

# SELF-FEEDER

**Daily Bread**

Matthew 4:4

September 17, 2023

We began our study by considering the nature of the Bible. We now want to continue by considering our need for God's Word. To do so, we will examine why we should consume God's Word and what's involved in a commitment to God's Word. A discussion of such things is crucial before we move on to talk about the work of Bible interpretation.

Jesus affirmed our need for a steady intake of Bible truth. When he was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, he said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus' words contained a citation of Deuteronomy 8:3, a passage that spoke about Old Testament Israel. After being delivered from Egyptian slavery, the people of God wandered in the wilderness for forty years, awaiting the day in which they would receive entrance into the Promised Land. During those wilderness wanderings, the Lord taught his people that they had a need for regular spiritual sustenance from God's Word. According to Jesus, the experience of the Israelites is instructive for God's people. In all generations, faithful believers should learn to feed on the Word of God.

## **1. THE NATURE OF BREAD**

If you were to visit your local grocery store, you would surely run across a bread aisle. In the twenty-first century western world, such an aisle would likely be chock-full of a seemingly endless variety of bread. Most modern people have countless choices — whole wheat, pumpernickel, sour dough, rye, plain white bread, French bread, Italian bread, and so on. My favorite bread is normally found in the freezer section. It is a flourless, sprouted-grain bread.

Whichever bread you prefer, you are surely aware that there are many varieties of bread. Jesus' words in Matthew 4:4, however, reveal that there are two categories of bread of which many humans are not aware — physical bread and spiritual bread. Understanding the nature of these two types of bread is critical to our spiritual health.

### **A. Physical Bread**

We are all aware of our need for daily food. After just a few hours without eating, most of us begin to experience a gnawing in our stomachs. We need physical food to survive. Jesus famously spoke of our need for physical food in the Lord's Prayer. In teaching his disciples, he told them to regularly pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

Jesus' reference to bread was an important one. In the first-century world, bread was a basic staple of life. For many, it was the substance of their daily sustenance. Nowadays we have a plethora of food choices anytime we decide to eat. A normal

weekday lunch presents us with a vast array of opportunities — sushi, tacos, hamburgers, pizza, burritos, sandwiches, soups, and the list goes on and on. Things were different in ancient society. Historians tell of the prominence of bread in the ancient world. In some cultures, bread was actually included in customary greetings and salutations. Meeting someone on the street, one might say, “Bread to you!”<sup>1</sup>

Why was bread as being so important in the ancient world? It was held in high regard because it was the most basic food staple. It was the food source for most people. In some respects, bread was responsible for the survival of many civilizations.

These things shed light on why Jesus included a mention of bread in the Lord’s Prayer. He perhaps didn’t intend for his disciples to pray specifically for bread. Instead, his words were meant to speak of humanity’s dependence on God for the basic physical provisions of life. Through prayer, Jesus’ disciples were to rely on the Lord to meet their daily needs. Concerning our Lord’s reference to bread, one has said, “Bread is a mere detail in man’s dependence upon God.”<sup>2</sup>

All of this is instructive for us. Our sufficiency, strength, and sustenance in life comes from the Lord. Such is true in both a physical sense and a spiritual sense. As we aim to become self-feeders from God’s Word, we should recognize such realities. One has said, “Apart from God even our imagined advances are declines.”<sup>3</sup> The concept of “daily bread” teaches us that we are dependent upon the Lord to “supply every need...according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). An awareness of such things will give us a correct frame of mind as we seek to feed ourselves with spiritual food from the Bible.

## **B. Spiritual Bread**

Our need for physical bread teaches us our need for dependency on God. Jesus’ words in Matthew 4:4, however, reveal that we need a second type of bread. In saying “Man shall not live by bread alone...”, Jesus indicated that we need a spiritual type of bread. To thrive spiritually, we need a regular intake of God’s Word — “...every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

As mentioned earlier, our Lord’s words in Matthew 4:4 were a quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3. In order to consider the full meaning of his words, it is important to consider the background associated with that Old Testament passage. Deuteronomy 8:3 contained words from Moses that were directed to Israel while the nation wandered in the wilderness, awaiting their entrance into the Promised Land. Moses told the people, “And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

It is helpful to consider the backstory behind Moses’ admonition. When we read the accounts found in Exodus and Deuteronomy, we learn that the nation of Israel

