**Man shall not live on bread alone** January 7, 2018

Hunger is a pressing issue in many nations of this world.

For example - Venezuela, where we lived for four years, is in the grips of a severe food crisis. The online news site, The Guardian says, *“The pangs of hunger are felt [everywhere in Venezuela]…through the corridors of its major businesses, behind the microphone on radio shows, in hospitals where malnutrition is climbing sharply and already claiming lives, and at schools where children faint and teachers skip classes to queue for food.*

*Nearly three-quarters of Venezuelans have lost weight over the past year… the average loss [being]… 9 kilos…[Even when food is available] nine out of 10 homes [lack the financial resources to purchase it.]*

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/26/nicolas-maduro-donald-trump-venezuela-hunger

We know that in our own town, Sooke, some 400 families, not only use, but depend on the Food Bank. Food insecurity in Sooke is a pressing issue. It’s one of the reasons why we began Grace Gardens last year, and why we partner with the Food Bank, directing the majority of the garden’s produce to them to distribute.

Food is not optional.

Everyone has to eat – every day.

Jesus, quoting from the book of Deuteronomy said in Matthew 4:4 - *“Man shall not live by bread alone...”*

What did he mean?

Someone could respond, “It’s obvious - in addition to bread, Jesus is stating that people also need to eat vegetables and fruits and meat.”

But Jesus wasn’t advocating for a balanced diet… though a balanced diet is important.

So, I ask again, what did he mean – *man shall not live by bread alone*?

Everyone is able to see the goodness that permeates this world.

That said… we also all know there is something broken with our world.

What people disagree on… is the specifics of what is wrong.

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

God reveals to us that he created humans with a body and a soul.

And in what Jesus says, he makes known to us, that both… need to be fed.

Just feeding the body is not enough.

Everyone knows what a famine is – even though, for those of us who live in the West, we’ve never experienced one.

But we’ve seen the pictures.

What is less known – is that a food famine is not the only kind of famine that can grip a nation or a region.

Our world at present, is in the grip of a severe spiritual famine.

And very few, recognize it’s affect, nor comprehend how devastating it is.

Before we go any further, let me give you our **Coffee question** for today:

What evidences do **you see** of spiritual famine in Sooke?

**Feedback:**

We need to unpack the context of the statement made by Jesus, which Matthew recorded in his gospel, 4:4 - “*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

After Jesus’ baptism, but before he began his public ministry of teaching, healing and gathering around him a core group of followers, Jesus faced the god of this world, Satan, in an epic showdown.

It was God the Holy Spirit who led Jesus... into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mt. 4:1.

And it was God the Father who had given permission for Satan to take his best shot at Jesus, and to attempt, if he could, to corrupt him.

Three times Satan placed before Jesus seemingly reasonable requests.

Satan tried to entice Jesus to move in a direction away from God the Father; away from a life of humility and obedience.

We’ll come back to this in our study of the book of Acts – but we need to understand that Jesus’ ability to say no to Satan, was not only because of who he was.

John Piper says, *“Jesus triumphed over the great enemy of his soul because of the forty days he had fasted in advance of his encounter with Satan.”*

desiringgod.org – what to eat while fasting

Normally, physical fasting can weaken a person.

It can muddle their mind.

**My experience of getting ready for a colonoscopy.**

“I was not myself.”

But in the case of Jesus, those forty days of fasting, rather than weakening, made his inner person strong.

It was because of his victory... over Satan... that Jesus went on to set free, over the next 3 ½ years, many in Israel, who had been taken captive by Satan.

Do you remember what Jesus said in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he returned home after his temptation?

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.* Luke 4:18-19

This is what Jesus did for the next 3 ½ years.

And then, at the end of his time on earth, Jesus again faced Satan and this time he decisively finished him.

As he gave his innocent life in sacrifice on a Roman cross, Jesus, once for all, provided what was necessary, in order for forgiveness of sin to be offered to everyone and anyone who would come home to God.

As I earlier stated our key verse comes from the book of Deuteronomy.

We need to look at that passage - Deuteronomy 8:1-5

One of the ways God probed the hearts of his people was to cause them to hunger.

Why would he do that?

