**Feed Yourself Week 2- Chew**

**Message Big Idea**: We will grow and prosper when we follow a simple method for meditating on God’s Word.

**Scripture:** Psalm 1, Joshua 1:7-8, James 1:19-27

**Prop:** Carrot Sticks

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**Introduction: Chewing**

Do you know how many times you’re “supposed” to chew your food before swallowing? There actually is a technical answer to this question. Let’s hear a few guesses. *(Take 2-3 guesses)*

The correct answer for chewing dense foods like meat or vegetables is… 30 times! Can you believe that? That seems like a lot of chewing. I had a hard time picturing this, so I wanted to give it a trial run this morning. And I just so happen to have brought some dense food with me, carrots!

Now I’m going to take a bite of this carrot and I want you to count out loud with me to 30, alright? Here we go. *(Take an obnoxiously big bite and exaggerate chewing 30 times)*

Phew, I made it! The truth is: chewing *anything* 30 times is a lot! Personally I usually give most food 15-18 decent chews and then down the hatch it goes. I mean, let’s be honest, who has time to chew each bite 30 times?

* We’ve got soccer practice
* We’ve got appointments
* We’ve got binge watching to get to…

We don't actually have time to chew our food 30 times!

But there are some problems that arise if we don't chew our food thoroughly enough, right? If we don't chew enough, we don't absorb the necessary nutrients that our body needs.

But I think there is a far more weighty reality when it comes to us spiritually. We often do the same thing with our spiritual health, don’t we? I know I do. For example, I use an app that allows me to track any Bible reading plan I want, but I find that a lot of times I get more satisfaction out of completing it than I do actually reading the Scripture itself. Many times I fly through it and don't actually think about the words at all. For me, it becomes about checking the box that I did the spiritual practice of reading my Bible, but did I properly absorb what God wanted to teach or show me?

**Series Recap**

The Bible is God’s Word given to us for our daily nourishment. And in this series we’re challenging one another to grow in our relationship with God by feeding ourselves with his word everyday.

I get to meet with a lot of people and one theme I consistently hear is, *“I just want to be fed.”* Ok, but part of maturing as a Christ-follower is learning to feed yourself. We all expect healthy, full-grown adults to be able to feed themselves physically, right? It shouldn't be different spiritually speaking. Learning to feed yourself is part of the maturing process for a Christ-follower. And that is what this series is all about.

**Word: Psalm 1:1-3**

I want to take a look at an Old Testament passage in the book of Psalms where the author clearly understood the necessity of feeding yourself, but he also gives us some unique wisdom on how to get the spiritual nutrition that we need. Here is how the first few verses of Psalms read:

**“Blessed is the one**

 **who does not walk in step with the wicked**

**or stand in the way that sinners take**

 **or sit in the company of mockers,**

**but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,**

 **and who meditates on his law day and night.**

**That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,**

 **which yields its fruit in season**

**and whose leaf does not wither—**

 **whatever they do prospers.” -Psalm 1:1-3**

The author begins the book of Psalms by saying, *(highlight)* **“Blessed is the one…”** I want to stop there for a moment and ask, who doesn't want a blessed life? We all do, right? No one wakes up in the morning and thinks, *“I could really use a little less blessing today.”* The word “blessed” here in the Hebrew can be translated to mean, “oh how very happy is the one!” Probably for most of us, happiness is a sought after state in life. We wall want to be happy! But, here the Psalmist suggests that this blessed life, this happiness doesn’t just automatically happen; it is a direct result of certain actions.

Verse 1 goes on to list three actions: walk, stand, and sit. These actions are all stated negatively showing us what kind of life to avoid.

* *(Highlight)* **Don’t** walk in step with the wicked
* *(Add Highlight)* **Don't** stand in the way that sinners take
* *(Add Highlight)* And **don't** sit in the company of mockers

But then in verse 2 we see these actions stated positively… and this is where we want to really focus our time today. Verse 2 could also read, “Oh how very happy are the ones whose *(highlight)* **delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.”**

“Oh how very happy are the ones…” That sounds pretty great, right? We all want that. There are two words that I want to look at here in this passage. First is the word *(highlight)* “**law.**” The Psalmist says, “Happy are the ones whose delight is in the law.” The word “law” simply means “instruction.” So, the law is the instruction that God gives to humanity as a guide for life. *(Hold up Bible)*One of the purposes of the Bible is to serve as the instruction that God has given to us to guide us for life.

Let me ask a question: “When was the last time you found delight in spending time in God’s Word?” Can I have an honest moment of confession? I had a really hard time answering that question. Or rather, I didn’t like my answer to that question. Yet, the Psalmist says we will find happiness when our delight is in the instruction we find in this book.

