**Feed Yourself – Week 1 - Taste**

**Series Big Idea:** The Bible is God’s Word given to us for daily nourishment. In this series we will challenge one another to grow in our relationship with God by feeding ourselves with his Word everyday.

**Message Big Idea**: God’s Word is to our spiritual wellness what food is to our physical wellness.

**Scripture:** Exodus 16, Deuteronomy 8:1-3, Psalm 119:103

**Note:** This is planned as a 25 minute message with an additional 5 minute “Lab Time.”

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**Introduction: Soul Food**

The Human Body is absolutely incredible. With all our scientific and technological advancement, there is still nothing even close to the complexity, efficiency, or beauty of the human body.

And the more we learn about the human body, the more we see how incredible it really is.

This week I did a little digging and found some incredible facts about our physical bodies that almost seem too amazing to be true…

Did you know:

* If a human being’s DNA were uncoiled, it would stretch 10 billion miles, from Earth to Pluto and back.
* A single human brain generates more electrical impulses in a day than all the telephones of the world combined.
* 50,000 cells in your body died and were replaced by new ones while while I spoke this sentence.

Incredible isn’t it!? The human body is truly amazing, but there is a catch…

If you don’t feed it…it all stops working! (2x)

Our bodies can go 30-40 days max without eating, but If we don’t eat, ALL of the incredible systems and processes of our bodies will come to a grinding halt. For all it’s wonders, the body needs food.

And the better food you feed your body, the better it functions.

The reason this is important for us today is this: Although it may not be as readily apparent...Just like your body is not designed to be self-sustaining...neither is your soul. You have to feed it!

**Our soul needs feeding.**

Yet many of us don’t recognize that. We buy in to the lie that our souls are self-sufficient.

Somehow we convince ourselves we can indiscriminately consume whatever “junk-food” we want with our eyes, our hearts, and our minds, without it impacting our souls. We know that all food is not created equal...There is “good food” and then there is “junk food”. There is food that supports the proper function of your body and then there is food that may taste good in the moment but you know is not providing the nourishment your body needs. Just because you’re eating doesn’t mean you’re eating well. In the same way, just because we’re filling our minds, hearts, and spirits with a lot of stuff, it doesn’t mean we’re getting the proper nutrition for our souls.

The truth is, our souls are not self-sustaining and what we “take in” or “consume” with our eyes, our heart, and our mind WILL directly impact the health and the shape of our souls…just like what we consume physically impacts the health and shape of our bodies.

What we need is some good soul food. It’s reminding of this soul food restaurant I ate at in Birmingham, Alabama – Paschals! Amazing!! We all need good soul food...

But the question is where do we find it?

**Series Intro**

As Followers of Jesus, the simple answer is our primary truth source, the Bible.

* We believe that the Bible is God’s Word given to us for daily nourishment.
* We believe that the Bible is the main course of a well fed soul.

In this series we will challenge one another to nurture our souls by feeding ourselves with his Word everyday.

Often times, I hear people describe what they are looking for in a church and they say something like, “I want to be fed.” Now, I think most people are trying to communicate a good and healthy desire for good spiritual food... But the the problem is the way we describe the process.

Imagine if you walked into a restaurant and said, “Hello, I’d like a table for two… AND I would also like someone to feed it to me!” I think you would get some pretty strange looks! Why? Because a restaurant may serve you food but you would not expect the server to pick up and knife and fork, cut your food and then insert it into your mouth!

In a similar way, part of maturing as a Jesus-follower is learning to feed yourself. You expect a healthy, full-grown adult to be able to feed themselves physically. We need to challenge ourselves to learn to do this spiritually as well.



Here’s why this is so important…

**Reveal Study Summary**

There was a fascinating study on this topic conducted a few years back called the *(picture)* **“Reveal.”** Here is what they found…

They identified several different general stages of a spiritual journey:

* New Christ-follower,
* Growing Christ-follower, and
* Mature Christ-follower.

And they found that certain spiritual practices or experiences have different degrees of impact at different stages of a spiritual journey.

* For example, a **Celebration service** was most impactful at the early stages of being a Christ-follower.
* While organized opportunities to **Contribute** were most impactful for those in latter stages.

However, only one activity was powerful at every stage...and it was actually the **most** powerful of **all** activities at every stage...more influential than any other practice by a significant margin. Any guesses?

It is **Reflection on Scripture**.

We all need soul food! Just as physical food is necessary for our bodies to function properly...Reflecting on God’s Word is the main course of a well fed soul!

**“Man shall not live on Bread Alone…”**

And when I say that we need to reflect on Scripture, it’s not just based on a survey that was done. This is also at the core of Jesus’ teaching and his own personal connection with God, the Father.