Because hunger has a way of uncovering what is buried deep in the human heart.

But doesn’t God know everything?

Wouldn’t he know what was in a person’s heart? Yes.

1 Chronicles 28:9: *“...the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought.”*

Humans have an innate ability to deceive themselves - Jeremiah 17:9.

When God acts to uncovers what is in the human heart, he does so, not for his sake, but for ours.

in the case of the nation of Israel, God caused them to physically hunger, and then fed them manna, in order to teach them that… *“man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”*

What was manna?

Manna was not some kind of desert food.

It didn’t grow on trees, nor was it a root to be dug up.

Exodus 16 describes manna in this way:

*...in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor...It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.*

Every single morning, for forty years, God gave to the nation of Israel, all 3-5 million of them, enough manna for that day.

In doing so, he taught them a profound spiritual lesson.

Blaise Pascal wrote:

*“There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.”*

In the story of the Bible we learn that humans need God, like our lungs need air.

We see in example after example, that life without God is woefully incomplete.

The point is driven home, again and again, that even if, all of one’s physical needs are met – there remains within the human heart a great vacuum, because God is absent.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, *“Man cannot live on bread alone.”*

God who is wholly good, placed us in a good world, full of good things.

But none of God’s good gifts can ever take the place of God in a person’s life.

Manna was God’s miraculous provision for the nation of Israel during the 40 years they wandered in the desert.

But it never was God intent that the nation would trust in the manna.

God did the same with their clothes.

He intervened so they did not wear out.

God provided for them – he met their physical needs – in order to train them to trust in him for their spiritual needs.

God wanted them to learn experientially that their deepest satisfaction was not to be found in a full belly every day, but in knowing him; in loving him; in following him… without reservation.

Every word that comes out of the mouth of God reveals who God is – his person and his power.

Every word spoken by God… brims with life, and is meant to feed, nourish, and sustain the human soul.

Because Jesus himself lived, not by bread alone, but on every word, that came from the mouth of God the Father, he was not deceived by Satan’s empty enticements – neither in the desert, nor later in the garden of Gethsemane.

What do we take away from this?

If you haven’t yet welcomed Jesus into your life, I invite you to do so this morning.

We all begin our lives, with a bent towards things that bring death.

We all try, in our own ways, to satisfy these longings within us, not realizing they are there because our souls are starved.

God through Jesus tells you the truth – you cannot live by bread alone.

It is only in relationship with God through faith in Jesus that a person can come alive and truly live.

But by your own efforts, you can’t get back home to God.

That’s the bad news. The good news is this.

Jesus made the way for you to come home.

Years ago, this church had a saying – come as you are.

Come…is an invitation often repeated in the Bible.

But it is an invitation that needs qualifying.

Come as you are… to Jesus.

Come as you are… and put your trust in him and be born of the Spirit.

Come as you are… and begin to live a new life.

If you are ready to come to Jesus….

Tell him you believe he came to deal with your sin problem.

Ask his forgiveness – and be specific.

Tell him you receive him into your life to be in charge.

Tell him you will follow him.

The trajectory of your life can change because of Jesus.

Your inner emptiness … can be exchanged for what Jesus described as “fullness of life.”

For those of you who are already followers.

I believe the truth expressed by Jesus changes how we look at people in our town when we understand our nation is in the grip of a spiritual famine.

Look at these two pictures.





It is easy to recognize that these individuals are physically starving.

You and I need to be taught by the Spirit of God to recognize what spiritual starvation looks like.

People who are physically starving, will try to dull their hunger pains, by eating things that are not good for them - like twigs, leaves, clay, garbage, etc.

People who are spiritually starving do the same.

It would be so easy to be critical of people in our culture.

But rather than condemning the emptiness of life that exists all around us, may God’s Spirit put in our hearts, great compassion for those, who because of the emptiness within them, try to fill it with things, other than God; things that only bring death.

If God the Father did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but to save it, why would we his followers think, he would want us to do anything different?

Jesus would have us see people as he sees them; and respond to them as he would respond; to love them as he would love; to extend grace as he would.

Jesus was the friend of sinners.

This is the heart of God.

