand, naysayers said he was too old, too fat, too slow—a man who refused to accept middle age. He characteristically uses the experience. "If I can do *that* at *this* age, what can a youngster do? It should inspire them to change their lives."

Not surprisingly, his positive attitude is much in demand. When not filming commercials or promoting his new books, *By George* and *George Foreman's Knock-Out-the-Fat Barbecue and Grilling Cookbook* (see page 96), he's prizefighting (his record: 75-4, 68 KOs), com-

mentating for HBO boxing, or narrating such documentaries as *Bad Dads* (to air Father's Day, June 15).

"I worry about our kids' futures. We need new answers to raising them; yesterday's values won't work. Even our athletes aren't role models anymore. I was fortunate to have football stars like Jim Brown."

All young people need "loyalty and discipline," he says. "I sure did." A public service TV spot featuring Jim Brown spurred the 16-year-old George to join the Job Corps in 1965, where he was encouraged to work out his attitude in a boxing ring. "I was surrounded by military veterans who really knew how to talk to us. They taught us to be loyal to the United States of America. I found out to be loyal to something—a team, a family—changes your world."

After the Olympic gold and the first championship, life looked promising. But with a succession of failed relationships and business

deals, he was at his lowest in 1977 after losing a savage battle with Jimmy Young. It was then he embraced religion. "Jimmy beat the devil out of me—literally. From then on, I've always seen only the good in things. Life is too precious."

George left boxing that same year to preach. He moved into his church in 1981 and soon established the youth center. "This is the only thing I've done that I really did with all my heart and stuck to it," he said at the time. Six years later he went back into boxing only after running out of funds for the center. He was tired of begging for money. "I knew people would say, 'there's just another fighter looking for money, using kids as an excuse.' And when I'd say, 'I'm gonna be champion of the world,' everybody laughed—I was 37 and needed to lose 85 pounds. But the laughing stopped once I recaptured the title. *Hah!*"

He likes knowing his attitude and

hard work have helped his own family *and* his center family. "You take a kid who grows up tough, a bully guy, and put him onto my ranch and say, 'Hey, you, catch that pig.' And he says, 'No problem.' He thinks he's a brave dude—until that little pig squeals and slips through his hands. Then, *oh no*," George laughs. "There he is, running from a baby pig. It's fun to watch them act like the kids they really are."

So when is, well—"Retirement?" he asks, smiling. "*No way*. I hate that word. I've got too much to do, like building a computer literacy center and writing more books, especially another cookbook. He grins. "Yeah," he says smugly. "I like that. When people ask one day, 'Where is George? He's got to be retired by *now*,' they'll hear, 'No, no, no. He's in the kitchen—*still cookin*!'"

He sure *is* cookin'. Turn the page for three Foreman recipes.



# George's

## LEAN, MEAN RECIPES

George Foreman's insatiable appetite often has him craving cheeseburgers. But "as a boxer, I know that fat slows you down," the two-time heavyweight world champion says in *George Foreman's Knock-Out-the-Fat Barbecue and Grilling Cookbook* (Villard Books, \$13.95). Written with nutritionist Cherie Calbom, the book features light versions of Foreman family recipes, along with new ones George has grown (well, *reduced*) to enjoy.

Before his 1994 championship comeback at age 45, George had to "break the 300-pound mark on the scale," he says. Switching to a low-fat, high-flavor diet was a must, but it wasn't easy. George details his success (he lost 85 pounds) and more in the book, which includes nutritional analyses and simple, flavorful recipes. "You have to eat like you have a future," the champ contends. (Read more about him on pages 94-95.)

### JOAN'S ROSEMARY LAMB CHOPS

*This recipe also works well with thick-cut pork chops.*

- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon dried rosemary
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 green onion, chopped
- 8 (1½-inch-thick) lamb loin chops

**Garnish:** green onion curls

• **Combine** first 7 ingredients in a shallow dish or large heavy-duty zip-top plastic bag; add lamb chops.

Cover or seal, and chill 8 hours or overnight, turning chops occasionally. Let stand at room temperature 30 minutes.

• **Remove** chops from marinade, discarding marinade. Grill, covered with grill lid, over medium-high heat (350° to 400°), turning occasionally, 12 minutes or until a meat thermometer inserted into thickest portion registers 145°. Garnish, if desired. **Yield:** 4 servings.

♥ *Per serving: Calories 293, Fat 14.3g.*

### GRILLED SALMON STEAKS WITH TARRAGON SAUCE

- 4 (8-ounce) salmon steaks
  - 2 tablespoons reduced-fat mayonnaise
  - 2 tablespoons dried tarragon
  - 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- Tarragon Sauce**  
**Lemon wedges**

• **Spread** steaks with mayonnaise, and sprinkle with tarragon.

• **Grill**, covered with grill lid, over medium-high heat (350° to 400°)

10 minutes or until salmon flakes easily with a fork. Sprinkle with lemon juice; serve with Tarragon Sauce and lemon wedges. **Yield:** 4 servings.

♥ *Per serving: Calories 290, Fat 14.8g.*

**TARRAGON SAUCE:**

- 2 tablespoons plain low-fat yogurt
- 2 tablespoons reduced-fat mayonnaise
- 1½ teaspoons dried tarragon
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard

• **Combine** all ingredients; chill. **Yield:** ¼ cup.

### LBJ'S TEXAS BARBECUE SAUCE

*President Lyndon B. Johnson inspired George to greatness through his Job Corps program, which "gave me a second chance," George says. This adapted recipe is excellent with beef or pork.*

- ½ large onion, diced
- ½ green bell pepper, diced
- 2 to 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 (10¾-ounce) can tomato puree
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup chili sauce
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 6 peppercorns, crushed, or ½ teaspoon coarsely ground pepper
- 1 bay leaf

• **Sauté** first 3 ingredients in olive oil in a large saucepan 10 minutes or until tender. Stir in tomato puree and remaining ingredients; bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer, stirring occasionally, 1 hour. Remove and discard bay leaf. **Yield:** about 2 cups.

♥ *Per (2-tablespoon) serving: Calories 47, Fat 1.8g.* ◇



*Joan's Rosemary Lamb Chops are winningly accented with aromatic rosemary and fresh lime. George calls his wife's dish "one of the most memorable meals I ever had."*

PHOTOGRAPH BY SAVARE GIBSON