At the very beginning of Jesus 3-year ministry, he goes away to pray and fast in the wilderness for 40 days. But during that time the evil one shows up and tempts him by trying to distract him from the mission. The Devil knows that Jesus had been fasting and says to him, “Use your powers to turn these stones into bread.” And listen to how Jesus responds:

***“Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* -Matthew 4:4**

Jesus responds by quoting Scripture. Specifically, he quotes the Old Testament, and I think this is very significant. See, Scripture had become so much a part of him that when he came upon a challenging situation - it just came out!

I think it’s true that under pressure, when we are feeling the squeeze, what comes out of us is what is inside of us! (2x) Ask yourself, what comes out of you when you are under pressure? When you feel the squeeze of life?

Jesus makes this important connection between food being necessary for physical life and God’s Word being necessary for spiritual life. The Scripture he references describes a time when 1 million Israelites were freed from slavery; which of course is a very good thing! But all 1 million of them end up wandering in the desert; which is not a very good thing. I mean, what do a million people do for food in the wilderness? No Wendy’s, no Taco Bell, no McDonalds.

So the people begin to complain to Moses:

***“If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate food, all the food that we wanted, but you’ve brought us into this desert to starve to death.”******-Exodus 16:3***

Now I don’t know what ***“pots of meat”*** are. It kind of sounds like one of those Brazilian Steak Houses where you can eat all the meat you want. Ever done that? Fogo De Chao? Just keep the coaster on your table turned green and they keep bringing meat! So awesome! If it was even close to that – no wonder they were complaining!

In response to their complaints, God says this amazing thing to Moses:

***“I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.” -Exodus 16:4***

So Moses tells all the Israelites what God promised:

“***In the morning you will see the glory of the Lord because He has heard your grumbling."*** ***-Exodus 16:8***

The next morning when the dew was gone these thin flakes like frost appeared on the ground and on the desert floor.

***"When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, ‘What is it?’ for they didn’t know what it was.******And Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded you: ‘Each of you is to take as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person that you have in your tent.’"*** (an omer was about a quart). ***-Exodus 16:15-16***

***"Then Moses said to them, ‘No one is to keep any of it until morning.’ However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell." And the people of Israel called the bread manna.” –Exodus 16:19-20***

Now there are all sorts of debates about what exactly manna was.

* Some scientists suggest it was a special kind of lichen that grows on rocks in the wilderness.
* Others say it was something that fell from a particular plant indigenous to that area.
* And still others say it was most likely the larvae of beetles.

The Bible doesn’t say. The Bible just says it was flakes that fell like frost. And I’ve thought a lot about this and done some extensive research myself, and I have actually come to a conclusion to end all debates: it was like *flakes* that fell like *frost*…so I’m saying it was (Anybody? Anybody?) Right: FROSTED FLAKES! And they’re GRRRRR-EAT!

Actually nobody knows. *(Manna = “What is it?”)* In fact the word “manna” literally means, “What is it?” Since they didn’t know what to call it they just called it “What is it?” And nobody really cared exactly what it was because they were hungry, and they could eat it. And this was how God fed them in the wilderness. Since they got the same thing everyday, I imagine they probably got creative in how they prepared their manna: Boiled manna, fried manna, roast manna, manna cakes, manna burgers, manna splits. (Get it? Manna splits?) Anyways, manna was their food and God gave it to them every day.

Now here’s the connection back to what Jesus said: Check it out:

***“Remember how the LORD your God led you in the desert forty years... He humbled you, feeding you with manna to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”******-Deuteronomy 8:2-3***

Sound familiar? These are the same words from Scripture that Jesus said! And this text reveals that God wasn’t just feeding them; he was trying to build a relationship with Him; grow them spiritually.

***“Humbling”*** someone doesn’t mean putting some kind of emotional beat down on them. The Biblical idea of humility means **“to acknowledge your true source.”** As opposed to thinking the source is you. So when it says God was humbling them, it’s saying God was teaching them that he was the true source of both the food for their body and for their souls. He was trying to permanently connect in their hearts and minds that they need God’s Word for their souls as badly as they need food for their bodies.

And I believe God wants to do the same thing with us: He wants to lead us to become a people who believe, “I got to have God’s Word just like I got to have food! I got to have it – to survive and thrive!

But do we really see the Bible that way? I think for many of us… *(Hold Bible)*

* We think this is a text book full of rules to reference for life.
* We think the Bible is great for occasional inspirational reading.
* We think it’s something you study to become theologically astute.
* Or we think it’s something you read from on special occasions, like Linus in “Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown.”

Yet, Jesus says and lived out something entirely different! He taught us that God’s Word is as crucial to our spiritual well-being as food is to our physical well-being!

**Why Americans are Spiritual Starving**

So let me push you on this! I think we need to be pushed on this topic since we know that reflection on Scripture is so critical to our spiritual growth. So without embarrassing anyone by asking you to stand or raise your hand – let me ask this question and you can respond silently: How many of us can honestly say we reflect on Scripture daily? *(long pause)* Well, here is what the experts are telling us:

* 87% of people in the U.S. own Bibles. Basically 9 out of 10 Americans own at least one Bible. AND that does not count the number of people who have downloaded the Bible App.
* But when asked how many people read it – even a little of it – daily, only 2 out of 10 Americans say they do.