This is why, we his people, his followers, also need to be known as the friend of sinners.

This perspective changes our understanding of what it means to be the church of Jesus.

There is one other thing for followers of Jesus, that while obvious, still needs to be said.

It was Job who said: *“I have treasured the words of God’s mouth more than my daily bread.”* 23:12

Jeremiah said to God: *“...your words were my joy and my heart’s delight.”* 15:16.

Follower of Jesus, if you don’t feed your soul every day, on the words that come from the mouth of the Lord, your soul will be anemic.

You will lack discernment.

Life circumstances will easily overwhelm you.

You will remain self-oriented.

Every one of us lives full lives.

Sometimes it is challenging in a 24 hour period to fit everything in. Am I right?

And yet, don’t you and I…still find time… to eat every day?

In Jesus’ answer, he reminds us that the feeding our soul is as important as the feeding of our body. *Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

There is no excuse for anyone who follows Jesus to be spiritually malnourished.

If your life is too busy to feed your soul, then you must re-order your priorities and schedule.

In the bulletin, there are two apps suggested to help you in establishing the practice of reading God’s word in order to feed your soul.

If you don’t have a spiritual food plan, check them out.

But there is another reason why you and I must feed our soul.

When Jesus lived on the earth, he repeatedly said that to see him was to see God; to watch the things he did, was to see God at work!

When Jesus left the earth, and returned to his Father’s home, he sent the Holy Spirit to live in his followers.

Do you realize what Jesus’ plan is… in this present time?

To see us, is to see him.

Jesus intends to reveal himself to people in Sooke through you and I.

Galatians 2:20 says: “Christ lives in us.” We are his habitation.

Our lives showcase Jesus.

Do you get it now?

Do you see why is it so important to feed on God’s word – every day?

Jesus has staked his reputation on us!

Our lives show the life that is truly life.

*Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

This is why the priority each day must be to feed our souls; to nourish the new life we have because our Savior lives within.

Here’s the other takeaway.

Look at these pictures.







These people look healthy.

But unless a person’s life is centered in Jesus, they are spiritually starving.

That said, I do want us to look at a different kind of famine, that is both devastating in this life and in the life to come.

Through the prophet Amos, (8:11) God spoke of a *“famine of hearing the words of the LORD.”*

John Piper writes, *“Manna is one of the incredible ways God can, with a mere word, reveal himself and meet a person’s need, when all else looks hopeless.”*

desiringgod.org – what to eat while fasting

During his forty days in the desert, Jesus too hungered.

Those days of hunger revealed what was in Jesus’ heart.

The 40 years which the nation of Israel spent in the desert were intended by God to humble his people, and to test them in order to know what was their heart, whether or not they would obey him in all things.

Those 40 days spent by Jesus in the desert were intended by God the Father to prove Jesus’ humility; to show what was in his heart – that he would obey the Father no matter what - and to strengthen him to face Satan and to bring to completion what he had come to do.

But there was a reason why God let them experience hunger

Like the nation of Israel, Jesus experienced real physical hunger as he fasted.

In John 6, five times Jesus spoke of himself as being “the bread of life.”

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

v.41 - *“****I am the bread*** *that came down from heaven.”*

v.48 - “***I am the bread of life***.”

v.51 - “***I am the living bread*** *that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will*

*live forever.”*

v.58 - *“Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live*

*forever.”*

*“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

The person of Jesus and the words he speaks brings life to the human soul.

In the desert, Jesus rejected Satan’s suggestion to act independent of God and to provide for his hunger through his own means.

Rather, Jesus trusted that God the Spirit who had led him into the desert, would in his good and right time, lead him out of the desert and then and only then would his physical hunger be satisfied.

In essence Jesus said to Satan, “Though I am desperately hungry, I will not turn away, from the Giver of Life. God is my sufficiency.”

Jesus demonstrated how, *“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

When he faced Satan, Jesus succeeded where Adam and Eve and the family of Abraham had failed.

He chose to trust God implicitly and explicitly.