---

<sup>1</sup> Standage, Tom. *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2005), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume 1*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Boice, James Montgomery. *Daniel: An Expositional Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1989), 37.

quickly complained against the Lord after they were released from slavery in Egypt. Their complaints were often centered on the same things — food and water. In fact, Exodus 15:22-17:7 contains three narratives of events that happened immediately after the people’s salvation from Pharaoh’s armies. Each narrative tells of the way the people complained about food. Though the Lord had miraculously delivered them from the clutches of the most powerful man in the world, the people were discontent and griped about not having the food they desired. In Exodus 16:3, they said, “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and *ate bread to the full*, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Despite their sinful attitude, the Lord graciously provided for his people. He supernaturally sent bread from heaven to feed them, something called “manna.” He also sent quail to their camp (Exodus 16:4-36). In all of these things, the Lord taught his people that he was their source of physical provision and sustenance.

However, the Lord also used such things to teach them that he was their source of spiritual sustenance. This was the meaning of Deuteronomy 8:3. The events of the Exodus and the Wilderness Wanderings should have taught the people of God to rely on the Word of God for spiritual provision. In effect, the Israelites were guilty of the same sin as Adam and Eve. They hadn’t trusted God’s Word. As a result, they sinned through discontentment in relation to food.

The Lord used such experiences to train the Israelites concerning their need for spiritual sustenance. In order to claim their inheritance and live victoriously in the land of promise, they needed to learn to depend on the Lord. More precisely, they needed to understand the source of their dependence on God. The Word of God was their means of vital support and sustenance from the Lord.

According to Jesus, the story of Israel in the wilderness is the story of us all. In all generations, God’s people must learn to rely on God’s Word. One has said, “The raw word of God in itself must become the basis of man’s action.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus’ wilderness temptations gave witness to such things. He was led into the desert by the Spirit of the Lord to be tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1). Such a temptation was necessary in order to secure the redemption of God’s people. The first man and woman had rebelled against God in a garden, so it was necessary for the Son of Man to go into a wilderness to secure their pardon.

Whereas Adam and Eve were surrounded by peaceful animals in a garden (Genesis 2:19-20), Jesus was surrounded by wild beasts (Mark 1:13). Such a reality depicted our Lord’s role as a substitute for humanity’s sin. Our Lord was first tempted in reference to food, as our ancestors were tempted in regard to food (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6). Whereas Adam and Eve failed in their temptation because they doubted God’s Word (Genesis 3:1), Jesus overcame by holding on to God’s Word.

### **Soul-Saving Bread**

Jesus’ bread metaphor points to a couple realities associated with the way he spiritually satisfies our souls. First, it alludes to the fact that Jesus provides us soul-saving bread.

---

<sup>4</sup> Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Christ of the Covenants*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 1980), 84.

In John 6:35, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Prior to conversion, the soul of man or woman is spiritually empty. Through the work of the new-birth, the soul receives forgiveness of sins and regenerating presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ provides spiritual bread that gives salvation to the soul. These realities are commemorated every time the church takes of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26-29).

### **Soul-Sustaining Bread**

After receiving soul-saving bread at salvation, God’s people need soul-sustaining bread throughout their lives. This was the main meaning of Jesus’ words in Matthew 4:4. In the midst of temptation, he clung to the Word of God. He provided a model for disciples who would follow him. More than a model, however, provided a means of power and strength as well. Because he fully clung to the Word while tempted in the wilderness, we have power via his Spirit within us to cling to the Word as well.

Believers are a blessed people. They have special revelation from God within the Bible. Scripture gives them heavenly insight for union and communion with God. On top of this, the Spirit of Christ within can create greater desires and commitment to God’s Word. Through grace and faith, believers can cultivate a mode of living through which they daily receive the spiritual sustenance they need through the word. Our Lord’s words in Matthew 4:4, should lead us to ask ourselves — are we depending by regularly taking of the spiritual bread found in his Word? Do we have a habit of life through which we are sustained and strengthened by his truth?

## **2. GETTING OUR DAILY BREAD**

A physical eating regimen is a part of our daily lives. In ancient times, humans usually ate whenever they were actually able to secure food. In our modern world of convenience, most have three meals a day. Through such a practice, one is ensured to get the allotment of calories he or she needs. To be spiritually strong, we must consider how we will get the spiritual food required for life and godliness. Charles Spurgeon once told his congregation, “Even if the Lord should send us a famine of bread and a famine of water, may he never send us a famine of the word of God.”<sup>5</sup>

There is biblical wisdom in this regard. The New Testament provides us with much spiritual truth about how we might train ourselves to become self-feeders. By considering several passages of Scripture, we can gain wisdom for becoming people who regularly feeds on God’s Word. We can make self-feeding a way of life. Let’s consider five ideas.

### **A. Priorities**

First, it is helpful to talk about the issue of priorities. I once had a man who disciplined me who frequently said, “You make time for what is important.” He primarily used that admonition in reference to spiritual disciplines. Many argue that they can’t find time for feeding on God’s Word. The strong Christian knows that he or she must make time for such things.

---

<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, 1881; 27.* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1984), 331.

There is a lot of talk about personal priorities in the world of modern self-help literature, but do we see precedent for such things in Scripture? We certainly do. Paul gave testimony of the way he prioritized the things of God. When writing to the church at Philippi, he said, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14-15). Paul made the pursuit of Jesus Christ his primary aim in life.

The apostle was quite likely well-familiar with the words of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). The words “kingdom of God” can certainly refer to the upcoming physical kingdom of Christ, that kingdom in which he will literally rule upon the New Earth forever and ever. However, the concept of the “kingdom of God” also can be thought of as the spiritual reign of Christ in the heart of his people.

So what does it mean for us to “seek first the kingdom of God?” In part, it means that we prioritize the rule and reign of Jesus in our hearts and souls. This is where priorities come into play with our commitment to self-feeding. To be self-feeders who are strong in God’s Word, we must make time for God’s Word. The lives of Jesus, Daniel, and David all give witness to the place of priorities in the pursuit of God (Mark 1:35; Daniel 6:10; Psalm 55:17). One has rightly said, “What was said of that great warrior Hannibal, making his way into Italy over high, rocky mountains, the Alps... 'Hannibal will either find a way or make one;’ a good heart will find or make its way over mountains of difficulties and business, to have communion with Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

## **B. Personal Discipline**

Personal discipline is also important in becoming a self-feeder. Priorities involve making Christ first. Discipline involves exerting the energy necessary to make Christ first. It also involves the effort required to engage in the handwork of Bible reading and study. One has commented on the need for such effort by saying, “Success in business comes from hard work. Success in sports arises from rigid discipline and training. Still, none of these trophies will last. Real conquering in the Lord also demands time, discipline, effort.”<sup>7</sup>

Some modern believers discount the need for such discipline. They argue that it is a contradiction to the grace of God. While we certainly never want to embrace a form of religion that makes man’s work the basis of earning God’s favor, we must be aware that the Bible calls us to exert effort in our pursuit of the Lord.

Yes, some can engage in discipline in a legalistic manner. They imagine that their discipline is what makes them right with God. Such a perspective is misguided. The Christian way of seeing discipline is different. Strong and healthy believers understand that discipline is necessary, but they also realize that such discipline is a result of and response to God’s grace. The Bible says, “For the grace of God has

---

<sup>6</sup> Saxton, David W. *God’s Battle Plan For The Mind*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 58-59.

<sup>7</sup> Chantry, Walter J. *Call the Sabbath a Delight*. (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, UK 2017), 34.

appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12).

The healthy Christian does not engage in discipline in order to earn God’s favor. He or she does so because he or she has already experienced God’s favor. Healthy Christian discipline is an act aimed at experiencing more of the Lord’s presence. It is driven by a desire to glorify God through one’s life. It is a response of gratitude to all of the grace one has experienced in the cross.

Paul called believers to holy and healthy discipline by saying, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:7-8). The Greek word rendered “discipline” is one from which we get our word “gymnasium.” It was used in the ancient world of the intense exercise of an athlete who trained for the Olympic Games.

