

## **What the Bible says about Spiritual Nourishment**

**We need God's food—apples, oranges, bread, and all those kinds of natural things—that He causes to come up out of the ground. When we eat them in the right amounts and in the right balance, good health is the result. We also feel truly satiated because we eat the things that He so generously provides.**

**Now when we do not eat, our body begins to feel weak, and we know immediately that we need to eat some food. If we do not get any food, we will hurt even more. For many of us, the main thing that we feel is not hunger, but weakness. The knees begin to feel a bit rubbery, and we just do not have the energy to do much. The mind begins to become a little dull, and the tongue begins to feel thick. Things just do not work with the smoothness that they normally do when we have strength. We need the food that [God](#) provides.**

**When we fast, we become weak. God wants us to make connections to spiritual things. Thus, when we do not have what we can get from Him spiritually, we will become just as weak spiritually as we become physically when we lack food. We will not be able to do spiritual things without those things that *only* God provides. We can visit hundreds of different stores to get food to eat, and the food we buy from them will make us feel strong physically. But there is only one place we can go to get the food that will feed us spiritually.**

**Humbling oneself before God is what is necessary to keep us from being separated from God. What can be produced by fasting is a vivid illustration of the attitude necessary for salvation—humility—thus allowing one's mind to change and turn toward God.**

### **Isaiah 55:1-3**

**Isaiah 55:1-3** contains an appeal, continuing the theme that there is a spiritual food that nourishes the inner man and fills one's life in a way and with abundance that all of a person's material things cannot. That **God** is speaking about His Word is seen in the word "listen," which is directly connected to the phrase "eat what is good." This food is, of course, spiritual, and its source is God. Interestingly, He says to come and buy, but not with money. This food cannot be purchased with material wealth. All the money in **the world** cannot purchase it, but it still must be bought. Recall that the foolish virgins in Matthew 25 are advised to go out and buy oil from those who sell in preparation for the coming of the Bridegroom.

The "food" in Isaiah 55 and the "oil" in Matthew 25 can be bought only by means of the dedication and commitment of one's life in submission to **Christ**. By being a living sacrifice in prayer, study, meditation, and obedience, one becomes energized by the food of God's Word. In addition, one can "purchase" it only from those appointed by God to "sell" it. It can only be bought from those already converted and provided by God with the gifts to teach it to others. In most cases, this is the ministry of the **true church**.

**Jeremiah 3:15** provides us with clear Old Testament evidence that the principle of feeding the mind with the correct instruction leads to good spiritual health: "And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." God clearly states that a mind fed with the right things can produce wisdom, **holiness**, and happiness. In other words, He promises that those who hear Him will be fed the elements of an abundant life through shepherds who exhibit godly character. God's Word, if it is believed and practiced, produces a unique perspective of life and a balance that cannot be found through any other means. Nothing that man has produced through philosophy or religion can even come close. These elements of human society have played major roles in producing restless, anxious, violent cultures.

We must choose to secure the best diet for the mind to utilize and assimilate into one's moral and spiritual character, as well as other expressions of personality. The world produces an almost overwhelming amount of spiritual junk food and outright spiritual garbage, and it is within easy reach of any mind anywhere no matter where one lives.

### Isaiah 55:1-3

Remember who is saying this and to whom. [Jesus Christ](#), the [God](#) of the Old Testament and our Savior is speaking, not to [the world](#) in general as some may think, but to all those who have made the covenant with God.

Under the Old Covenant, this includes Israel and Judah, and under the New Covenant, the church. Verse 1 essentially invites us to come and eat freely, that is, without restriction, because all that He offers is good to eat. However, the English translation hides a tone of pity. In Hebrew, it pleads for us to take advantage of what God has made readily available. It bears a pleading tone because suffering and discouraged people seem to be doing all but the right things to help them overcome their difficulties. These people are "spinning their wheels" in their preoccupation with Babylon, a type of the world.

By contrast, the tone of verse 2 is mildly chiding as well as urgently warning. It admonishes against spiritual foods that indeed may make one feel "full" but really do not nourish the spiritual life's genuine needs. Eventually, one feels that something is missing. Our Savior does not argue but asks, "Does all this really satisfy you? Is this the end to which you are called? Is this what life is all about?" He implies that those He has invited will have to choose to change their spiritual diet. Then He urges us to listen carefully. It is almost as if He says, "Listen! Listen!"