**I Married a Same-Sex Attracted Man. And I Am Blessed.**

NOVEMBER 3, 2017  | [Jaclyn S. Parrish](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/profile/jaclyn-s-parrish/)

[CHRISTIAN LIVING](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sections/christian-living/)

My husband struggles with same-sex attraction. Like me, Sam came into this world with an innate and insatiable desire for things that bring death. Like me, he came into our marriage bearing the weight of pain he didn’t ask for and the scars of choices he can’t change. And like me, he has chosen to trust Christ—[not to make him heterosexual, but to make him holy](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/godliness-is-not-heterosexuality).

When people aren’t stunned into silence by that revelation, they often ask us, “So . . . what’s that like?” And I can answer honestly that it’s difficult. It’s lonely. It’s painful and scary.

But ultimately, I can say with equal honestly and surpassing joy that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” ([Rom 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%205.20)). No, I wouldn’t wish my husband’s past on anyone, but I also wouldn’t trade our story for anything.

**SEEING MARRIAGE FOR WHAT IT IS**

Marriage is an incarnate manifestation of Christ and his church ([Eph. 5:22–33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%205.22%E2%80%9333)), a living and breathing argument for the gospel. Nothing less than his grace could empower us to forgive as much as marriage requires ([Matt. 18:21–35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%2018.21%E2%80%9335)). Nothing less than a perfectly faithful God could give us courage to trust something as faithless as another human ([1 Tim. 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Tim.%202.13)). And nothing less than his love could compel us to love as wholly as we must ([1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%204.19)).

Satan lives to see this truth rejected, so he’s been spewing lies about the nature and purpose of matrimony since Genesis 3. His attacks are nothing new. Every Christian wedding has declared war on the armies of darkness. And every Christian marriage has been an act of faith. Each one lives or dies by the decision to wake up each morning and believe, for one more day, that God’s plan for men and women truly is best. Our marriage is not unique in that respect.

*I wouldn’t wish my husband’s past on anyone, but I also wouldn’t trade our story for anything.*

But to think, we might have missed it. Without his past sin and present struggle, Sam and I might have plodded through our entire life together and missed the miracle. But because of my husband’s struggle with same-sex attraction, we get to see our marriage for what every Christian marriage is: a wondrous, dangerous, glorious, and thunderous testimony to the greatness of God’s redemption and the goodness of his plan.

**KNOWING SCRIPTURE FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH**

When I was in second grade, I bet my eternity on Scripture. When I married Sam, I bet my life on it. The 8-year-old girl in the baptistry anted up as best she could, but the woman at the altar was all-in, and she knew it. If I was wrong, it wouldn’t cost me down the line after death. It would cost me today, tomorrow, and every day for the rest of my life. Suddenly, Scripture wasn’t something I could devote the odd half-hour to; I had to build my life on it, and I needed it beneath my feet every moment.

*When I was in second grade, I bet my eternity on Scripture. When I married Sam, I bet my life on it.*

Psalm 119, for example, makes real, visceral sense to me now. Previously, the 176 verses waxing eloquent on the beauties of the law had always seemed a bit much, to be honest. Now I know that 176 verses couldn’t possibly express a fraction of the Bible’s incalculable worth. When the scars of past sins start screaming (and yes, they do), Sam and I cling to Scripture and weep together before our Savior, “I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!” ([Ps. 119:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%20119.8)).

And at the end of each day, both good and bad, we can echo the psalmist: “I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word” ([Ps. 119:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%20119.16)). Because of Sam’s testimony, we’re fully convinced that God’s Word is essential and that it’s sufficient. Until Christ calls us home, we’ll never stop needing it, and it’ll always be enough.

**BUILDING COMMUNITY WITH BROKEN SAINTS**

Telling our testimony is always interesting. Not so long ago, we sat in a new small group, listening intently as each fresh-faced couple told the story of how they met Jesus and each other. Then came our turn.

