

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

^{6:1} Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so. (NIV 84)

Theme: How is your Spiritual Diet?

Everyone is on a diet of some sort. Whatever you eat or don't—that is your diet. There are all sorts of weight-loss diets out there. You could go on weight watchers, Slim Fast, the Atkins diet, the paleo diet, a gluten-free diet—we could go on and on. On the other side of things there are people like athletes who eat thousands upon thousands of calories a day because they are training and need the energy or need to gain some weight to be better at their sport. And then there are those who just eat and eat anything and everything they see simply because they feel like it. Everyone has a diet of some sort.

The same thing can be said about spiritual diets—everyone has one. Whether you eat a lot, a little, or somewhere in between, everyone is on a spiritual diet of some sort. So I ask you today, how is your spiritual diet? Let's break it down into a few different categories.

The first is what I'll call the no food diet—those who fast. Those who go long periods of time without eating anything thinking that this is somehow good for their bodies.

Sadly many people do this with their spiritual diets as well. They call themselves Christians. They believe in Jesus they say. They grew up in the Church, went to Sunday School, and Confirmation Class. And that is it. They have gone week, months, even years without feeding

their soul—they basically starve themselves spiritually thinking that this will somehow not harm their spiritual lives.

When my grandma died this summer we knew it wouldn't be long after she stopped eating. For without food you don't get any nutrients and you can't keep up your strength. Without eating any spiritual food your faith gets weaker and weaker as the Holy Spirit is no longer able to work through the gospel to strengthen your faith. You open yourself up to temptation, doubts, and confusion about God's Word. No one would willingly starve themselves to death, yet that is what many people do spiritually even though doing so has eternal ramifications.

Then there is the kid diet. A newborn baby craves nothing but milk. As the kid grows she might eat some pureed fruit and veggies and later some solid food. And still a bit older their diet consists of grilled cheese, mac n' cheese, and chicken nuggets—and little else. The basics.

What is the kid spiritual diet? Just the basics, the bare-bones—the fundamental doctrines and that's it. Those who have such a spiritual diet are those who know the basics and even treasure them. They cherish basic Bible Stories like Noah's Ark and Jesus walking on Water. They may even recall a few things from Confirmation Class. But the basics are enough for them. They go to Church on a somewhat regular basis, but they don't have much of an interest in learning more about God's Word in Bible Study. They think that learning God's Word was something they had to do as children, but now they are adults so they no longer have to. "Why go any further," they figure, "I already know the most important parts of God's Word."

Don't get me wrong—it's great that they go to worship, and knowing the fundamentals is important, just as drinking milk is important for people of all ages. But there is more to God's Word than just fundamentals or just the basics, just as there is more to eat than just milk. You don't just eat grilled cheese and chicken nuggets for every meal; you've matured. And so you want to grow spiritually.

Then there is the junk food diet. Everyone loves junk food—whether it is candy, pop, desserts, chips, or whatever kind of junk food you so desire.

Are you on a spiritual junk food diet? Does most of your theology come from a blog someone linked to on facebook or some

inspirational, pseudo-religious, quasi-spiritual saying that someone else posted? Or maybe your spiritual diet consists of watching televangelists like Robert H. Schuller or Joel Olsteen, or listening to Family Life Radio or some other contemporary Christian station. Eating junk food tastes good and often lifts your spirits but it offers very little nutritional value and in the long run is detrimental to your health. In the same way eating such spiritual junk food may lift your spirits, it may put a smile on your face, it may give you some comfort or encouragement; but little of it is any good for you. And eating such a diet over and over again may be detrimental to your faith. Maybe you are on the fast food diet. It's food, it's cheap, and it's easy. You are eating and satisfying your hunger and are getting some nutrients, but you could be eating better.

Those who are on the fast food spiritual diet know it's important to get into God's Word. And they do on a somewhat regular basis, but their schedules are so full that they half pay attention to it and half pay attention to something else, or they rush or skim through God's Word. As a result you get some nutrients and some benefit. But it certainly can be better.

What is the problem with all of these spiritual diets?

When we don't eat the right thing, then our faith suffers. When we aren't growing in our faith and knowledge of God's Word then our faith is shrinking and getting weaker—whether we perceive it to be or not. Those who never move past the elementary truths never grow in their faith and soon, even some of those basic truths are forgotten. The Writer to the Hebrews urged his readers to move past the fundamental doctrines such as baptism, the resurrection from the dead, and Judgment Day—not because they were unimportant, but because those are just the foundation. He was in the middle of talking about the connection between our Great High Priest, Jesus, and Melchizedek. But he couldn't go on because their faith and knowledge of God's Word wasn't where it should have been. What about you? Do you remember who Melchizedek was? Do you remember all the points of connection between him and Christ? If you can't remember then it's time to expand your diet! It's time to move on from milk to solid food.

There is one more diet I'd like to talk about—the eat everything diet. Maybe it's at a buffet or some type of party. You love the food and there is so much of it that you stuff your face and then go back for more! Afterward you are stuffed and feel bloated. And you decide then and there that you aren't going to eat so much next time. But there is no overeating when it comes to God's Word—you can't over-indulge on the gospel! There is no such thing as studying his Word too much, or knowing too much of his Word. There is no limit to the number of nutrients you can get from spiritually eating and drinking. No one has ever felt guilty about being in the Word too much; no one has ever felt sick because they were reading the Bible so much.

