

# SELF-FEEDER

E.A.R.S. — Sharing  
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Some regard their time in God's Word as being complete after they have understood the text they are studying. They mistakenly believe that head knowledge is the end goal of Bible study. Others do a little bit better. They don't see Bible study as being finished until they personally apply God's Word to their life, experiencing life transformation. While it is certainly important to understand God's Word and apply it to our lives, Bible study should never end with such things. The Lord's ultimate goal in all of our interactions with his Word is for us to share his Word with others.

I like to think of these realities in relation to the jars, cups, and various containers my wife and I have within the cabinets of our kitchen. Some vessels serve the sole purpose of storing away important items. We have large jars for storing sugar and flour. Other vessels are used for dispensing items. We have two different tea pitchers that we use at most meals.

In Bible study, some believers mistakenly view themselves as storage receptacles. They imagine that the end goal of Bible study is to store away large swaths of information in their minds. Opposite of this perspective is the one the Lord wants us to embrace. He wants us to regard ourselves like the tea pitchers I mentioned earlier. The Lord wants to pour his Word in us so that we can pour it out for others.

A passion for sharing God's Word should be the passion of every self-feeder. J.C. Ryle once said that Satan will rise up in judgment against some Christians at the end of time because Satan himself had a greater zeal to ruin souls than some Christians have to save souls.<sup>1</sup> How can we make sure that we are not of the number who seem so cold and calloused toward those who are without Christ? Let's consider five important actions that will help us make our times of self-feeding a springboard for gospel sharing.

## STUDY

Witnessing for Christ flows from one's walk with Christ. One should not regard it as an isolated event that is unrelated to other areas of Christian devotion. Evangelism does not occur in a vacuum. It is a natural response to what one experiences through his or her own fellowship with Christ.

## What He Whispers in Your Ear

Jesus indicated that such things are true. In preparing his disciples to represent him, he once said, "What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops" (Matthew 10:27). Jesus' words referenced an ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, J.C. *Practical Religion*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 196.

practice within rabbinical schools. When a rabbi trained a pupil, he would often arrange debates between his pupil and the pupils of other rabbis. Since young learners weren't yet experts in the law, they needed their rabbis to assist them. Oftentimes a rabbi would stand behind his protégée as debate ensued. If an opponent posed a question or offered a response the protégée could not answer, the rabbi would quietly whisper a response in the young man's ear. In this way, learners learned how to represent God's Law to others.

Jesus calls us to do something similar in witnessing. He doesn't require us to be slick salespeople who have an ability to convince others concerning the claims of Christianity. We don't have to have an encyclopedic knowledge of all Christian doctrine, ready to answer every difficult question one might bring our way. No. The method of true, Christian witnessing is so much more simple. We are merely required to walk with Jesus, allow his truth to fill us, and be prepared to share what Jesus has taught us with others. One has said, "True witnessing is no other but an overflow of devotion to Christ."<sup>2</sup>

### **The Experience and Encouragement of Peter**

Peter learned of these things from personal experience. Shortly before the crucifixion, the Lord warned him of the need for spiritual preparedness. He said, "Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat...the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that you know me" (Luke 22:31, 34). In folly and overconfidence, Peter shrugged off Jesus' warning, saying, "I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33).

Unfortunately, Peter's brashness did not result in steadfastness. When Jesus was arrested, the man's boldness wilted. Pressed and asked concerning his association with Jesus, he quickly denied any acquaintance with the Lord. He even did so on three occasions. On the last, he vehemently cried, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" (Luke 22:60). Luke gave a record of the fallout of Peter's denial, saying, "So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62).

Peter experienced deep pain and regret because of his denial of Jesus. The Lord would eventually graciously restore him and reaffirm the man's role in the church (John 21:15-19). Through his failure, Peter undoubtedly learned how important it is for believers to be prepared to profess Christ. He knew that he should have listened to Jesus' warning. Consequently, Peter later encouraged believers to be prepared to profess Christ. In 1 Peter 3:15-16, he said, "... but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused."