Responses always vary. Sometimes there’s fascination. Sometimes fear. Sometimes visible disgust. But sometimes—more and more, now that I’m learning to look—I catch a glimpse of people thinking, almost in terror, *If this God, if this church, if this small group is safe for them . . . could it possibly be safe for me?*

*More and more, I catch a glimpse of people thinking, almost in terror, ‘If this God, if this church, if this small group is safe for them . . . could it possibly be safe for me?’*

We’re all caught between a desperate desire for community and a mortal fear of vulnerability. But if someone is willing to be the first to throw down their mask, throw out their arms, and say, “This, this is how broken I am, and this Jesus loves me anyway,” it’s truly amazing how many people will follow. Over and over again, God has let Sam and me watch him use our story to set his people free from secret sin, private grief, unconfessed bitterness, unspoken fears, and so much more. And over and over again, I’ve watched real intimacy and community blossom from those first hesitant seeds of vulnerability. I’m stunned God would entrust something so powerful and so precious to me.

These days, the faces aren’t always so fresh in our small group. There’s real pain, real tears, real laughter, and, praise God, real community. Together we’re cultivating a desperate love for God’s Word and a glorious surrender to his plan.

People sometimes tell me I’m brave to share my story. I’m not. I’m blessed.

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**God Will Give You More than You Can Handle**

JULY 17, 2015  | [Mitch Chase](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/profile/mitch-chase/)

[CHRISTIAN LIVING](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sections/christian-living/)

Christians can make the strangest claims when comforting those who are suffering. What do you say to someone whose life is falling apart? If you have but few precious minutes with a person who’s lost a job, home, spouse, child, or all sense of purpose, what comfort do you give?

We might turn to conventional wisdom instead of Scripture and end up saying something like, “Don’t worry, this wouldn’t happen in your life if God didn’t think you could bear it.” The sufferer may object, head shaking and hands up. But you insist, “Look, seriously, the Bible promises God won’t *ever* give you more in life than you can handle.” There it is—conventional wisdom masquerading as biblical truth. You’ve promised what the Bible never does.

**TEMPTATIONS VERSUS TRIALS**

In 1 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul writes, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” His discussion is specific: he’s writing about “temptation,” a snare that breaks a sweat trying to drag us into sin. Using a predator metaphor, God warned Cain that “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it” ([Gen. 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen.%204.7)). Sin stalks us, but God is faithful. Sin desires to overcome us, but there is a merciful way of escape. Sin sets the bait, but for the believer—praise God!—sin is not irresistible.

Now if people apply Paul’s words about temptation to general sufferings, you can see where the line “God will never give you more than you can handle” comes from. I don’t doubt the sincerity and good intentions of those who use this phrase, but sincerity isn’t enough. Even Job’s friends meant well.

**THE TWIN ERRORS**

There are at least two errors in the unbiblical notion of “God will never give you more than you can handle.” First, it plays on the cultural virtue of fairness. Second, it points the sufferer inward instead of Godward.

**1. Trials that Are . . . Fair?**

If you give your children boxes to load into the car, you make visual and weight assessments that factor in their ages and strength. You don’t overload their arms and watch them crash to the ground with stuff splayed everywhere. That would be unfair. The saying “God will never give you more than you can handle” strikes a tone of fairness we instinctually like. There’s something pleasing about the idea that the scales are in balance, that God has assessed what we can handle and permits trials accordingly.

But there is a glaring problem with the “fairness” that undergirds this conventional wisdom: God has been unfair already, because he has not dealt with us as our sins deserve. He has been longsuffering, forbearing, gracious, and abounding in love. The sun shines and rain falls even on the unjust ([Matt. 5:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%205.45)). God transcends the categories of fair and unfair to such a degree that we have no position to evaluate his actions or weigh his will. His ways aren’t subject to our culture’s standard of fairness.

**2. The Power . . . Within?**

Suffering doesn’t ask if you’re ready. It may come slowly or with a vengeance, but it doesn’t ask permission, and it doesn’t care about convenience. There’s never a good time for your life to be wrecked. But the saying “God will never give you more than you can handle” tells me *I* have what it takes. It tells me *I* can bear whatever comes my way. It tells me God permits trials according to *my* ability to endure. Think about what this conventional wisdom does: it points people *in*ward.

Yet the Bible points us *God*ward. As the psalmist says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling” ([Ps. 46:1–3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%2046.1%E2%80%933)). When our strength is failing under crushing burdens, the answer is not within. God gives power to the faint and increases the strength of the weak ([Isa. 40:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa.%2040.29)). The power comes *from* him to those who wait *on* him.

