

“Nourishment for Our Soul”

An Ideal Disciple, Part 3

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Jesus is very hungry. He has not eaten for 40 days. This is not intermittent fasting; it is extreme fasting. The devil approaches Him and says, basically, “Jesus, you must be really hungry. You just need to eat something. I don’t have any food, but hey, you are the Son of God. You have great powers. Here are some rocks. Just turn them into some little loaves of bread. Then you will have something to eat. It will taste so good.”

And yes, Jesus knows that the bread would taste good. And He knows that, yes, He could turn those stones into bread. Yet, He also knows that would be a misuse of His power. He knows that is not what His Father wants Him to do. So, resisting the temptation He quotes these words from Deuteronomy 8, Matthew 4:4 “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Friends, it is important that your body gets food. It really is. Yet, even more importantly your soul needs food, soul food. That phrase is used to describe some tasty African American cuisine, but I am using it to describe spiritual nourishment needed for a healthy soul.

This is a soul that can live as God intends, a soul that is able to love God and love other people, a soul that is able to trust and follow Jesus and be His disciple. The basic need of our souls is “every word that comes from the mouth of God,” the Word of God, the Bible. Yes, other sources may provide spiritual nourishment, but the Bible is the primary and essential part of a spiritually healthy diet.

That is why when we draw our picture of an ideal disciple at Chisholm Baptist Church, that individual is holding a big Bible. You cannot be a true disciple of Jesus without a Bible. Today we focus on the role the Word of God should play in our lives. Let’s pause and pray that Word would challenge and encourage us this morning.

There are six points I want to make this morning, but don’t worry, I will be concise.

1 – The Bible is the Word of God. There are two foundational truths on which Christianity is built.

One is that God, the God described in the Bible, the triune God really does exist. The second truth is, as Francis Schaeffer put it, “He is not silent.” He is the God who speaks. If God were silent, we would know nothing about Him, and we would not be here this morning. Throughout human history the Lord has spoken in a variety of ways, but the most significant and important way is through the scriptures, the writings. When these writings are collected, we call them the Book, or the Bible.

It started about 1400 years before the time of Jesus, when Moses composed what was called the Torah, the Book of the Law, which are the first five books in our Bible. Right from the beginning it was understood that these were not just Moses’ words, but also God’s words. And it was understood that what was written was authoritative and the source of spiritual nourishment.

**Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.** As the words of the Old Testament prophets and other writings were added to what we call the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible, their authority and value become a central part of Israel’s faith in the Lord.

**Psalm 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 19:10, 11 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.**

When Jesus was on earth, He exhibited the highest respect and confidence in the Old Testament scriptures as did His apostles. The apostle Paul spelled out his understanding in **2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.**

Yes, by all scripture Paul means the 39 books of the Old Testament, but we have plenty of reason

to believe those words are true of the New Testament as well. The early Christians certainly believed the teachings of Jesus and the apostles were completely trustworthy, authoritative, and valuable, just like the Old Testament was.

The is evident in **2 Peter 3:16** **There are some things in them** (letters from the apostle Paul) **that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.** “The other scriptures.” Peter views what Paul wrote as being on the same level as the Old Testament. It is scripture, words that, yes, came from Paul’s pen, but have been breather out by God.

Thus, we have 66 books, the Bible, Old and New Testament, Gods trustworthy, authoritative, and valuable words, that He uses to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

Now, I said 66 books. A Roman Catholic friend says, “When you get a Bible you can either have the 66 books Martin Luther chose, or the 73 books Peter, Paul and John and the other apostles used.” That is not quite accurate. I am fairly certain that Jesus and the apostles did not view the seven extra books, usually called the Apocrypha, meaning other writing, as God inspired scripture.

These were all written during that 400-year period between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Jesus and reflect some Godly wisdom. Yet, I don’t believe they are God inspired scripture, and I don’t think Jesus, Peter, Paul, or John believed that wither. I would also add that the gospel of Thomas and other gnostic writings composed at least 100 years after the rest of the New Testament are also not the Word of God. I am confident the 66 books this Bible constitutes God’s word for us.

2 – Reading and studying the Bible provided spiritual nourishment for our souls. This enables us to follow Jesus, grow in love for God and others, and make other disciples. Again, that is why the ideal disciple is holding a big black Bible. Now, it could be a little red one or a phone like this containing multiple copies of the Bible. The point is that a disciple of Jesus is dependent on the scriptures, the written word of God, to provide the guidance and encouragement that will enable him or her to faithfully follow Jesus.

The disciple views the Bible much the same way as the writer of **Psalm 119:105** **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**

2 Timothy 3:16 says script teaches what is true, gives reproof when we adopt a false idea, corrects when we are making poor lifestyle choices and trains us how to live the right way. The Bible also provided those, what Peter calls, “great and precious promises” that help us to keep following Jesus even when the path gets rough and difficult.

Professor Do Birr taught our college age Sunday school class when I was at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. Six months after being diagnosed with cancer he was no longer able to teach the class and soon after that he was bedridden. I remember his wife, Doris, telling us that about his be he had a plaque with the words of Habakkuk 3:17-19. She said, “These are Bible verses that give Don and I peace and hope each day.” And for 45 years later, those words have stuck in my mind, and heart as a reason for peace and hope, even in the darkest of times.

17 Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.  
19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the high places.

In other words, that passage says, I will be joyful in the Lord because He enables me to continue to follow Him even when the path is very hard, and life seems to completely fall apart. Folks, even this morning those verses encourage me and give me a reason for peace and hope.

I know many of you in this room can testify how when you were facing big challenges, or maybe little challenges, a particular verse or passage from the Bible brought them so much encouragement. And that is how it should be.

Yet, equally important is to feed on God’s word when things seem to be going well because that is how our soul grows stronger and can persevere when those difficult challenges come and can keep trusting and following Jesus, even when it is

not the easy thing to do. Reading and studying the Bible provides spiritual nourishment for our souls.

3 – Just as there are many ways to prepare food, there are a variety of ways to feed on God’s word. There are three primary ways the Bible comes into our lives and that we “hear” God’s word. First is when you read, study and meditate on the scripture on your own. It is often called devotions, quiet time, or just “personal Bible study.”

There are plenty of indications that godly men and women in both the old and New Testaments spent time reading and meditating on the scriptures. One passage that always sticks in my mind is Psalm 1, the blessed man, the happy person who does not follow ungodly paths, but instead, **Psalm 1:2,3 his delight is in the law of the Lord** (the Old Testament scriptures) **and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.**

To become a person like that, read, study, and meditate upon God’s word, the Bible. That is why one of the things we continually do at Chisholm Baptist church is encourage you to make personal Bible study a priority in your life.

A second way we receive nourishment from the scriptures is through small group Bible studies. Through our personal devotions are very important, all of us can benefit from spending time with other believers, sharing insights about the Bible and what it means for our lives.

Small group Bible studies can be very helpful in correcting some of the wrong understandings of the Bible that you might come up with. None of us have a complete understanding of scripture and we can all learn from each other. Each of us is also a sinner, who can be tempted to read and interpret the Bible in such a way that it enables us to excuse or at least minimize our own sins.

That is why, I am a big fan of our “What Did God Say Today” class on Sunday mornings. I really wish I could attend, but I am usually doing something else at that time. Discussing with others what God is saying through a particular Bible passage, both the meaning and application of the text, is an important part of spiritual growth. It is an important part of being a disciple.

It is one reason why we encourage you to be part of a small group Bible study of some kind. There are some things that the Lord is saying to that you will hear, understand, or practice better if you are studying God’s word with other believers. If you are not part of a small group, please talk to me, Pastor Mark, or one of our other leaders and we will help you find one that will be a good fit for you.

A third way we receive nourishment from the Bible is by learning from those who teach the scripture. That means sermons preached by pastors. It also includes listening to a Bible teacher on the radio or podcast, or reading a book written by a Bible teacher. Acts 2:42 says the early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. Every day they wanted to be taught by God’s appointed teachers. In Ephesians 4:11, the apostle Paul tells us that God has gifted pastors and teachers for the purpose of encouraging and equipping those in church. In His great commission, Jesus says in making disciples, His followers are to be **Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** Implied, of course, is that those becoming disciples are willing to be taught. Again, personal devotions are important, but those who don’t take time to listen to good Bible teachers or don’t think they need to listen, are failing to receive nourishment that is necessary for a healthy soul.