The Greek word translated "defense" in 1 Peter 3:15 was one from which we get our word "apology." It is the word from which the field of "apologetics" gets its name. Apologetics is a field of Christian study that focuses on providing a reasonable defense

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Geoffrey. *Ernest C. Reisinger: A Biography*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 129.

of the faith. Peter's words reveal that the believer's Bible study is to have a bearing on one's witness. Self-feeding is an opportunity for God's people to fill their hearts and minds with God's truth so that they are ready to dispense and defend Christian truth to people they encounter on a daily basis.

Peter had to learn such things the hard way. Have you learned to prepare yourself to be a witness for Christ? Realize that the end goal of all Bible study is that you might be a transformed individual who glorifies Christ. Read and study God's Word with an eye on being a more effective witness. Know that a dark and deceived world needs self-feeders who are filled with the truth of God and ready to share it with others.

## **SUPPLICATION**

Prayer is another tool that can turn our times of self-feeding into personal witnessing. We talked about prayer in our study previously. In doing so, we talked about how prayer helps us to personally respond to God's Word. Now we want to talk about prayer helps us share God's Word with others.

Jesus indicated that prayer has a pivotal part of personal evangelism. When he ministered and shared the gospel with others, he instructed his disciples, saying, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38). Jesus himself had a heart of compassion for those who were spiritually weak and helpless (Matthew 9:36). He personally proclaimed the truth of the kingdom to those who did not have adequate knowledge of God (Matthew 9:35). Despite his personal involvement in evangelism, he called his disciples to pray. He knew that no gospel advancement occurs without fervent prayer.

### **Have a Prayer Strategy**

When I was a young Christian, a more mature believer mentored me. He encouraged me in reference to sharing Christ with others. In talking about morning prayers, he told of the way he started each day by praying something like, "Lord, please send someone my way to whom I can witness." After receiving such counsel from my friend, I attempted to put it into practice. When I started my days with such a prayer, I was amazed to discover how my witnessing opportunities I had. I become more sensitive to souls around me. Instead of just studying the Bible for myself, I began to regard myself as an evangelist who was commissioned to share what Jesus taught me in my personal devotional time.

After such experiences, I was introduced to another method that is helpful for witnessing. A church I attended distributed bookmarks for believers to use in their Bibles. On the bookmark, there were five blanks. The blanks were intended to be filled with names of unbelievers. The tool was designed to provide believers with a prompt to remind them to regularly pray for the lost. I found the tool to be a great help. God's people should have a mind to make their personal times in God's Word a platform for sharing Christ with others. For such things to happen, prayer is a prerequisite.

### **Pray for the Gospel to Spread Like a Wildfire**

Paul advocated for the place of prayer in personal evangelism. When writing to the first-century church at Thessalonica, he said, "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of

the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you” (2 Thessalonians 3:1). The apostle’s words were Romanesque. They contained concepts related to Roman conquest of barbarian lands.

The word rendered “speed ahead” was used of an invading army subduing a foreign people. Paul used the term in a positive and spiritual sense. Just as a legion of Roman soldiers would spread like a wildfire through ancient tribes and villages, Paul requested prayers that the gospel would advance through his ministry. To become self-feeders who share what we learn from God’s Word, we should offer similar prayers on a regular basis. Such prayers will prepare our hearts, enlighten our minds, and ready our mouths to share Christ with others.

There was another Roman concept in Paul’s prayer request in 1 Thessalonians 3:1. The word rendered “honored” was a popular one in the Roman Army. It was used of the way a conquering general would spread the knowledge of Roman culture through his victorious campaigns. When uncivilized villages and towns were brought underneath the leadership of Roman, it was said that Rome and its Emperor were “honored.”

Paul applied such things to the spread of the gospel. God’s people are to pray that the truth of Christ would move amongst people and transform lives. It should be their desire to take what they learn from self-feeding and share it with others. Prayer is a pivotal part of such gospel proclamation. Charles Spurgeon once said:

Dear friend, the will of God is that you should speak to that friend sitting near you about soul-matters. The will of God is that your unconverted servant should have your prayers and your instruction. God puts men in our way on purpose that we may do them good.<sup>3</sup>

However you do it, make prayer for lost souls a regular part of your prayer life. In this way, the Lord will shape you into a self-feeder who shares the gospel with others.

## **STAND OUT**

In conversations about personal evangelism, much has often been made of what is called “lifestyle evangelism.” Such a philosophy of witnessing maintains that Christians can effectively witness through how they live. Critics of such an approach often claim it minimizes the importance of actually proclaiming the gospel. In our study, I would maintain that believers should not create a false “either/or” scenario regarding such things. Scripture is clear that believers should witness with both their lives and their words.

As we’ve already discussed in this study, our times of self-feeding should result in life transformation. After explaining, applying, and responding to God’s Word, our lives should bear resemblance to the character of Christ. As a result, our lives will naturally stand out in the world. The difference in our lives will inevitably provide a witness for Christ. Others will see our character and note that there is something unique about us.

Peter talked about these realities when he wrote to first-century believers. Knowing that his readership was harassed by opponents to the newfound faith, the

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<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Volume 26, 1880*. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 80.

apostle encouraged them not to retaliate. Instead, he called them to double-down on their commitment to Christ. He knew that arguing with gospel opponents would do little to sway minds. Hostility and hatred wouldn't help either. Christians shouldn't fight as the world fights.

Peter knew that the main means of resisting gospel adversaries was to simply live the Christian life. He told his readers, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). The apostle's words likely contained an allusion to some of Jesus' teaching. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

From Jesus, Peter had personally learned of the need to live out the gospel in front of others. He himself had overlooked these realities while Jesus was still on Earth. Consider the scene when Jesus was arrested. As a mob approached to apprehend our Lord, Peter unsheathed his sword. He struck a servant of one of the high priests in the head, attempting to deal a deathblow. Fortunately for the man, Peter was a rather poor swordsman. Peter was only able to cut off an ear. Before being bound, Jesus graciously healed the man (Mark 14:43-50).

After his experience with that episode, Peter's perspective changed. He remembered the words of Jesus (John 14:26). At some point, he came to the realization that people of the Lord do not fight like the people of the world. Instead of using weapons and instruments of human warfare, God's people fight with the gospel (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). They allow the gospel to transform their lives so that they might stand out as a bright witness for the realities of Christ. They confound the wisdom of the world through the radiance of holy lives.

In your attempts at self-feeding, remember these realities. Your study of God's Word should ultimately result in you sharing what you learn with others. This will involve a bright, transformed life that communicates the character of Christ to others. Though we don't want to overemphasize lifestyle evangelism at the expense of gospel proclamation, we must realize that transformed lives play a major part in evangelism. J.I. Packer once defined evangelism as "Christians being Christians in the world."<sup>4</sup>

## **SPRINKLE**

I remember learning a strategy for evangelism from one of my earliest Christian mentors. The man had a way of sprinkling gospel topics into everyday conversations. At grocery stores, community events, and other places, he seemed to be an expert at gently and tactfully bringing up the things of God. Sometimes, he would simply say bye to a person by saying, "God bless you." Or, he might say something like, "The Lord has given us some great weather today, hasn't he?" It was amazing to observe how such conversational tactics often led to an opportunity to talk deeper about the things of the Lord.

I didn't know it at the time, but my friend's approach was thoroughly rooted in Scripture. Paul commended such a practice in his letter to the Colossians, saying, "Let

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<sup>4</sup> Johnston, G. Mark. *Evangelizing with Courage and Kindness. TableTalk: Vol. 46; No. 1.* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2022), 70

your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:6). The apostle used salt as a metaphor for how believers are to season their conversation with gospel truth. His use of such a metaphor was undoubtedly drawn from the teaching of Jesus. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, ““You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet” (Matthew 5:13). On another occasion, our Lord told his disciples, “Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50).

### **Discretion with Salt**

I don’t know about you, but Jesus’ salt metaphor is extremely helpful to me. Being a witness for Christ can be challenging. Sometimes It is difficult to know what to say. By thinking about witnessing in terms of salt, one can understand how witnessing should work. Just as one sprinkles a little bit of salt on food in order to accentuate the taste of food, believers are to sprinkle bits of truth about Christ into conversation. In doing so, they can open doors to speak further about the gospel.

The salt metaphor is also helpful because it reminds us of an issue of critical importance. When sharing Christ, we must be careful to not say too much and not to say too little. We must pray for wisdom to say the right thing in the right way. We must avoid being obnoxious and overbearing, but we must also avoid being timid and silent.