**WHERE TRIALS DIRECT US**

Trials come in all shapes and sizes, but they don’t come to show how much we can take or how we have it all together. Overwhelming suffering will come our way because we live in a broken world with broken people. And when it comes, let’s be clear ahead of time that we don’t have what it takes. God will give us more than we can handle—but not more than he can

The psalmist asks, “Where does my help come from?” ([Ps. 121:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%20121.1)), and we must be able to answer like he did. We must know and believe, deep in our bones, that “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (121:2). When trials come, trust that the Lord’s help will come. This news is helpful to sufferers since we’re saying something true about God instead of something false about ourselves.

Paul recalled a time when God gave him more than he could bear. In a letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly *burdened beyond our strength* that we despaired of life itself” ([2 Cor. 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%201.8)). Paul and his associates had been in circumstances that transcended their strength to endure: “Indeed, we felt that we had received the *sentence of death*” (1:9).

Then he provides a crucial insight into his despair. Why were he and his companions given more than they could handle? To “make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” ([2 Cor. 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%201.9)). God will give you more than you can handle so that his great power might be displayed in your life. Indeed, a greater weight of glory is still to come: “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” ([2 Cor. 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%204.17)).

You might not consider overwhelming sufferings to be “light” and “momentary,” but think of your trials in terms of a trillion years from now. In the middle of affliction, sometimes the most difficult thing to hold onto is an eternal vision. Paul isn’t trying to minimize your affliction; he’s trying to maximize your perspective.

Suffering doesn’t get the last line in the script. In this life, God will give you more than you can handle, but the coming weight of glory will be greater than you can imagine.

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Man Shall Not Live on Bread Alone

What to Eat While Fasting

Resource by John Piper

Scripture: [Matthew 3:16–4:4](https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/matthew/3/messages)    Topic: [Fasting](https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/fasting)

And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

So far this year we have seen the prophets and teachers of Antioch fasting in Acts 13 and we have heard Jesus teach us that when the bridegroom, namely, himself, is taken out of the world, then the attendants of the bridegroom, namely, we, his disciples, will fast. And today we get to see Jesus the Son of God himself fasting.

Two Hopes for This Message

I have two hopes for this message. One is that we know Jesus better. [Last week](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1995/897_When_the_Bridegroom_is_Taken_Away_They_Will_Fast__With_New_Wineskins/)we heard him make the amazing claim that the bridegroom had come—God had called himself the bridegroom and husband of Israel in the Old Testament. Now here was Jesus saying—the bridegroom is here. Today in this text we see Jesus as the representative and head of a new Israel, as a kind of new Joshua preparing to take his people over into the promised land, but first tested in the wilderness.

My other hope, besides getting to know Jesus better, is that we understand fasting better and see more deeply into its spiritual value for us individually and as a church. It should give us pause, I think, to realize that the Son of God began his life's ministry with a 40 day fast. We should stop and think about this. We should ask, What about me, Lord? Can I face the incredible challenges to my Christian life without sharing in the fasting of Jesus?

Can we as a church experience the fullness of Christ's power and blessing without humbly seeking the Lord in fasting? These are pivotal days at Bethlehem. I feel a stirring in my heart for what God is preparing for us. When the staff fasted last Wednesday and prayed, the Lord wove some words together that are filled with hope. The last paragraph of my 1994 annual report goes like this:

And finally, thanks to you all for your prayer and your unfailing encouragements. I am happy in this work because you have prayed. What a privilege to be here! There are fresh breezes blowing. My sails are up. The sky is clearing. The Lord is aboard and tells me there is good man-fishing not far out to sea.

My heart is so hungry for a deeper work of God in our midst! A work that will see supernatural new birth taking place week in and week out through your anointed lives in these Cities. This is why fasting is on the front burner. [Charles Spurgeon](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1469_Charles_Spurgeon_Preaching_Through_Adversity/), the London pastor from a century ago, said,

Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has Heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory.

My heart longs for us as a church to be nearer the Central Glory, to be so near the fire that we burn with the zeal of Jesus for his name and for this perishing world.

So let's look now at his fasting.