Now, this is not me beating up on you, in fact, it is still a challenge in my life to be consistent in reflecting on Scripture every day. I’m just trying to help us all face an important truth – one of the reasons that some of our lives lack real spiritual vitality is because we are starving to death spiritually! Many of us are suffering from spiritual malnutrition. And it’s not because we live in a spiritually impoverished place. *(Hold Bible)* The soul food here is plentiful! We just aren’t eating properly! What is missing from so many of our spiritual diets is manna from God! My soul needs feeding. Your soul needs feeding. Our souls need feeding by reflecting on scripture everyday!

There is an early Jewish tradition that when a 5-year old child begins attending the local synagogue to learn the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), the rabbi would place honey on the little kid’s fingers. For a child back then honey was just like candy. After giving the child the sweet taste of honey the Rabbi would introduce the Bible to the child by quoting Psalm 119:103 saying:

***“How sweet are your words to my taste,***

 ***sweeter than honey to my mouth!” –Psalm 119:103***

**Lab (5 Minutes)**

Now, I’m not going to place honey on your fingers, but my sincere hope is that you begin to enjoy the sweet taste of God’s word. So, I want to give you just a taste of what I’m talking about. When you came in you received this handout that has a passage from James printed on it. Take just 3 minutes; not very long. Here is what I want all of us to do:

* The first minute, I want you to just read that scripture.
* The second minute, I want you to use to reflect on that scripture. What jumped out to you as you read it?
* Then the third minute, I want you to write down 1-2 sentences describing what it makes you think of or how it applies to your life.

Got it? Ok, I think we have a little background music to play. Let’s begin.

**Music for 3 minutes.**

Now, that was just a taste. My hope is that it was a sweet taste like honey! Let me read you what came to me… ***(Share a 1-2 sentence reflection.)***

To wrap up, let’s go back to the story of God feeding the children of Israel in the wilderness. I’m going to use that to challenge you in two ways…

**Challenge #1: Daily**

First, did you notice thatmanna was something that came every day? Did you notice the people had to gather it daily? And because of that, the people learned to live with a day-to-day dependence on God. Remember the part about the maggots? Yeah, kind of gross; but what that’s telling us is that manna didn’t keep. There was only fresh manna and spoiled manna; manna without maggots and manna with maggots. So, they gathered fresh manna every single day. I want to challenge you to gather fresh manna every day too. To enjoy the sweet taste of God’s word everyday!

Two very practical ideas:

1. Sign up for our *(graphic)* **Community Bible Reading Plan**. That is what I do. It goes along with our big idea series. It shows up in my email inbox at about 4am every morning before I get up. It’s like virtual manna that comes to me so I can get a taste of God’s word everday.
2. Or another idea is try *(graphic)* **Readscripture.org** or download the app. It is very cool. Many of our staff are using it. It’s a Bible reading plan, but it also has helpful and interesting videos that go with the reading plan.

You need fresh manna every day. What is your plan to daily reflect on scripture? Your soul needs feeding!

**Challenge #2: Together**

And second, did you notice that gathering manna was something they did together? They did it as a community. They’d all head out together in the morning. It was how they survived as a community, gathering manna daily and gathering manna together.

Two very practical ideas:

1. Join a *(graphic)* **Small Group**. There is great stuff you will never get out of the Bible if you only read it on your own. We get to glean from others experiences and their insights. I have been in a small group my whole adult life. I cannot recommend this strong enough! If you want to get more information about a small group, fill out a communication card or fill out the interest form on our website.
2. The second idea: We are launching a *(graphic)* **“How to Read the Bible” Workshop** starting on (date) at (local). This workshop will build upon what we have been talking about today and take you to the next level. And if you are in a small group, consider bringing your whole small group to one of these workshops. We have made space for 1000 people to be a part of this. I would love for every one of you to experience it!

**Conclusion/Communion Intro: ”I am the Bread of Life”**

We are going to close by receiving communion together. But today I want us to use this moment as a time to remember that we don’t read the Bible for the Bible’s sake, we read it because it points us to Jesus.

In the second part of John 6 we find Jesus discussing the very story we referenced today about God providing Manna from heaven. However, he concludes by saying something very interesting...He says that there is another bread from heaven that will never spoil and that will never leave you wanting.

In verse 35 Jesus says that ‘HE is that bread’...He says:

***“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” –John 6:35***

In other words, Jesus is saying, all of the nourishing words of scripture are pointing us to Him, Jesus.

And there is perhaps no better illustration of this reality than Communion where we have the opportunity, every week, to actually feed ourselves with these symbols of Jesus...the bread of life...the true Soul Food...the main course of the well feed soul.

Let’s pray and then receive Communion together.