He then exhorts us to eat what is good, that is, what He has specifically made for this purpose. In verse 3, His admonishment becomes abundantly clear when He says, "Come to Me [and] hear." What comes from Christ truly nourishes, satisfies, and produces spiritual strength and richness, fortifying the spiritual wall that protects us from [falling away](#).

### **[John 4:3-6](#)**

At this point in His ministry, [Jesus](#) was gaining attention, and to avoid arousing even more attention and directly clashing with the Pharisees, He moved His work north into Galilee. The shortest route there was through Samaria, the land of the Samaritans. Verse 4 says He *needed* to go that way. He had a choice of two roads to get to Galilee. One went around Samaria, the other through it. The latter was obviously the shorter route. Most Jews took the longer route to avoid having to deal with the Samaritans. The Greek indicates that Jesus was led to choose the shorter route: He *had* to go that way.

By the time the group reached Jacob's well, Jesus was exhausted. Most of the modern versions fail to give the force of His tiredness because it takes a great number of English words to parallel it. They may say He sat down, "just as He was." It indicates He wearily flopped down, as if it was more than just being tired from traveling. We can easily think of Jesus as the all-conquering and mighty Messiah who swept aside every obstacle in His path as if they did not exist. John, however, shows us a Jesus who had to struggle against His humanity.

It is good for us to remember that the Word became flesh ([John 1:14](#)). [Hebrews 4:15](#) says He was tested in all things as we are. Yet, even when He was bone weary, He did not allow his weariness to justify [sin](#) or failure to carry out His God-assigned obligations in serving and setting an example for mankind. Experiencing the kinds of obstacles we must overcome fully prepared Him to function as our High Priest. When Jesus speaks, we need to be confident that He has every right to speak, not merely because He is [God](#) but also because He has experienced the limitations and weaknesses of humanity. Jesus' manhood was not something that was merely apparent but a real participation in humanity's frailties. His work was just as fatiguing to Him as it would be to us.

This story of the woman at the well begins with a bone-weary, physically worn out Jesus. The disciples leave Him to go into the city to buy some food. When they return, they find Him in an entirely different state: His hunger is gone, His exhaustion ended, and He is full of fresh vigor, ready to go on doing His work.

Their first thought is that someone else had supplied Him with food and reinvigorated Him, but this is not the case at all. Jesus' reply is that something entirely different reenergized Him. Commentators commonly conclude that Jesus said doing God's work stimulated him. It is true that involvement in work produces further stimulation. From our own experience, we know that a job we dread doing seems to erect a barrier that keeps us from even starting, leading to procrastination. Finally, we drag ourselves into beginning, but once we get going, the work produces its own energy in us, our attitude changes, and we really get into the job.

Yet, that is not quite what Christ said. *McClaren's Commentary* on this verse makes an interesting observation, one worth mentioning because it more accurately reflects what He said:

Notice that the language of the original is so constructed as to give prominence to the idea that the *aim* of the Christ's life was the doing of the Father's will; and that it is the *aim* rather than the actual performance and realization of the *aim* which is pointed at by our Lord.

His words, then, are better rendered, "My food is that I *may* do the will of Him that sent Me and finish His work." His reinvigoration derived from making the accomplishment of the Father's will His every impelling motive. In this case, it was not the actual doing of the work but the motive for doing it that was so energizing and stimulating.

*The Revised English Bible* translates this verse as, "But Jesus said, 'For Me it is meat and drink to do the will of Him who sent me until I have finished His work.'" "Until" properly indicates He was being sustained and energized from the motivation to see the work done. The apostle Paul expresses a similar motivation in [1 Corinthians 9:16](#), "For if I preach [the gospel](#), I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" These men felt driven to do the work God had appointed for them.

If our lives are going to be at all worthy, it will be because of two factors: What we aim for in life and recognizing who we are. The first may be simply described by saying, "You gotta have high hopes," and we can have no higher aim in life than to do the will of the Father. The second can be understood by grasping why psychologists keep trying to persuade parents to work to build their children's self-esteem. They have observed that, if children do not think they are anything or can do anything, are of no value and unloved, or have absolutely no skills, they will not do anything. They will spend their lives cowering in self-pity and spinning their wheels in ineffective, low-level activity.

Anything connected to doing the will of the Father supersedes all other ambitions in life. Jesus Himself says in [Matthew 6:33](#), "Seek first the [kingdom of God](#) and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

### **[John 6:26-27](#)**

The day after feeding the 5,000 from one boy's lunch, as recorded in John 6, this miracle becomes the springboard for a lesson on where the Christian should go to receive the best spiritual nourishment for his mind. After [Jesus](#) perceives that the people seek Him out to be fed physically again, He knows that they do not properly understand what they had witnessed the day before. They do not understand the significance of the miracle in identifying Him as the Messiah, perceiving it merely as a means of getting food to fill their empty stomachs. There they are, hungry again.

In these verses, Jesus cautions His disciples about allowing the wrong focus to dominate their lives because it is so easily done. In [this world](#), providing for our physical life requires a great deal of time and energy for most of us. This necessary activity, in addition to countless other distractions working to grab our attention, makes concentrating on seeking spiritual nourishment a responsibility that demands vision combined with discipline in the use of time.

## **[John 6:31-40](#)**

**[John 6:31-40](#)** is an encouraging passage, showing that we are never alone. Therefore, guidance and help in governing ourselves is ever-present as we walk the path toward God's Kingdom.

These verses give people of **[faith](#)** solemn assurance that Christ is always present in our lives and always willing to help. Jesus makes the ironclad promise in **[Hebrews 13:5](#)** that He will never leave nor forsake us. A large portion of Jesus' preaching in John 6 is a comparison between food that satisfies a person's hunger and also provides strength and energy to carry out his responsibilities. At the same time, we understand that food enters the body as one eats and becomes a more or less permanent part of the body as the body uses it.

The illustration is drawn from Israel's pilgrimage through the wilderness when **[God](#)** mercifully and miraculously provided food in the form of manna. God produced that daily miracle for the Israelite's benefit so that they could physically make it to the Promised Land, in addition to giving us encouragement by His assurances.

Jesus' concern for us is spiritual, and accomplishing our pilgrimage to the **[Kingdom of God](#)** is the goal we strive for. Producing fruit along the way greatly pleases the Father. Bread symbolizes the means of internal, spiritual strength and energy, whereas the fruit metaphor of John 15 is external, something seen and produced because the individual uses the spiritual strength and energy drawn from the "bread."

(We may understand Jesus' instruction in this important discourse more clearly if we focus, not on the term "bread" specifically as bread, but more broadly as including a wide range of strengthening and energizing food.)

Jesus begins in **[John 6:32](#)** by declaring that He is the true bread. In John 13 and I Corinthians 11, bread is specifically used as a metaphor in a different circumstance. Here, bread is figuratively used as the source of spiritual nourishment, strength, and producing fruit by those making the pilgrimage.

The manna is a type of **[Jesus Christ](#)**. It descended, as it were, from heaven, but the Father was the real Giver. Thus, in the wilderness **[Moses](#)** did not literally provide the manna but only gave instructions for its use. The manna indeed satisfied their immediate need for nourishment for physical strength and energy, but by way of contrast, Jesus, the true bread of God, gives *life*, not mere nourishment. Verse 34 shows that the Jews, as with virtually everything else He taught, did not grasp His teaching spiritually.

Thus, in verse 35, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." He explains His mysterious teaching more plainly, essentially saying, "I am the One who both imparts and sustains life." He is, of course, emphasizing spiritual teaching. The Greek shows that

He completely identifies Himself with the bread, as it actually reads, "I am the bread of *the* life." It is not mere life but *everlasting spiritual* life. He means that through faith and an intimate, spiritual union and relationship with Him that, as the body assimilates actual bread physically, so spiritual assimilation with Him gives everlasting life ([John 6:63](#)).

Continuing in verse 35, He adds that "he who comes to Me"—meaning the one who believes in Christ, coming with nothing but [sin](#) and needing everything—will in no way become spiritually hungry or thirsty. In other words, he truly will be fed, unlike those in the wilderness who became hungry. Those who come to Him will be given complete and enduring spiritual satisfaction.

Verse 36—where Jesus says to the Jews, "You have seen Me and yet do not believe"—is interesting in that it shows that God does not hold unconverted man guiltless. Indeed, as soon as a person sins, the death penalty immediately falls on his head. Here, Jesus places the entire blame for the Jews' rejection of Him on them. Why? Because, being of Israel, they should have known better by recognizing the fulfillment in Him of familiar scriptures. Thus, their rejection of Him contained a large measure of deliberateness.

Verse 37 ought to be especially encouraging to us because [John 6:44](#) implies that a calling must be given for fuller understanding of what Jesus is teaching. Obviously, we do understand what He is saying, or we would not be in our present circumstance in relation to Him. Verse 37 is a strong promise that He will make every effort to provide us with salvation.

Verse 38, then, asserts to us that, if God calls a person, it is definitely God's will to do so. It is no mistake or happenstance. God's will is being worked in the called one's life. In verses 39 and 40, Jesus adds that it is the will of the Father, and therefore the Son's also, that all those given to Christ should be resurrected to everlasting life!

Verses 39-40 are the closest statements regarding a guarantee of salvation as one will see in God's Word. Verse 58 confirms His words, "This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

God has appointed Jesus Christ as largely responsible for our salvation. He has already given His life's blood for us so our sins can be forgiven. He has paid the penalty that inhibits us from receiving everlasting life. Once that penalty is paid, the responsibility falls on us to give of our energies to change our lives so that they exhibit consistent obedience.

Whereas in times past we did not care much about our responsibilities to God, it has now become incumbent upon us to be very concerned. In making the New Covenant, we owe submission to the Father and Son, to conform our conduct to agree with



theirs. Thus, we will be formed into their image. We must submit to their rule, then, as well as those parts of their rule that they have assigned to others.

### **[John 6:32-35](#)**

In verses 32-33, [Jesus](#) makes His first obvious move to reveal that we are to eat of Him. Put into modern English, Jesus says, "[Moses](#) was merely God's agent who gave directions to the people on how to collect the manna. My Father in heaven is the real Giver. Even if you consider Moses to be the giver, he did not give the real heavenly bread. The Father is right now giving the real bread from heaven. I am that real bread of life." Jesus is the One we are to ingest and assimilate into our lives.

Jesus does not mean that manna had no physical value but that it was not a means of sustaining spiritual life. Nothing physical can do this. Physical things may please us, even exhilarate us, but they can give no lasting sense of well-being.

Clearly, Jesus intends that we understand all of this spiritually, including the word "life." Life, as Jesus means it, is the way [God](#) has lived from eternity. In and through Christ, we can share in it if we will "eat" Him, the "bread" of that life. In verse 34, the people reply, "Lord, give us this bread always," showing that they now understand enough to desire the bread but not its spiritual application. In verse 35, then, He responds by identifying Himself undeniably as the bread of life, adding, "He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." He declares that He is the only permanent satisfaction for the human desire for life and that attaining this satisfaction hinges on belief, a commitment to Him based on trust.

When we connect this final thought with verses 26-29, it becomes clear that [faith](#), which enables the establishment of an intimate fellowship and union with Him, makes it possible to ingest and assimilate Him spiritually. By assimilating Him spiritually, as we assimilate bread physically, man can attain everlasting life.

The faith or belief Christ means is a deep-seated commitment exercised by humbly coming to Him as one who knows that he has nothing and needs everything to have the kind of life God lives. Much as a plant turns towards the sun, one with a commitment like this will turn to Him for everything, knowing that without Him we can do nothing ([John 15:5](#)).

### **[John 6:53-58](#)**

These people knew well that [Leviticus 17:10-11](#) forbids the eating of blood. They should have understood that He was not speaking of literally drinking the blood coursing through His body. If they knew Him from His youth, as they had earlier claimed, they should have known He was the most law-abiding person they had ever witnessed. What [Jesus](#) means is: "He who accepts, appropriates and assimilates, and understands My sacrifice as the only ground of his salvation remains in Me and I in Him." This is why He adds, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me and I in Him." He is the living Word.

As physical food and drink are offered, accepted, and eaten, so also must Christ's sacrifice be offered, accepted, and eaten. As the stomach assimilates the physical, so His sacrifice is spiritually assimilated in the heart of believers. As food nourishes and sustains the physical body's life, so Christ's sacrifice nourishes and sustains spiritual life.