Jesus' Forty Day Fast

[Matthew 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%203.16) says that after being baptized, Jesus came up out of the water and the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. Now the Holy Spirit had always been with Jesus. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. But this was a special anointing, or outpouring, or baptism that would rest on Jesus for his three-year public ministry. He was baptized to identify with us in his submission to God's rule and righteousness. And the Holy Spirit came on him, as he does on us, to empower him and guide him in the huge demands of his ministry.

**The Father's Pleasure and the Spirit's Leading**

As the Spirit comes upon Jesus, God the Father says (v. 17), "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." One of the wonderful effects of these words is to assure Jesus and us that the fire of misery and pain that Jesus was about to walk into was NOT owing to his Father's displeasure.

This is especially important to see when you notice in the next verse ([Matthew 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%204.1)) what the Spirit's first act is in Jesus' ministry. It says, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." The first act of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry is to lead him into the wilderness, and to expose him to Satan's testings.

**Jesus Prepares for Combat with Fasting**

Under the Spirit's leading Jesus prepared himself to meet the devil by fasting. The Spirit of God willed that the Son of God be tested on his way into the ministry, and he willed that Jesus triumph in this testing through fasting. Jesus triumphed over the great enemy of his soul through fasting.

It seems to me that this story should shake us. Here is Jesus standing on the threshold of the most important public ministry in the history of the world. On his obedience and righteousness hangs the salvation of the world. None will escape damnation without this ministry of obedient suffering and death and resurrection. And God wills that, at the very outset, the ministry be threatened with destruction—namely, the temptations of Satan to abandon the path of lowliness and suffering and obedience. And of all the hundreds of things Jesus might have done to fight off this tremendous threat to salvation, he is led to fast. To fast!

If Satan had succeeded in deterring Jesus from the path of humble, suffering obedience, there would be no salvation. We would still be in our sins and without hope. Therefore we owe our salvation to the faithful fasting of Jesus. This is a remarkable tribute to fasting. Don't ride over this quickly. Think on it. Jesus began his ministry with fasting. And he triumphed over his enemy through fasting.

Deuteronomy 8:2–3 Parallels Matthew 4:1–4

Now to see the fuller meaning of this, turn with me to Deuteronomy 8. Every time Jesus responds to the three temptations of the devil in the wilderness he quotes from Deuteronomy. "Man shall not live by bread alone"—[Deuteronomy 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%208.3); "You shall not tempt the Lord your God"—[Deuteronomy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%206.16); and "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve"—[Deuteronomy 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%206.13).

**Jesus Tempted in the Wilderness**

This is very significant. Here is Jesus led by the Spirit into the wilderness—the wilderness—and to counter the temptations of Satan Jesus quotes passages from Deuteronomy, all of which are spoken by Moses to the people of Israel about their time of testing in the wilderness. In [Matthew 4:3–4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%204.3%E2%80%934) it says,

The tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

**Moses' Words About Israel's Time in the Wilderness**

Now look at [Deuteronomy 8:2–3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%208.2%E2%80%933) and mark the parallels that you see between that situation in the wilderness and Jesus' situation in the wilderness. Moses says to the people,

You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness [NOTE: as Jesus was led by the Spirit in the wilderness] these forty years [NOTE: as Jesus was there forty days], that He might humble you, testing you [NOTE: as Jesus was "tested"], to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 And He humbled you and let you be hungry [NOTE: as Jesus was made hungry by his fasting], and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.

**What Do These Parallels Mean?**

There are too many similarities between what is happening to Jesus here in the wilderness and what was happening to the people of Israel to think it is an accident. What does this mean?

It means that God is now preparing to deliver his people—the new Israel—from the Egyptian bondage of sin into the promised land of forgiveness and righteousness and peace and joy and eternal life. To do this he has sent a new Joshua—Joshua and Jesus are exactly the same word in Greek ([Acts 7:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%207.45)). This new Joshua stands as the head and representative of the whole people. On their behalf he will now be led by God into the wilderness. It will be 40 days to represent 40 years. He will be tested as Israel was tested. And he will hunger as Israel hungered. And if he triumphs, he and all his people go safely into the promised land.

