

What is Bible Study?

or

A Letter From Your Friend!

I love bread! I enjoy it toasted, roasted, fried, grilled, hot, cold, buttered, honeyed, jammed, sandwiched, fresh, day-old, sweet or sour. Just about every kind there is appeals to me—except Rye and Pumpernickel. I love Wheatberry, Sourdough, Cornbread, Raisin, English Muffins (with or without raisins), Australian Toaster Biscuits (with or without raisins or honey-bits), White, Cinnamon, Wholewheat, Blueberry, Raspberry and Apple/Cinnamon Muffins, Biscuits, soft warm Dinner Rolls, German Black, Danish, Pocket and Pita, Stoneground, Grilled Cheese, Poppyseed, Crumpets, Oatmeal, French, Garlic, Unleavened, Breadsticks, and the list goes on—I haven't even begun writing about pastries.

Many of my favorite places are associated with bread. Anderson's Pea Soup restaurant in Solvang, California serves three kinds of hot miniature loaves and real butter with every meal. Marie Calendar's has the thickest fresh cornbread I have ever seen and their honey-butter makes it even better. A cook named Ladonna in Modesto, California creates wonders with her own sourdough starter. Pat Martinsen, my co-author's wife in Auburn, Washington, makes better use of a Bosch than anyone I know. (For my 40th birthday she gave me a fresh loaf which I ate all by myself.)

You might think it strange, but I prefer a peanut butter and jam sandwich to spaghetti, pizza, cauliflower, asparagus, and even stewed tomatoes. I once went on a three day backpacking trip with pre-made sandwiches for my only food. The meals were wonderful, quick and tasty! I particularly enjoyed the way three-day-old peanut butter and honey sandwiches sort of crystallize the bread into a crunchy sweetness. Things did get a little sticky as the days passed and I had to reach farther into the bag for the next one.

I especially love my wife Marji's home-made bread! There is nothing quite like coming into the house and smelling the delicious aroma of baking bread! My mouth has begun watering just thinking about it. Somewhere I heard that fresh, hot bread and butter are not good for you, but I confess without a shred of guilt that I will place my life at risk every time it is available!

This year at Christmas, I wanted to get my wife one of those new-fangled bread machines—you know, the things you just pour ingredients into and then leave alone. As you go about your day, it mixes, kneads, raises, kneads again, bakes and cools bread that is almost as delicious as it is easy. The machine's teflon coated bread-dish almost cleans itself. I wanted to get her one, but I didn't. She reminded me that we are trying to save for a family vacation to Hawaii and can't afford such a thing. I am tempted to trade my plane ticket for a bread machine. Do you have one?

This probably seems like a crummy way to introduce a Bible Study and I hope you don't toast me for it. All my other study-starters seemed like half-baked ideas. I knew we kneaded something to increase our appetite and this was fresh out of the oven ... So crusty as it may seem, I'm going to serve it anyway. Hope you eat your fill. There may be a reason Jesus compared Himself to bread. It's hard to imagine a meal without it.

Jesus replied, "I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me will never be hungry and he who believes in and cleaves to and trusts in and relies on Me will never thirst any more (at any time)." John 6:35 (The Amplified Bible)

Daily Bites

In our last lesson, we looked at the importance of breathing and noticed that prayer is to spiritual life what breathing is to physical life. In this lesson, we will discover that spending time reading the Bible for the purpose of getting to know Jesus is to spiritual life, what bread and water are to physical life. Read John 6 to get an overview of Jesus' teaching.

1. What is the longest you have ever gone without food? Without water? How does missing a meal affect you? How does lack of water affect you?
2. How many meals do you usually eat a day? How many glasses of water do you drink?
3. What claim does Jesus make in John 4:14; 6:32-35; 47-51?
4. What is the relationship between Jesus' claim (in question 3) and your answers to questions 1 and 2?
5. Is there work involved in a relationship with Jesus?

- John 6:27
- Hebrews 4:11

As I was preparing this study, it came time for lunch. I decided to stop and make some raspberry muffins to eat. I mixed the ingredients, poured the batter into muffin tins and stuck it in the oven to bake. Before long, a delicious aroma began to fill the room. (Are you getting hungry?) I had to do a little work before I could eat the food. There is some work involved in becoming familiar with Jesus and what He had to say.

6. What is the work or labor that we must do? Read and summarize the following texts.

- John 6:29

Believe and trust mean the same thing. If someone was completely trustworthy, what would you need to do in order to be able to trust them? Get to know them, right? So how would you work on trusting Jesus?

- Matthew 11:28
- Matthew 11:29

You prepare the meal (labor) by taking daily time to look at Jesus. Think of opening a book about Jesus as preparing the meal. Consider reading, thinking, contemplating and meditating about Jesus as eating the meal. The steps outlined in our "Daily Bites" section are about eating, chewing, absorbing, taking in the food (which is Jesus).

7. In John 6:31-33, 58 Jesus compared Himself to manna—the food given to the Israelites while they traveled through the wilderness. How can you apply the instructions of the following verses about manna to your spiritual life?

- Exodus 16:16
- Exodus 16:19
- Exodus 16:21

8. How do these truths apply to our life with Jesus? (consider Philippians 1:6 for a hint)

- Food must be taken into your body to do you any good.
- Watching someone else eat does you no good.
- Once you have eaten something, you lose control of it. It will do to you whatever it is supposed to do.

Daily Bites

- Food will affect your body regardless of your enjoyment of it.

Spiritual life is the result of coming to know Jesus as a Friend by becoming familiar (on a daily basis) with Jesus and what He had to say. This means that, just as you eat food every day, you need to spend some time each day with Jesus through reading about Him, thinking about Him, talking to Him—that's how your friendship grows!

This week, consider the time you spend with Jesus each day as your “spiritual food.” Don’t rush through your “meal” but take some time to enjoy it. Remember that your job is to spend time with Jesus each day allowing Him to become a part of you. His job is to make you grow.

- *Begin each session with prayer* - maybe something like this: “Lord, help me to come to know you better as we spend time together...”
- *Read the passage* - several times noticing as many details as you can.
- *Imagine the setting* - put yourself in the picture. Try to imagine the sounds, smells, sensations.
- *Summarize the passage* - in your own words.
- *Apply the passage* - what message is God giving you?
- *Meditate and pray* - meditate on how this passage makes Jesus more real. Talk to Him about the passage and about using the information you have learned to deepen your friendship with Him. Listen for impressions He is giving you.

Passages for This Week

- John 8:42-47
- John 8:48-59
- John 9:1-12
- John 9:13-34
- John 9:35-41
- John 10:1-21
- John 10:22-42

The Banquet Table

When I awoke in the morning the table was there. Perhaps it had been there before, but I had never noticed it. It was such a large table, so colorfully spread, that I can't imagine how anyone could have missed it.

I approached the table for a closer look and was greeted by a tall Man, apparently the Host. "Come and dine," He said joyfully. "Would you like for Me to show you to a seat?"

I hesitated. "Well, I'm not sure. Could I ask you a few questions first?"

"Certainly," He replied.

"Whose banquet is this—I mean, who prepared it? Who is issuing the invitations?"

He said, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him who is athirst come, and take the water and bread of life freely."

"You mean I don't have to pay anything?"

"That's right."

"I don't usually get that hungry for breakfast," I said, as I considered the offer. I looked hopefully up and down the table. "You don't happen to have some of those breakfast bars, that I could just stick in my pocket and eat on my way to work? It would sure save time."

The Host smiled. "If you sit down and eat, you'll find that you have more appetite than you think you do, at least most of the time."

Still I hesitated, "I've known some people who started out eating breakfast, next thing it was breakfast, dinner, and supper. Then they added a few snacks in between. Finally, they were eating all day long and got so fat they could hardly walk around."

"It's true," the Host replied, "that those who do *nothing* but eat will grow fat. But it is equally true that those who *don't* eat will die."

He was winning me to His side—but then I noticed something. Sitting on the far side of the table was the preacher from my church. His plate was filled with good things, and he was eating with obvious enjoyment.

"Oh, look! There's my preacher!" I said to the Host.

"Yes," He responded. "He's here every morning. He is a great believer in eating a good breakfast."

"That's wonderful!" I said. "That will save *me* a lot of time, because I go to hear him every week. He can tell me what the food is really like and I won't have to take the time to come here and eat for myself."

"No one can eat for another," the Host responded, "In order for *you* to receive strength and nourishment, *you* must come and eat."

Just then I caught sight of another familiar face. There was Billy Graham, down at the end of the table. "Does he come here every day too?" I asked the Host.

"Yes, he's here for several hours every morning."

"Several hours?" I gulped, "Then I'd better not come. Because I know I don't have enough of an appetite to eat for that long."

"You're only expected to eat for your own needs, not for someone else's," replied the Host. "This is your first morning."

Maybe for today you'll want to start out with a couple of those thin, crispy breadsticks, and a glass of juice. You'll be surprised how quickly your appetite will grow, as long as you continue to balance your eating with the proper exercise."

I was just about ready to ask Him to show me to a place at the table when I thought of one more thing. "Hey, wait a minute! This whole business suddenly sounds pretty legalistic. You wouldn't want me coming here to Your banquet table just out of habit, would you?"

"I can't think of another `habit' that would bring you greater health," said my Host. "But you're missing the point. *I'm* here, every day, waiting to serve you, waiting to share good things that I have prepared for you. *I'm* here, the table is here, there's a place for you here. I really look forward to having your company for breakfast, why would you just walk by the table and go on your way? It's here, it's free, it's for you.

Then He took my hand and led me to my place at the table. He filled my plate with grapes and cherries and strawberries and waffles ... but wait! I'm telling you about my meal. Your favorite things may be entirely different. Why don't you come to the banquet, and eat for yourself?

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Revelation 3:20 (NIV).

Bible Texts

John 4:14* “but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

John 6:32-35 “Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always. And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

John 6:47-51 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

John 6:27 “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

Hebrews 4:11* “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

John 6:29 “Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.””

Matthew 11:28* “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:29* “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

John 6:31-33 & 58 “Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 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.”

Exodus 16:16* “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent’”

Exodus 16:19* “Then Moses said to them, ‘No one is to keep any of it until morning.’”

Exodus 16:21 “So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted.”

Philippians 1:6 “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”

(Unless otherwise mentioned, all quoted scripture is from the New King James Version)

** New International Version*

More About Jesus

is written by Lee Venden and Thure Martinsen

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