And why would you want to feast on the Word of God? Why would you want to read his Word, or study his Word, or attend Bible Study? First of all, because it is the Word of God. Because the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible to write what they did we know that these are the very Words of the Lord and they contain no errors or lies. They aren't the thoughts and opinions of man. Everything he wants us to know and everything we need to know for our eternal life is found on the pages of Scripture! Why would we not want to learn more about what he says to us! Another reason why we want to study God's Word is because he never stops giving through it. There is no poison in this food—every time we eat of it; it is a great benefit to us. There are no limits to the blessings the Holy Spirit gives to us and works in us through the gospel!

And what blessings do we gain when we feast on his Word? The first is knowledge and understanding. The more we read and study God's Word the more of God's Word we know. When one portion of Scripture makes a reference to another portion of Scripture—like when the Writer to the Hebrews mentions Melchizedek, you are able to recall who he was and the connection with Abraham and Christ. The more you know of God's Word the more and more you catch and then you are able to connect the dots that you previously wouldn't have caught before.

B. And the more of God's stories that you know the easier it is to understand the teachings of God's Word. The stories of his people are concrete examples of his teachings. So the more you know of one part

of God's Word, your knowledge grows in another part. And as when you feast on the Word you not only grow in knowledge, but you grow in spiritual maturity!

And the more you see how God deals with his people the more you see the love and grace that he has for you. For instance, he chose Moses, a murderer to lead his people. King David, An ancestor of Christ, was an adulterer and a murderer. Paul, back when he was Saul persecuted the Church, throwing many Christians in jail—and God made him an Apostle who went throughout the world spreading his Word. We could go on and on giving many more examples of how God graciously dealt with sinners. And if God forgave these men for the wickedness they had committed; just think of how he deals with you and your sins! He freely forgives you just as he has forgiven others! So the more you know God's Word the more you are comforted and encouraged by his love.

And so the more you grow in the knowledge of God's Word, the more you grow in faith! Because the Holy Spirit works through the gospel, which does not return to him empty. Whenever and wherever you read or listen to the gospel the Holy Spirit is at work. And he strengthens and increases your faith. Instead of growing weaker and putting your faith in jeopardy, your faith is made stronger and more firm so that you will not doubt but believe in the love of the Lord.

And that leads us to the final reason why we want to eat well when it comes to spiritual food—it leads to eternal life. For it is faith, which is worked in us through the gospel, that we receive everything Christ has won for us. And it is only in the Word that we learn about what Christ has done for us. It was for us that he came down from heaven and lived a perfect life that we were not able to live. And yet he found himself on a cross, upon which he placed our sins upon his shoulders, becoming guilty of everything we have done wrong. On the cross he was forsaken by his Father since he became guilty of all our sins and so suffered the eternal punishment that we deserve for our sins.

And three days after he died Jesus rose from the dead. And he promises us in his Word that his resurrection from the dead is a guarantee that we too will rise from the dead and all who believe in him will join him in heaven forever. This message of free forgiveness and eternal life is found only in God's Word; and it is received only through faith in Christ. And so as we get into the Word our faith is

strengthened and the Lord leads us to a perfect life with him in heaven forever! What more motivation do we need!

You may be thinking to yourself, "I understand what you are saying, pastor, but how do I actually do that?"

This is a good start—that you are here at worship is the first step! Because it is here at worship that we don't just give thanks and praise to God, but God gives to us. During Worship the Lord feeds and nourishes us through the Word found in our liturgies, hymns, sermons, readings, and prayers. As you worship the Lord is feeding you and you are growing in your faith and knowledge of him—becoming more mature.

But Worship has its limitations. It is meant more to praise God than to learn his Word. That is where Bible Study comes in, which is just as important in the lives of Christians as worship. It's at Bible Study that we learn God's Word, that questions are asked and discussions are had that simulate our thinking and makes connections and applications to our lives that we might have never caught on our own. As we sit and study God's Word together we are grow in faith together and encourage one another alone in a life-time of learning God's Word. We have two opportunities to do that this year: on Sundays as we continue looking at God's Grace in the beginning in our study of Genesis. And on Wednesday morning as we look at the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church so we can better understand those around us and reach them with the pure gospel.

But did you know that if you spend an hour in worship each week and an hour in Bible Study each week that is just more than 1% of your entire week? You spend far more time than that eating week! So it's important that we don't stop at worship and Bible Study. Carve out some time in your schedule to sit down with God's Word. Read the Bible, ask me for a Bible Reading plan. Find a nice quiet time to read and chew on God's Word!

And there are many other resources out there to help you feed on God's Word—countless devotional books or topical books and so on are widely available. Now of course, you don't just want to pick up any Christian book you find at Walmart. Some of them may do more harm than good. Our own publishing house, NPH, is the best place to

start. Check out the pamphlets in the back, check out their website and pick something that interests you—you can't go wrong.

Everyone has a diet. As you grow and mature your diet changes. Everyone has a spiritual diet—how is yours going? Make yours a mature one—move past the basic and elementary truths to the solid food of God's Word. For it's through the Word that the Lord feeds our souls. And as we dine on his Word, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, will strengthen our faith and knowledge and lead us to a new life with him forever in heaven. Amen.