Personal Bible study, small group Bible studies, listening to sermons and Bible teachers, these are the ways we receive the spiritual nourishment necessary to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ and become ideal disciples.

4 – Just as eating a variety of foods provides a balanced and healthy diet for our bodies, reading and studying various parts of the Bible is healthy for our souls. In **Acts 20:27** Paul tells the Ephesian elders **I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.** That means He taught them all the truth God has revealed in the scriptures. I think that is my job as a pastor.

Now, because Christians are new covenant believers, I have often focused on teaching the New Testament. Yet, I must not ignore the Old Testament in my sermons, and you should not ignore the Old Testament in your personal study. Why? Because even though the Bible is made up

of 66 books, it tells one story, that starts in Genesis 1 and ends in Revelations 22.

For us to understand the New Testament, we have to be familiar with the old. The better we understand the Old Testament, the better we will be able to understand the New. So. To grow as a disciple, to become an ideal we need the spiritual nourishment that both the Old and New Testaments provide.

A balanced spiritual diet also means not ignoring particular parts of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments that, for whatever, reason you are tempted to avoid. Now that doesn't mean you should focus on those parts. Ideal disciples are not more familiar with the Song of Solomon than they are the gospel of John. But God has something to say to each of us through each part of His Word. There is not part which an ideal disciple avoids.

5 - Just as there is "junk food" that provides minimal nutrition for our bodies and can actually contribute to health problems, it is possible to turn the Bible into "spiritual junk food" that is not healthy for your soul. Now, I am kind of a fan of things like donuts, chocolate bars and ice cream, but spiritual junk food can do real damage to our souls.

What am I talking about? Well, sometimes we pick our individual phrases of verse and ignore the context of those phrases or verses. For example, quoting **Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged**, in an effort to deflect criticism of a sinful belief or behavior is probably the most common misuse of scripture. The reality is that people can make almost any point they want or defend any action or attitude, if they quote the bible out of context.

Since the devil is able to quote scripture as he tempts Jesus (Matthew 4:6) I guess it is no surprise that those who abuse other people can quote scripture to justify their actions. But the quotes will always be out of context, and they will be misconstruing and misusing the Bible.

Another way to turn the Bible into spiritual junk food is to treat it as a source of Bible trivia. Some folks memorize all sorts of biblical facts, like the names of all the kings of Israel and Judah but pay

little attention to what the Lord is saying to them through His word.

Using the Bible as a tool to impress others with your knowledge of what it says, but no being concerned with doing what it says, is clearly misusing God's Word. As **James 1:22 says, But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

This leads us to :

6 - The Bible is not just a source of spiritual nourishment and encouragement to an ideal disciple. But it is the authority. When God speaks, His disciple listens, and not only listens, but obeys. An ideal disciple, someone who is truly trusting and following Jesus, doesn't just read the Bible, doesn't just study the Bible, doesn't just memorize or quote the Bible. Rather an ideal disciple obeys the Bible, thinks, loves and lives as God calls him/her to do through His Word.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary Adoniram Judson put it this way. Maybe I like to quote him just to say that name, Adoniram Judson. He said, *"A true disciple inquires not whether a fact is agreeable to his own reason, but whether it is in the book, the Bible. His pride has yielded to the Divine testimony. Break down your pride, and yield to the word of God."*

Folks, that is what ideal disciples do. They break down their pride and yield to the word of God. Even when they don't understand all of the "Why's and how's," they still try to believe the promises the Lord makes and obey the commands He gives in the Bible. Even if they don't like what God's commands require, they seek to obey them.

Is that always easy to do? No, not at all. I, like you, often fail to believe and obey as I should. Yet, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ those failures, those sins are forgiven. And as a Christian you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you and enabling you to believe and obey more and more as you are growing in faith. By His grace, you are becoming an ideal disciple of Jesus, who, like Jesus, finds spiritual nourishment from every word that comes from the mouth of God. May the Lord help to feast on His work this week and in the weeks ahead.