

Spending Time with the Lord in the Word

Feeding upon the Word

To learn how to spend time with the Lord in a profitable way, we need to consider how the Lord Himself spent time with the Father. By doing this we will discover that the same principles that governed His earthly life also govern His life now indwelling us. How He lived on the earth is how He now lives in us (Heb. 13:8).

We have seen that one of the secrets of the Lord's spending time with the Father was how He cultivated His love relationship with the Father (John 1:18; 15:9-10). We have also seen that another secret of His spending time with the Father was how He practiced putting Himself aside as He prayed (Luke 3:21). Now we must observe a third crucial secret out of the Lord's life that should also govern our spending time with the Lord. This was the Lord's practice and habit of feeding upon the Word.

In Matthew 4:4 the Lord declared to the devil, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." These words quoted by the Lord from Deuteronomy 8:3 not only reveal how He handled the devil's attacks, but they also show us the secret of His inner life. It is clear that the strength of the Lord's inner life was maintained by His regular feeding upon the Word. He was not living by bread alone, but by every word proceeding out through the mouth of God. So

the Word is likened here to something that nourishes — bread.

If the Lord felt the need to spend time with the Father, feeding upon the Word, how much more do we need this kind of practice. The Lord Jesus was intrinsically *the living Word* (Gk. λόγος), yet He took time to feed on *the written Word*; and He could testify to the devil that this was the way He was living. He was living on every word proceeding out through the mouth of God.

Now we must see that our inner life is constituted with the same inner life that was in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 6:17: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." Our human spirit, which has been regenerated through the new birth, is now joined to the Lord Himself who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 15:45). Thus, what was true of the Lord's life in the flesh is still true of His life in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). Now we must come to know in our experience how our inner man needs and requires regular times to feed upon the Word (1 Pet. 2:2-3). This was one of the Lord's secrets in maintaining His supply to live out the Father's life, and it must become our secret as well (John 6:57).

When the Lord says, "every word that *proceeds* out," He uses a present participle. He does not use a past tense. He does not say, "Man shall live on every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Spending Time with the Lord in the Word — Pages 1-4
- Spending Time with the Lord book order —Page 4

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centuries ago when the Bible was written by Moses and all the other Old Testament writers.” No, He says, “every word that is *presently proceeding* out of the mouth of God.” In other words, the Lord’s view of the Word was that it was the present speaking of God. When we come to the Bible we should come in the same way: “Lord, this Word was not only originally breathed out by You, but it is still breathing You.”

The nature of this Bible is spirit and life. In John 6:63 the Lord said, “The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life.” This means that the inner content of every verse, every word, is spirit and life. It is nourishing and it will supply you. It will change your insides. Simply open up and pray and use your praying spirit with the Word. Do not just think about the words, but pray, “Lord, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for such a verse like, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ ”

To take the Word in a spiritual way for supply is in contrast to just reading it as you would read *Reader’s Digest*. When you come to the Word you are not just exercising your mind — not just reading for mere information — but stopping, opening up to God with the realization, “This is Your breathing to me right now, Lord.” Such an opening means this Word is intended to supply me with God Himself. It is to nourish me for today. It is like opening your mouth up to eat your meal, and the food gives you energy and fuel to supply your physical body. Now we can echo our Lord, “Lord, thank You, I’m not living by bread alone, but on every word proceeding out of Your mouth. Thank You, Lord, for Your precious Word that proceeds out.” Begin to talk to the Lord with the words of the Bible.

A personal testimony

As a believer, some years ago I began to learn this secret of feeding on the Word. After being a Christian for about nine years, I came to a point where I felt dry, discouraged, and defeated. I had tried to overcome my failing self in many areas, but found that I lacked the necessary strength. This went on for

several weeks, and then somehow it occurred to me that I should begin reading my Bible three times a day in a regular way. So I began reading the Old Testament in the morning, Psalms and Proverbs at noon, and the New Testament in the evening. It was amazing to see what happened to me within one week. I discovered that the Word of God was food! At that time the Lord impressed me with Jeremiah 15:16, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.” This verse became my experience and testimony.

Formerly, my time with the Lord in the Word had been mainly an exercise of my eyes and my mind. But when I discovered that the nature of God’s Word was food, I began to read the Word with a praying spirit. The Bible became a new book in my hands — it became a book of enjoyment, a book from which I could feed upon the living God. I found myself reading and praying simultaneously and then taking up a verse or a phrase and beginning to fellowship with the Lord with the very words of Scripture. I found I did not have to strive to find what to pray. The Word of God itself became the content of my prayer.

While doing this I found a mysterious yet real supply spontaneously infusing my inner man. No longer was I merely looking at black and white letters on a page or trying to mentally understand things, which had often left me spiritually deadened. For the first time in my Christian life, I began to enjoy God Himself in the pages of the Bible.

Eating three square meals a day by feeding upon the Word taught me experientially that my inner man requires food just as my physical body does. The reason for my defeated Christian life, I discovered, was simply lack of nourishment. Even though I had been studying the Bible for seven years in Bible college and seminary, it had become to me a book of theology, sermons, and outlines, rather than a book of enjoyment and supply. I realized that the mere knowledge of the Bible could not change me. It was only when the Bible was translated into food by praying with my spirit over the verses that it turned

into enjoyment rather than mere thought. I began to experience a living supply that automatically filled me with God. I realized then as I do today, many years later, that one of the secrets of spending time with the Lord is to feed upon the Word.