The Aim of Jesus' Fast (and Ours)

Now we can see the meaning of Jesus' fasting more clearly.

**Voluntary Identification with the People of God**

It wasn't an arbitrary choice of something to do in the face of satanic temptation. It was a voluntary act of identification with the people of God in their wilderness deprivation and trial. Jesus was saying in effect, "I have been sent to lead the people of God out of the Egypt of sin into the promised land of salvation. To do this I must be one of them. That is why I was born. Therefore I will take on the testing that they experienced. I will represent them in the wilderness and allow my heart to be probed with fasting to show where my allegiance is. And with the Spirit's help I will triumph through this fasting, overcome the devil, and lead all who trust me into the promised land of eternal glory."

**A Means of Battling Satan**

In other words Jesus' fasting is part of his testing the way hunger was for the people of Israel in the wilderness. But that doesn't mean fasting wasn't a means of battling Satan. Because fasting reveals where the heart is. And when the heart proves to love God more than bread, Satan does not have the foothold he would if our heart was in love with the earthly things like bread.

**Proving Our Hearts**

The people of God are often called to go without the ordinary means of life. Fasting is a brief, voluntary experience of this deprivation to prove our hearts. When we experience this "going without," the Lord reveals what is in our hearts. What are we controlled by? Richard Foster says in his chapter on fasting,

More than any other single Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David said, "I humbled my soul with fasting" ([Ps. 69:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%2069.10)). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear—if they are within us, they will surface during fasting. At first we will rationalize that our anger is due to our hunger then we know that we are angry because the spirit of anger is within us. We can rejoice in this knowledge because we know that healing is available through the power of Christ.

What are we slaves to? What are our bottom line passions? Fasting is God's testing ground—and healing ground. Will we murmur as the Israelites murmured when they had no bread? Will we leave the path of obedience and turn stones into bread? Or will we "live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"? Fasting is a way of revealing to ourselves and confessing to God what is in our hearts.

**The Aim of Fasting**

And the aim of fasting is that we come to rely less on food and more on God himself. That's the meaning of the words in [Matthew 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%204.4), "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Every time we fast, we are saying with Jesus, "Not bread alone. But you, Lord. Not bread alone, but you, Lord."

Let me show you quickly in closing why I think Jesus is saying that we should trust in God not bread.

**Why We Should Trust God, Not Bread**

It comes from the context of [Deuteronomy 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%208.3) where Jesus gets this word in [Matthew 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%204.4),

[God] fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that [NOTE!] He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.

He gave them manna—an utterly un-heard-of food falling from heaven—Why? "So that" they would learn to live on everything that comes from the mouth of God. How does miraculous manna teach that? Because manna is one of the incredible ways God can, with a mere word, reveal himself and meet your needs when all else looks hopeless.

But watch what Satan does with that. Satan says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, turn this stone to bread." In other words, "Do the manna thing. Make manna like you did in the wilderness. If the point of manna in the wilderness was to teach the people to expect miracles in distress, then treat yourself to some miracle bread, and you will be obeying Scripture."

And Jesus responds, "You are so close and yet so far. You have always handled the Word of God that way, so subtle. You sound like you approve God's Word, but you turn every word against him. The point is this Satan: Don't trust in bread—not even miracle bread—trust in God. Don't get your deepest satisfactions in life from food—not even God-wrought miracle food—but from God. Every word that comes out of the mouth of God reveals God. And it is this self-revelation that we feed on. This will last forever. This is eternal life. Begone, Satan, God is my portion. I will not turn from his path and his fellowship, not even for miraculous manna."

I invite you to let God prove your heart with fasting this Wednesday. See if he does not reveal some deep things to you, and give himself to you for food.

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▣ "that man does not live by bread alone" This is one of the passages Jesus quoted to Satan in His temptation experience (cf.  [Matt. 4:14](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 4:4](javascript:%7b%7d)). Humans need a personal, trusting relationship with God more than anything (e.g., [Ps. 42:1-4; 63:1; 143:6](javascript:%7b%7d), Augustine said there is a god-shaped hole in every person)! The physical is not enough for authentic life (i.e., "by everything that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord").