

EAT THE LIVING BREAD

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Have you heard the saying, “Today is the first day of the rest of your life”? Of course, it’s technically true, but the intention of that one-liner reaches far beyond a mere statement of fact. And it’s worth far more than the \$2.95 you paid for the greeting card where you saw it for the first time.

What if today actually marked a fresh start for you? What if this day meant that your burdens—the weights and the wounds of your past—could be left behind for good? What if your future possibilities could now be written on a clean slate?

God is really into “new beginnings.”

He gave Adam and Eve a new beginning when He forced them out of the Garden of Eden. That was a merciful move—it was difficult, but it wasn’t all bad. They raised a family that populated the earth.

He gave Abram a new beginning when He told him to journey to a new land that would be his and his descendants’ forever.

He gave Moses a new beginning when He sent him from the backside of the desert to the court of Pharaoh to deliver the Hebrew people from four centuries of slavery.

He gave Nebuchadnezzar a new beginning, and restored his kingdom, when the deposed king acknowledged Jehovah as the One True God.

He gave young Samuel a new beginning when God wouldn’t let him sleep one night so that He could talk with him.

He gave David a new beginning when He called him from tending sheep to leading the people of Israel. Then, He gave David another new beginning after he sinned with Bathsheba.

He gave Mary and Joseph a new beginning when the angel announced the birth of Jesus.

He gave Saul of Tarsus a new beginning when He revealed His designed purpose for Paul’s life.

He gave Billy Graham a new beginning when He saved the young college boy from a life of drinking and partying.

He gave this pastor a new beginning when He revealed to me His mercy and saving power and rescued me from the confusion of false religions.

Do you still think the Lord cannot give *you* a new beginning today? To discover how, let me take you back to the early history of the people of Israel, soon after they had crossed the Red Sea on dry ground and began circling the desert. They were no longer slaves, but they had not yet learned how to live in the freedom they had been given. The desert was their classroom, and school was in session.

Manna, What Is It?

Exodus 16:11 Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹² "I have heard the Israelites' complaints.

(Nothing has really changed, has it? We manage to find things to complain about, no matter how good we have it. It's too hot; it's too cold. It's too wet; it's too dry. It's too bland; it's too salty. It's too strong; it's too weak.

The amazing thing is that God does not turn a deaf ear... He HEARS our complaints, and thoughtfully responds.)

Now tell them, 'In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.' "

¹³ That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew. ¹⁴ When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground. ¹⁵ The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. "What is it?" they asked each other. They had no idea what it was.

And Moses told them, "It is the food the Lord has given you to eat.

God gave them meat in the evening and bread in the morning. Abundantly.

Meat in the evening. Bread in the morning.

Meat is protein, and protein builds strength. Bread is a carbohydrate, and carbs build energy. Meat is solid food, which stands in contrast to spiritual "milk"—the food of spiritual infants—as alluded in the Letter to the Hebrews.

So, here is a word-picture in the second book of the Bible that may be applied to us today: God gives us the meat of His Word in the evening, and the bread of His presence in the morning.

By the "meat of His Word" I mean the product of reading and studying the Scriptures. If you end your day in the pages of the Bible, reading thoughtfully and digging into its meaning and application, you will gain spiritual strength and resilience.

By the “bread of His presence” I mean spending time in personal prayer and worship. If you concluded the previous day in the study of Scripture, you will have much inspiration for prayer and worship the following morning. If you begin each day in God’s presence, with reverence and expressions of faith, you will gain energy to endure and overcome throughout the day.

Evening and morning. Meat and bread. It’s a simple plan that works. It simply works. Try it, you’ll love it!

Exodus 16:12 “In the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.”

Please note the result of working this simple plan: Then you will know. Then you will know that I am the Lord. Then you will know that I am the Lord *YOUR* God.

If you want to move beyond guessing and really KNOW God for yourself, practice this plan. Meat in the evening, bread in the morning.

If you want a clearer picture of God’s plan for your life, work the plan. Study in the evening, prayer in the morning.

Let’s look a little further at the manna of each new day.

Exodus 16:15 The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. “What is it?” they asked each other. They had no idea what it was.

The word *manna* literally means “what is it?” They had no word for it. It was a mystery to them.

Many Christians today are puzzled at the value of morning prayer. Like manna, it seems light and flaky. What possible value could it have?

Its value may not be seen in the moment that it’s gathered, nor in your immediate experience of its discovery; its real value is in the long run, as it builds enduring deposits of spiritual energy (what Watchman Nee called “reserve grace”) for whatever may come your way.

When might you need “reserve grace”? What are some situations you have faced that called for extra spiritual “juice”?

Loathsome Bread

Many have given up on morning prayer because it didn’t stimulate them. They were just going through the motions. It seemed boring.

Numbers 21:4 The people grew impatient with the long journey, ⁵ and they began to speak against God and Moses. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?” they complained. “There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!”

The practice I am suggesting is not evening Bible study OR morning prayer; it is both! For the very reason that they go together. One is primarily intake, the other is primarily output.

Think of the practice of breathing. You inhale and then you exhale. Try it now! Take a deep breath in, hold it for a moment, then exhale. Do it again. Now, without taking another breath IN, exhale again. You can't, can you? No more can you take two deep breaths without exhaling in between. They go together. They work together.

So do Bible study and prayer. And they go very well together with a good night's sleep in between. During your sleep your subconscious mind meditates on the fruit of your study and inspires your prayer and worship in the morning.

For most people in our fast-paced, busy culture, Bible study and prayer, taken together, require too much time to practice them regularly or consistently. So break it up by trying God's plan instead—a little reading and study in the evening and a little worship and prayer in the morning. Even a minimum of 15 minutes in each setting can have a good effect.

John 6:28 They replied, “We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?”

²⁹ Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ They answered, “Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? ³¹ After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, ‘Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. ³³ The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “give us that bread every day.”

John 6:47 “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ Yes, I am the bread of life!

⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. ⁵⁰ Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”

Manna was the type; Jesus is the reality. Jesus Himself is the true bread, the bread that gives real life. We acknowledge that each time we take Holy Communion. It is not the white bread of religious ritual, but the whole grain bread of relational faith that we eat. It makes us whole!

New Mercies

Exodus 16:17 So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little.

¹⁸ But when they measured it out, everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed.

¹⁹ Then Moses told them, “Do not keep any of it until morning.” ²⁰ But some of them didn’t listen and kept some of it until morning. But by then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell. Moses was very angry with them.

²¹ After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need.

What is significant about gathering manna each morning as a regular practice? If they didn’t gather it at all, they would have nothing to eat. And if they tried to make it last more than one day, it spoiled, and they got no benefit from it.

Evening study and morning prayer make God the beginning and the ending of each day; they make Him the most important part of our day. They declare our utter dependence on Him, and they develop strong faith in Him. Who among us could use increased faith? Who would like greater assurance of God’s purposes? Brighter hope? Deeper joy? Stronger courage?

Lamentations 3:22 The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. ²³ Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning.

When? Each morning!

Exodus 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Look, I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions.

God has laid out the plan, a simple plan. So simple, anyone can practice it. But will you? Will you follow His instructions? Or will you give yourself a pass? Pick up your pencil, the test begins now.

Are you willing to adopt the simple plan suggested by God to Moses: meat in the evening and bread in the morning? By that I mean reading and studying God’s Word in the evening, and worshipfully praying in the morning. Would you take my 7-Day Diet Challenge to practice this spiritual diet for the next seven days—night and day, night and day? Then, write me a note, or send me an email or a text and tell me the result—good, bad, or indifferent.

I want you to share your commitment with me, because I want to pray for you. If you haven't done this before, or anytime recently, it may prove difficult to stick to it. The plan is simple, but not necessarily easy. Any number of things may arise to interfere with your practice—sickness, weariness, other people's expectations or demands. Don't be surprised, and don't be sidelined. Keep your commitment sincerely, even if you can't give it as much time as you'd like. Keep your commitment faithfully, even if you have to give up some sleep to do so. For seven days.

I will pray for your success. You pray for your success, too.

You don't need to spend hours at this. In fact, it will free your mind if you set a time limit at the beginning—say, 15, 20, or 30 minutes. Read until something stands out for you—even if it doesn't seem like a very important theme at the moment. If the Holy Spirit highlights it for you, go with that. Then, do a little study—maybe the historical context or background of the scene, maybe a word's meaning and how it is used elsewhere in the Bible.

Try to identify a truth to believe, or a command to obey, or a correction to make, or a promise to receive.

Remember the saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life"? It's more than a statement of fact. It's intended to give you a new perspective of today. To help you see this day as a first step toward a fresh (as yet unscripted) future of possibility.

Be honest now. If your thoughts and daydreams are occupied more by the events or suspected consequences of your past, than they are by the opportunities of the present and the possibilities of the future, then you are living by FATE, instead of by FAITH.

Too often we live like we cannot escape the chains of our past. But our Lord is the Chain Breaker! He is the Freedom Bringer! He is the New Life Giver!

We cannot escape the facts of our past—we are who we are—but those facts cannot bind us if we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is able to turn water into wine, a lunch into a feast, and death into life.

Let's reject the notion of "fate" (the idea that our future has been predetermined) and take up in its place the practice of faith!

TAKE MY 7-DAY DIET CHALLENGE!