Our view of the Bible

What does it mean to feed upon the Word? First, we must see that to the Lord it meant having a living and fresh relationship with the written Scriptures. For example, in Matthew 4:4 when the Lord said, “It is written,” He used the perfect tense in Greek (*γέγραπται*), which can be literally translated, “It stands written.” He did not say, “It was written,” as though the Word was something merely recorded in the past without any present reality. The force of the perfect tense, “It stands written,” indicates that the Lord’s attitude toward the Word was that it was God’s *present* speaking — living and fresh, not dead and old.

As we saw earlier, the written Scriptures were identified by the Lord as being the very word that “proceeds out through the mouth of God.” In saying “proceeds,” the Lord again used a tense that revealed His attitude toward the written Scriptures. “Proceeds” is a present participle (*ἐκπορευομένων*), which denotes that “every word” was presently proceeding out through the mouth of God. He did not use the past tense “proceeded,” as though He was articulating a theory on the inspiration of Scripture. Instead, He used the present tense “proceeds” to reveal that the written Scriptures are living and fresh, even proceeding “out through the mouth of God.” This proceeding word, according to the Lord’s view, is good for man not only to study and read, but to feed upon as bread and to live by. This was the Lord’s realization concerning the Scriptures. Consequently, in His experience His relationship to them was characterized by feeding upon the Word to be nourished and strengthened.

In the same way, our view of the Bible will determine how we handle it and come to it. If our view is that the Bible is a book of knowledge and doctrines, then the time we spend with it will be

characterized by study and research with no life (John 5:38-40). However, if our realization of the Bible is that it is living and fresh, proceeding out through God’s mouth for us to be nourished, then the time we spend with it will be characterized by enjoyment and feeding with much life supply (Job 23:12; Psa. 119:103; Heb. 6:5).

The nature of the Bible

Our view of the Bible should be based on our understanding of the nature of the Bible. The nature of the Bible is clearly defined in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is *God-breathed*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Most English versions use the words “given by inspiration of God” or “inspired of God” when translating the compound Greek word *theopneustos* (*θεόπνευστος*). However, it is best rendered literally “God-breathed.” Second Timothy 3:16 is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. It is also used by some ancient Greek writers and is variously understood either in a passive sense or an active sense.

When we understand the word *theopneustos* passively, it is translated “All Scripture is God-breathed” and emphasizes the fact that when the Scriptures were originally given, they were the breath of God as the biblical writers penned them. However, when we understand *theopneustos* actively, it is translated “All Scripture is God breathing” and emphasizes the fact that the *written* Scriptures are presently God’s breath to us. Both the passive and active senses are supported by other passages, and thus both are true. The pietistic Bible teacher John Albert Bengel expressed it well in his comments on 2 Timothy 3:16: “It was divinely inspired, not merely while it was written, God breathing through the writers, but also while it is being read, God breathing through the Scripture, and the Scripture breathing Him.”

The Scriptures were “God-breathed” when they were written, and they are presently “God breathing” while they are being read and poured over with prayer. Today when we come to the Word and open our hearts to the Lord, we touch the nature of the

Scriptures as God's breath and are supplied to live by that Word. Paul speaks of this kind of relationship with the Word in Colossians 3:16 when he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." In this verse we see that our relationship with the Lord is very much related to our relationship with the Word in a way of praying and singing. The richness of our contact with Christ is in proportion to our contact with *the Word* of Christ. When we allow the Word of Christ to indwell us richly, we become partakers of the divine nature through the Word (2 Pet. 1:4). By handling the Word with a praying spirit, we discover that it becomes God's breath to us.

Just reflect a little bit on this statement, "All Scripture is God-breathed." This means that the nature of Scripture is different from that of all other writings. Although the Scriptures were written by men, these men were moved and carried along by the Holy Spirit. Second Peter 1:20-21 says, ²⁰ "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Thus, when the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament writers, they do it in a way that emphasizes the nature of the Scriptures. For example, Acts 1:16 records Peter as saying, "This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David." And in Mark 12:36 Mark says, "David himself said by the Holy Spirit." In other words, whatever David said was equally the Holy Spirit's speaking. Thus, the nature of all Scripture is God's very Spirit-breath.

In Ephesians 6:17-18 the apostle Paul speaks of how to practically touch the nature of the Word: ¹⁷ "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸ with all prayer and supplication praying at all times in spirit..." (ASV/literal). The word "with" at the beginning of verse 18 is the Greek preposition *dia* (διὰ). Here it is used with the genitive case and means *through* or *by means of*. In other words, Paul is revealing how

to take the word of God — *by means of* or *through* prayer. It is by means of prayer that we touch the true nature of the Word.

The blending of various ways to contact the Lord

When we spend time with the Lord, often a number of things transpire. To begin with, we may feel burdened to put ourselves aside, with all our preoccupations and anxieties. Then we may be touched to spend some time just feeding upon the Word by praying over a verse or even just a phrase from a verse. Following this we may sense the need to wait upon the Lord quietly, allowing the love-life of the Triune God to be cultivated within our hearts (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 5:5). Thus, spending time with the Lord may include a blend of several different ways we contact the Lord. The main point during this time is that nothing would become a mere routine or ritual. Whatever we may practice while spending time with the Lord, the purpose is to bring us into God Himself, to have direct contact with Him in our spirit (John 4:24). It is this contact that nourishes us, supplies us, and transforms us.*

— Bill Freeman

* This article is taken from the 5th chapter of the book, *Spending Time with the Lord*, by Bill Freeman. This book of 218 pages may be ordered for \$13.95 postpaid from **Ministry Publications**, P.O. Box 1077, Moses Lake, WA 98837, or call (800) 573-4105.

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