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How to Receive God's Word, by Rod Cosgrove, Lead Pastor

We all love the smell and taste of freshly baked bread. Perhaps this is because since the earliest of days on the planet, bread has been a staple of the human diet. In fact, practically every culture on the earth has some variant of this simple meal: ground, sun-ripened seeds, water, salt and yeast. Combined, kneaded and allowed to rest and rise, bread is *alive* until baked, penetrated with micro-organisms that naturally live on the grains themselves, literally eating and breathing as they ingest and convert the sugars in the dough.

But as good as fresh bread can be...old, crusty or even moldy bread can be equally dissatisfying. The very loaf that you could hardly wait to eat a couple of days ago as its aroma wafted through the house, has now become hardened and dried out, a sorry example of how amazing this simplest of food once smelled and tasted. Fresh bread is best.

In the Old Covenant book of Exodus, we find the beginning of the nation of Israel. Until they were expelled by Pharaoh and headed for Palestine, they had merely been enslaved foreigners. But then, led by Moses as God's representative, they found themselves in the land-in-between – no longer in Egypt, but not yet in Canaan – and God had a training program for them. It was hard, but they made it worse with a bad attitude. They moaned about how good they had it in Egypt and as often happens, they remembered it better than it was. They whined to Moses and Aaron, who said they actually were complaining to God, since the whole thing was his program. But God had rescued them and was leading them. And he would feed them; he wasn't going to allow them to starve in the desert.

So, the Lord said to Moses,

Exodus 16:4

"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."

Literally, it was bread from heaven. It was fresh and delicious, white like coriander seed, and it tasted like honey wafers. No one knew what it was, so they called it “manna,” which sounded like the Hebrew for “What is it?” The people were to gather it each day, and it wouldn’t last beyond that day, except on the Sabbath, when they were to have gathered double on the day before. There would always be enough. So, go get your fresh bread today and enjoy it. It won’t be good tomorrow; in fact, it’ll spoil. But tomorrow, the Lord will provide more fresh bread, so don’t stress it. Eat daily in peace. **“Give us this day, our daily bread...”**

As loved sons and daughters of God, saved by grace through the death and resurrection of Christ and regenerated to life by the Holy Spirit, what you must understand is that:

**Life Truth: Daily nourishment from God through His Word
*is your fresh bread for life.***

In other words, regular, daily engagement with the Bible is how God feeds you. In fact, without it, you will starve.

In the same way that you must pretty much eat daily to maintain your health, so also must you hear and read the Scriptures daily.

And in the same way that your stomach grumbles if you haven’t eaten in a while, so also does your heart or spirit grumble when you haven’t studied God’s Word in some time.

Or, in the same way that you feel so satisfied after a great meal, so also can you feel so satisfied once you’ve put some encouraging or challenging verses to memory, ruminating on them through the day.

And in the same way that you will lose muscle mass if you don’t take in enough physical nourishment, so also will you lose spiritual mass if you don’t meditate on the Scriptures.

I'm not yanking your chain. Hear, read, study, memorize and meditate on the holy bread of God speaking through his Word. This is how you ingest the Bible; this is critical to feeling full of the Holy Spirit. And you must do it daily.

Yesterday's nourishment is getting stale and moldy. All who call Jesus our Lord needs to get fed by him today, and engagement with his Word is how he does it.

Jeremiah 15:16

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.

"When your words came, I ate them..." Nothing else will feed you this way but the eternal Words of God. In the past year or so I have read or listened to numerous books on a wide variety of topics, and many of you have too. I'm never far from a good book on theology, spirituality or leadership, but I'm also especially fond of historical biographies, historical fiction and missionary stories. Mixed in to that, I've also enjoyed books that help me to understand culture, science and develop personal capacity via what many would label "self-help." If you were to visit my home or church office and take a look at my bookcases, you'd see examples of these, books upon books on all sorts of topics, plus many others that I read and gave away. But despite this, I can tell you straight up that while many of these books have been impactful and others have impressed, taught or entertained me, none have been as precious nor as catalytic to my life as the Holy Bible. That's how it works. Bread from heaven.

*Jesus Christ, the Word of God, feeds us by His Spirit,
through the Word of God.*

Many of you know what I mean, but many others of you don't. You have no regular practice of eating the Scriptures, so you're just barely staying alive on a spiritual subsistence diet and wonder why you're always so hungry. Others are gorging themselves on spiritual junk food of sorts, receiving only pithy little French fries of TV prosperity gospel, stale chips of consumer-oriented Christian radio, snacks of pre-chewed devotionals and artificial fillers of ungrounded spirituality. Still others are spiritually anorexic or bulimic, over-consuming fringe teachings that do not nourish or going on spiritual feeding binges followed by extreme starvation diets.

These poor spiritual eating habits and disorders are suicidal, leaving the believer spiritually weak, thin, incapacitated, discouraged, grumpy, lacking stamina and easy-pickings under temptation by the enemy and our selfish hearts.

The prescription is simple: Eat fresh bread from God through His Word...and do it daily. Don't try to test God and see if your fresh bread from today will still be good enough for tomorrow. It won't be. He will basically assure that it will spoil, that it will only be enough for you today. But you know what? Some of you don't believe me. Really! You think you're fine getting some bread today and then tomorrow comes and you have a busy schedule or you tell yourself you're not a morning person or a night person or whatever it may be, and you will miss time with the Lord in His Word and it'll happen again the next day and before you know it, it's been like a week or more since you've truly been nourished by the Spirit through the Word. And you will wonder why you're discouraged...

It's because you're testing God...or it could be that He is testing you. This is what we do. We're testing him to see if he really means that today's bread is only for today. The Israelites did it in the desert, just like us. God told them, as we saw earlier, that he would test them to see whether or not they would follow his instructions regarding daily gathering of fresh bread. And the narrative says later in Exodus 16 that despite these warnings, some of the people tried to save the bread for the next day, thinking they wouldn't have to go out and gather it, but God ensured it would spoil.

Friends, when tomorrow comes, you may remember today's fresh bread. The bread of God's Word is the best, and the taste will linger for a time. You may get through a day or so without more fresh bread on top of that, but mark my proverbial words, today's fresh bread of God's Word is for today, not tomorrow. Tomorrow's fresh bread is for tomorrow. But you don't need to worry. Choose to set aside time to seek his face, alone with him in His Word. And he will show up and feed you.

Psalm 34:8

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

Trust God in this. Engage God's Word daily, for fresh bread for life.

DISCUSSION: How to Receive God's Word

1. Assuming you love fresh bread – who doesn't?!? – what's your favorite kind? Share a memory you have of some situation or special place where you had some fresh bread – Why do you remember it? What was it like?
2. In this message, Pastor Rod contends that "Daily nourishment from God through His Word is our fresh bread for life." To what level do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?
3. In what ways have you experienced God's Word as nourishment? If you've found yourself in times of malnourishment by not investing in receiving God's Word, how did that affect you?

4. If you think about it, there are really only five ways to receive God's Word:

- Hear it
- Read it
- Study it
- Memorize it, and
- Meditate on it

How much experience have you had with each of these? With which ways are you most comfortable? Which seem challenging or difficult for you? How would you like your habits in receiving God's Word to change?

5. Consider the following Scripture:

Jeremiah 15:16

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.

What are your thoughts about "eating" God's Words? What are some ways when you've eaten before that they have become "your joy and heart's delight?"

6. Pastor Rod contends that, "Poor spiritual eating habits and disorders are suicidal, leaving the believer spiritually weak, thin, incapacitated, discouraged, grumpy, lacking stamina and easy-pickings under temptation by the enemy and our selfish hearts." How does this hit you? If you feel this describes your spirituality in any way, how would you like that to change?