### Romans 10:17

In the spiritual sense, "eating" occurs primarily when one hears and reads. A person ingests messages and concepts into the mind through words, which establish and nourish his pattern of life. Those words, if one permits it, create a [faith](#) upon which one bases the way he lives. This faith is almost entirely dependent upon the quality of what is heard and whether a person believes it enough to follow it. These verses reveal that only the words of [God](#) or Christ, His gospel, His truths, will form the faith that leads to salvation because they will form the correct beliefs and thus the correct way of life. This is the faith of Christ; the person who has it believes what Christ believes. This is a simple, understandable, true formula.

[Zephaniah 3:1-2](#) shows what happens when a person rejects or disbelieves His words: "Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! She has not obeyed His voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the LORD; she has not drawn near to her God." That person comes to great dismay. This does not mean we cannot have words other than God's in our mind, but the children of God must filter everything through God's words to test their validity before they allow themselves to believe them firmly enough to make them part of their belief system.

Put another way, there is faith and then there is *the* faith, the faith that brings salvation. This faith arises from believing God's words. What we believe will determine our conduct and attitudes whether or not we stop to think about those beliefs because what is contained in the heart *will* come out ([Matthew 12:34-35](#)). Only God's words truly produce spiritual strength. In our recent past, "eating" and believing the wrong words set the church up for the scattering that has occurred. For quite a while, worldly things gradually corrupted the spiritual health of God's children, weakening them through spiritual malnourishment and changing their faith.

[I Corinthians 1:10](#) provides a first-century account of a congregation suffering from this process of ingesting the wrong words: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord [Jesus Christ](#), that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Division troubled this congregation because the members held dissimilar views on beliefs that are basic to spiritual unity. I Corinthians shows disorder, confusion, argument, and [offense](#) as symptoms of spiritual weakness.

### [Romans 11:7-10](#)

Elsewhere, Paul says Israel has zeal for [God](#), but not according to knowledge. God has not cast away His people; He will still save them, but He lets us know *why* things are the way they are now. He has given them over to being deceived; He has permitted it. God, writes Paul, has given them a spirit of stupor. He permitted it even as He permitted Adam and Eve to be tested in the Garden. These scriptures show that Israel's spiritual diet was misleading them; their table had become a snare. A table is a symbol of where we eat. It is literally where we eat physical food, but spiritually, it refers to our mental and spiritual nourishment. What the Israelites were feeding their minds was distracting them to the degree that they were unable to see the truth when it was presented to them.

### [Hebrews 2:1-3](#)

It is necessary for us to seek recurrent nourishment from the Word of [God](#), and it is available only through an enduring relationship with the Creator. This spiritual relationship, like any human relationship, is multifaceted. Yet, quite simply, we as individuals and as a body neglected our relationship with God, and the result was division and scattering.

The world's spiritual junk food gradually became the source of our spiritual nourishment. It invaded our attitudes and behaviors, systematically weakening us as it produced the spiritual disease we call [Laodiceanism](#). It deceived us because we outwardly appeared to be in good health. We judged that we were spiritually rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. However, the reality was that a spiritual cancer was eroding our spiritual health. He who looks on the heart saw that we were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. When the test came in the form of false doctrine, He found us lacking in spiritual strength and scattered us.

We can reduce this process to simple principles. [Matthew 6:24](#) reminds us that it is impossible to serve two masters equally well. As time has shown, we were serving the self and [the world](#) rather than God. He revealed our spiritual weaknesses, and they have greatly diminished us.

### **1 Peter 1:22-25**

**Notice the implications for one's mental health in this passage. Today, health experts emphasize eating organic foods grown without harsh chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Non-organically grown foods are known to be deficient in nutrients and may also contaminate the body. Modern health practitioners also emphasize cleansing the body internally through certain regimens. Peter is saying a similar thing here in a spiritual, moral, and ethical context. God's pure Word can purify the mind, freeing it from the corruption of our pre-conversion experiences. This will happen, though, only if we consistently—daily—eat it and use it as we would eat and use good foods in feeding and caring for our physical bodies.**

### **1 Peter 2:1-2**

**Do babies earnestly let us know when they are hungry? They cry and become red in the face. They let us know without any doubt. They want us and something from us. A desire is created by their hunger.**