The second word that sticks out in this passage is the word *(highlight)* “**meditate.**” In the original language meditate is the word *Haga*. That’s a funny word; say that with me, “*Haga.*” *Haga* is not our like modern idea of meditation. When I hear the word meditation my mind usually goes *(Picture)* to this place. I usually think of meditation as this silent, calm, reflective or even passive activity.

*(Back to passage with “meditate” highlighted)* But ***Haga*** is different! It means to **“to engage with the text deeply.”** A person who meditates on Scripture is so deeply engaged with God’s teaching that it’s boiling over and they talk about it day and night. As we interact and engage with the Word of God we discover that it will become our delight and it will transform us from inside out.

Then verse 3 comes to a conclusion about the person who is deeply connecting and delighting in God’s Word. *(Highlight verse 3)* Not only will this person be happy, but also they are stable and a great resource for others. This verse compares that type of person to a healthy tree. Think about all the great things that a healthy tree can provide:

* Food
* Shelter for animals and people
* Air to breathe
* Resources that we can create and build with

A spiritually mature person, who can properly feed him or herself, is invaluable to other people as well. You being a spiritually mature follower of Christ isn’t just good for you, it’s good for everyone around you!

The result of meditating on God’s Word is a life that is flourishing and prospering. Now prospering is not the sense of a reward for meditating, but this person will naturally flourish as he/she shapes their life according to the guidelines set down by God.

The bottom of line of this passage is that happiness and even prosperity come as the result of chewing on and deeply interacting with God’s Word. But, I want us all to catch this: the greatest benefit is that as we chew we are developing a deepening relationship with God.

**Meditating Method**

Now, here at COMMUNITY, we encourage a simple method for engaging with Scripture called, *(all words on screen)* **Read. Reflect. Respond.** Last week we focused primarily on the “read” portion of that challenge, encouraging all of us to get into a daily rhythm of diving into God’s word. And next week we’re going to focus on the “respond” portion – to really wrestle with God’s Word and how it help us navigate the challenges of our lives. But this week, today – we want to focus on that middle word, Reflect. Keep in mind; reflecting is really another way of talking about “meditating.” It’s about learning to focus on and sit in whatever text we’re reading. So, today we’re going to share four different ways we can all grow in this area of reflecting. I’d encourage you to pull out this handout as we talk about these methods and tools that can help us reflect. Let’s dive in a few options together:

First, we can use what we’ll call **Reflection Questions**. After you read a passage, ask yourself these types of questions: *(add)*

* Is there a command to obey?
* Is there a promise to claim?
* Is there a sin to avoid?
* Is there a lesson to learn?
* Is there a truth to carry?

Write down what you see. Then, as you reflect on the word, phrase, or verse you wrote down, ask yourself, “What is it about that passage that made it stick out to me?” Trust God to lead your thoughts as you open yourself to hear from him. Write out a few sentences on what you think he is saying to you. Writing it out is important because it focuses your mind and helps clarify your thoughts.

A second option is to utilize a tool like the **Read Scripture App**. Simply go to **readscripture.org** and download this incredibly helpful app. It has all sorts of useful videos to help you dig deeper into each book of the Bible. I can’t recommend this enough!

A third option to help you reflect is to make use of various commentaries as a companion to your Bible reading. Commentaries can help you see things you might have otherwise missed as well as provide important context regarding the original authors, audience, and the settings in which these Scriptures were being written and shared. Personally, I recommend the **“For Everyone”** commentary collection by N.T. Wright. N.T. Wright is a widely respected pastor and New Testament scholar who walks everyday readers through the books of the Bible in a cohesive, easy-to-understand way that is also done with stunning clarity and wisdom. If you can’t afford one of these books, Aaron Koehler told me he’d be happy to buy one for you!

Keep in mind the goal is to grasp the meaning of the text as God intended. We don’t create meaning out of the text; rather, we seek to find the meaning that’s already there. What was God saying to this original audience? What is he saying to us today?

The last method I want to mention is an ancient practice called, **Lectio Divina** – which simply means “divine reading.” It’s a traditional Benedictine practice to grow in closeness with God through Scripture reading, and it’s really powerful. The practice involves four movements…there is space on your handout to fill in these four movements: *(add)*

1. **Read**
2. **Meditate**
3. **Pray**
4. **Contemplate**

With *Lectio* we begin with a patient reading of a passage multiple times, each time focusing on a different element. Next, we simply meditate on what we’ve read, listening silently to what God might be wanting to teach us or reveal to us in this passage. This is a time to focus, not on gaining information but intimacy with God. Once we’ve sat silently with the passage for a bit, we then pray in verbal dialogue with God in response to whatever He’s showing us. And lastly, we contemplate – silently praying and expressing gratitude to God for speaking to us.