Just as we use discretion when applying salt to our food, we should use discretion when adding Christian themes to our conversations with unbelievers. We should intentionally make mention to “the Lord,” “Jesus,” “God,” and more. As we do, we should pray for and look for open doors to speak further about the gospel. By sprinkling Scriptural realities into our conversations, the Lord can use us greatly for a gospel impact in our world.

### **Advertising Christ**

I recently read a sermon by Martyn Lloyd-Jones in which he encouraged members of his church to be intentional in speaking of Christ. He remarked on the way the church often expends much energy in programs and promotion. Such worldly marketing tactics aren’t often effective. All the while, the church has a powerful promotional agency in the lives of believers who can speak of Christ within their respective circles of influence:

Beloved Christian people, if you and I were only functioning as we should as Christians, amongst other things, a great deal of money would be saved for the church. It is because you and I are not advertising the Christian faith as we ought, that the church is having to set up press officers and publicity departments, and going in for propaganda. Christianity was advertised in the first century at the very beginning simply by the lives and living of Christian people. Oh, that it might happen like that again!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones, M.D. *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 1, the Gospel of God*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), 180.

Imagine what the Lord could accomplish if we would be faithful to sprinkle Christian truth in all of our conversations with others. May God give us grace to be better witnesses for him. Our self-feeding will surely have the impact the Lord desires if we learn to sprinkle salt as Paul encouraged in Colossians 4:6.

## **SPEAK UP**

At the end of the day, it is necessary for believers to use words in order to introduce someone to Christ. Such words can be communicated in spoken or written form, but they are necessary nonetheless. Salvation cannot come one's way through merely observing the lifestyle of another person. One must comprehend gospel realities concerning God, sin, and Jesus. To comprehend such things, one needs a verbal witness and explanation.

The apostle Paul spoke of the need for gospel proclamation in his letter to the Romans. He reasoned with his readers, asking, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" (Romans 10:14-15). Paul knew people need to hear of Jesus in order to embrace Jesus. To share Christ, one must speak up! One Christian author has explained, "...it is one thing to display the gospel through our lives. It is quite another to open our mouths and share why it is significant to us, that is, what it means to us – Something that can change the destiny of others around us."<sup>6</sup>

Realize that self-feeding never comes full circle until you have spoken up as a verbal witness for Christ. We are not intended to be like jars that store away gospel truth for safe keeping. Instead, we are intended to be like pitchers or vessels that dispense gospel truth to others. Proclaiming and sharing Christ is at the heart of Jesus' Great Commission for his church (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).

There are many means and methods of sharing the gospel. Some memorize outlines that present gospel truth in a clear and organized way. Others commit certain passages of Scripture to memory. I've found it helpful to use what is known as a "three-minute testimony," telling of my own conversion through three talking points. Many use strategic leading questions to diagnose one's spiritual condition. They then present Christ based on their perception of one's spiritual understanding. No way is necessarily better than another. What's important is that you clearly share the core principles of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Whatever method you use, have confidence that the gospel, when shared, has power to change lives (Romans 1:16).

## **Conclusion**

Matthew Henry was the son of Philip Henry, an English nonconformist who was influential during the days of the English Civil War that displaced King Charles I from the throne of England. Nowadays, many are familiar with the voluminous commentary on Scripture that Matthew Henry wrote. What many may not know is that the man had a peculiar zeal for soul winning. All of his deep study of Scripture produced a burden to

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<sup>6</sup> Gallaty, Robby. *Growing Up: How To Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 126.

tell others about Jesus. One has remarked on how the man was known for frequently saying, “I would think it a greater happiness to gain one soul to Christ, than mountains of gold and silver to myself.”<sup>7</sup> May our times of self-feeding produce a similar burden in our lives!

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Have you ever thought about the way your personal Bible study should result in you sharing Christ with others? Is this element of Bible study sometimes overlooked or neglected?
2. Do you have a prayer list for people who are not saved? Do you regularly pray for the lost? What means and methods have you used? Are you a part of a small group, LifeGroup, or Sunday School class that prays for unbelievers?
3. Do you have any ways for “sprinkling” Christ into conversations with people you meet in public? What are some ways believers might do this?
4. Do you have a method for sharing the gospel with others? Do you need to find one you could utilize?

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<sup>7</sup> Franks, Benjamin E. Departure Or Development? The Theology of Pastoral Care in The Reformation (2). *The Banner of Truth Magazine: 674*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 24.