Paul’s language revealed that believers must exert effort to become self-feeders. One has said, “There must be some holy sweat if you are to please and glorify God.”<sup>8</sup> It takes discipline to say no to things that compete with our devotion to God’s Word. Reading and studying the Bible often involves hard work. It’s often not easy to perform cross-references of Scripture passages, to do word studies, or to investigate cultural and historical backgrounds of a given passage. To be a student of God’s Word, you must engage in personal discipline. One has commented:

There is no substitute here for dogged daily discipline. It is a battle to find the time: it can be a harder battle to fight sloth. But we need to overcome the habit of reading Scripture only when we “feel like it.” For in one sense it is an “acquired taste.” Only when we learn to read and meditate on it no matter what we feel like will we actually begin to feel like reading it. Scripture is medicine for our sick souls. The label says “Take daily” not “Take when you feel like it!” If we do only the latter, it is likely that we will never “feel better!”<sup>9</sup>

### **C. Perseverance**

Perseverance is also a prerequisite for becoming a strong self-feeder. I am speaking of the spiritual ability to press on in the face of difficulties and setbacks. As you seek to become one who is strong in Scriptures, you will inevitably face challenges. You will feel like quitting at times. You will stumble and encounter seasons in which your soul seems to grow cold. To persist in self-feeding, you need perseverance. One has said, “Growing Christians keep going.”<sup>10</sup>

The New Testament consistently upholds the importance of perseverance in the Christian life. The author of Hebrews described the mode of Christian living with the picture of a runner who runs a race: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a

---

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, R. Kent. *Disciplines Of A Godly Man*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 115.

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, B. Sinclair. *Maturity: Growing Up and Going On in The Christian Life*. (Edinburgh, U.K: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ferguson, B. Sinclair. *Maturity: Growing Up and Going On in The Christian Life*. (Edinburgh, U.K: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 191.

cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). The Greek word for “endurance” is one that spoke of “that quality of character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial.”<sup>11</sup>

In your quest to become a self-feeder, perseverance is important. There will be times in which you will fail to feed on God’s Word. You’ll miss days or even weeks of Bible study. You may be tempted to believe that you are a spiritual failure, that you’re just not good at the Bible study thing. Many fall for such lies and they give up on the goal of becoming strong in the Scriptures. Others let difficult seasons or setbacks in life sideline them. They assume that adversity is a sign of God’s disfavor, or they imagine that their struggles make it impossible for them to make time for self-feeding. No matter what your circumstance, realize that perseverance is important in your spiritual progress. Archibald Brown, the preacher who succeeded Charles Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, once admonished his hearers in this regard, saying, “Hold on with your teeth and if you can’t hold on with your teeth, hold on with your eyelashes-but hold on somehow!”<sup>12</sup>

#### **D. Perspective**

As believers engage in the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and Bible study, it is important for them to keep the right perspective. Thoughts and distractions will crowd their minds. In addition, they will be tempted to have the wrong focus regarding why they do such things. There will be an ongoing battle to keep one’s perspective in the right place.

In the Hebrews passage mentioned above, the author continued what he said about running the Christian race by talking about the perspective the believer ought to maintain. He said, “...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Notice that Jesus is to be the focus of our Christian life. More specifically, we are to be focused on Jesus’s position “at the right hand of the throne of God.”

These things teach us that our entire Christian walk is to be centered on the person and work of Christ. We must labor to make sure we keep our perspective in the right place. At times, distractions and a wandering imagination will beset us. I have an older Christian friend who has often told me, “Patrick, the weirdest thoughts and ideas sometimes pop into my head when I’m trying to read God’s Word!” I can relate to his struggle. We must learn to reign ourselves in and keep our perspective in the right place.

At times, we will be tempted to imagine that our spiritual disciplines are a way of making us righteous. It is important to resist such temptations and to keep our perspective on Christ. He is the focus of our private times of study. Our aim is to know Christ, not to check a self-righteous task off of a spiritual checklist.

---

<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1425.

<sup>12</sup> Murray, Iain H. *Archibald G Brown: Spurgeon's Successor*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2011), 34.

## **E. A Person**

In closing, it is important to consider Christ more specifically. Yes, we are to have our perspective on him. However, it is also important for us to realize that our interactions with the Word of God are actually a means of communion with him. John referred to Jesus as “the Word.” He said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). When we feed ourselves from Scripture, it should not be our goal to just consider principles, precepts, and paradigms about God. No, our aim in all Bible study should be to encounter a person — Jesus Christ! Make sure you stay aware of this reality. Keep it ever before you. If you are in Christ through salvation, you have union with him. Scripture study is a means by which you can enjoy communion with him!