**Lab Time**

This practice can be incredibly helpful in quieting the noise of our lives and honing in on not only consuming God’s Word, but really chewing on it. In fact, we think it’s so important that we carve out time and space to do this, that we’re actually going to have a little bit of a “lab time” right here in the service.

I’m going to put the same passage on the screen that we read last week, but this time I’m going to walk us through this practice of *Lectio Divina* together so we can all “chew” on the Word a bit together. Now, before we begin I want to ask you to do a couple of things:

First, put whatever is in your hands on the ground and place both feet on the ground. Get as comfortable in your seat as you possibly can. Take a big, deep breath and exhale out your nostrils *(model this).* Do this again. And one more time. Noticing our breath is one way to calm our minds and focus our attention. Alright, here we go…

**Step One - Reading**

Let’s read aloud together *(begin underscore):*

**“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.” – James 1:22-25**

Now, close your eyes. Take another deep breath and slowly let it out.

* What parts of the passage stood out to you?
* What caught your attention?
* What words, phrases, or images seemed to jump out at you?

I’m going to give you a few seconds to think about what we just read.

*(Sit in silence for 30 seconds)*

**Step Two – Meditation**

Remember, this word means to “engage with the text deeply.” Open your eyes and read the passage again, this time silently to yourself. As you do, focus on any particular phrase or image to which you feel drawn. Once you’ve found a word or phrase that catches your eye or moves your heart, slowly repeat it, linger over it, give it your attention.

* Why do you feel drawn to this phrase or image?
* What does it remind you of?
* What meaning does it hold for you?
* What might God be saying to you?

Take some moments to meditate on the text.

*(Sit in silence for 60 seconds)*

**Step Three - Prayer**

Now take any thoughts, feelings, actions, fears, convictions, and questions you have meditated on and offer them to God in prayer.

* Praise Him for who he is.
* If you feel convicted about a poor relationship, simply apologize, request forgiveness, and ask for guidance on restoring the relationship.
* If you feel thankful for something that God has done for you, then pour out those feelings of thanksgiving.
* If you feel a specific anxiety about something in your life, present it to God and pray for the guidance and peace to be able to submit to God’s will.

Take a few moments to silently pray to God.

*(Sit in silence for 60 seconds)*

**Step Four – Contemplation**

This final stage, though frequently overlooked, is one of vital importance. The “task” in this stage is to simply be silent in the presence of God. This is one of the most essential aspects for building a growing relationship with God. One of the most valuable things that we can do with this feeling is to relax and embrace it. Just “be” with God. Silently express whatever gratitude comes to mind.

*(Sit in silence for 60 seconds)*

**Challenge**

If your eyes are stilled closed, you can open them now. We did it! And the beauty of this practice is that we can do it anywhere, any day of the week. In fact, that’s part our challenge this week. We’ve broken it into two parts:

The first challenge is “**Weekly**.” Last week we challenged everyone to “taste” God’s Word by starting a Bible reading plan to be in God’s word every day. Today’s challenge is to specifically carve out time to actually meditate on Scripture, to not just read it, but chew it. When can you carve out time to meditate on God’s Word this week?

The second challenge is “**Together**.” As you read and meditate, share what you’re learning and experiencing with someone or multiple someones! This is why we’re always talking about joining a small group – because we’re better together! I can’t recommend enough that you join one if you haven’t already.

I’d also challenge you to sign up for one of our many “How To Read the Bible” workshops. If you’re in a small group already, go to one together! Our hope is that 1,000 people across all of our locations go through this fantastic workshop in the next month. Can you imagine what would change for us as a community if we all committed to growing in this area of Scripture reading and engagement? I think it would have tremendous impact!

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, this idea of “chewing” on the Word of God isn’t about checking a box or even merely executing some practice. It’s about growing in closeness with the God who loves us with an unthinkable love and desires for us to know Him and know him deeply. It’s about coming to know his heart and character. However we choose to carve out time this week, let’s remember that, at the end of the day, our goal is growing in our intimacy with our good, loving Father. Let’s pray.

**Communion Idea:**

There is a passage from the prophet Isaiah that would be a great one to meditate on this week. Here it is.

***“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:3-7)***

Receiving communion is a way of engaging with this particular passage. It’s wrestling with the fact that Jesus’ body (the bread) was pierced and crushed for us. He was wounded and afflicted and bloodied for us. Let the bread and the juice be a reminder to us of how much Jesus gave up for us.