

to its master, the cowboy began to weep, hugged its head, slipped on a halter, and fed the animal sugar cubes out of his pocket.

The commentator exclaimed he suddenly saw the solution to his problems. "I slammed my fist down on that rim rock and cried out to God. I said, 'Oh, God I have been running with the wild horses far too long. I am coming home to your corral never to roam again with the wild horses.'"

My appeal to each of you today is, Stay in the corral of God's Word, because all of the wild opinions galloping around us in our modern societies will bring you nothing but grief. Like the trusting centurion, hold fast to the Word, humble yourself to its authority, trust it, obey it, and it will lead you safely into God's eternal kingdom!

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TASTE AND SEE

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At her college graduation party Jane received a gift from a young engineering professor. Arriving home that evening, she opened the present and discovered it was a book. One glance at the uninteresting title was enough to cause her to lay it aside unopened for months. Engineering was not exactly the most fascinating subject to her.

Sometime later she and the professor fell in love and became engaged. One evening as they were happily pondering their wedding plans and future lives together, he asked her what she thought of the book he had given her at her graduation. All of a sudden she remembered how she had dismissed it from her mind. Embarrassed for neglecting it, she determined to show better appreciation for the gift of her soon groom-to-be.

Arriving home that evening, she could hardly wait to find the book. And looking at more than the title this time, she was pleasantly surprised to discover that the author was no other than the professor himself, and that he had written in it a note of dedication to her. Needless to say, Jane did not sleep much that night. Gripped by the whole experience, and utterly fascinated by the book her lover had written and dedicated to her, she simply could not lay it down until she had read the last page.¹

Delighting ourselves in the Lord, who loved us and gave Himself for us, propels us to delight ourselves in His Word, and anything else related to Him. In loving Him, we love what He loves, and shun what He shuns. As we look upon Him, we come to view things from His perspective, in a brand-new way. Jesus incon-

testably possesses our hearts and our warmest affections. For when we are His, "our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things."²

If we search through all our mail and happily find a letter from a loved one, we lay everything else aside and tear that letter open, devouring its contents. We find ourselves totally absorbed in the sentiments and details it brings. Probably we read it more than once to make sure that we miss out on nothing. Is this because of the stationery, handwriting, or sentence structure? No, it's because of the writer himself or herself.

That is the reason we love the Written Word—because we love the living Word. Tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, we delight ourselves in Him who poured out His love in the sacred pages of Scripture, breathed His Spirit into it, and lovingly autographed it for us with His own blood.

When I committed my life to Christ at the age of 10, I found myself driven with great desire to spend time with my best friend Jesus—praying and studying His word. Waking up long before dawn, I would sit at my desk voraciously reading my Bible. Not wanting to let go of this precious experience, I would study for hours learning about Jesus, the Person I loved and admired the most. I will never forget the look on my parents' faces when they would find me—an expression of gratitude mixed with concern. Gratitude for my spiritual interest, yet concern for my lack of sleep.

The impetus for our delighting in the Lord is His delight in us. "Let Israel rejoice in the Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King," the psalmist urges God's people. Then he follows his call by giving the reason for it: "For the Lord *takes delight in his people*; he crowns the humble with salvation" (Ps 149:2-4, NIV). Our loving Lord takes delight in us just as loving parents find great pleasure in their loving children.

Jesus took delight in His relationship with His Father. He was the source of Christ's greatest joy. Speaking prophetically through the psalmist, Christ thus addressed Him: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is *fullness of joy*; at Your right hand are *pleasures forevermore*" (Ps 16:11).

Not only did He taste that His Father was good, but it was His very food, His very life to do His will (John 4:34). Christ wants us to experience the same devotion and delight He and the Father mutually enjoy together. "He [Christ] studied the word of God, and His hours of *greatest happiness* were found when He could turn aside from the scene of His labors. . . to hold communion with God . . ."³

The biblical concept of tasting and seeing that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8) and of delighting ourselves in Him (Ps 37:4) is not one that we usually associate with devotional life. Normally we approach the devotional life from the perspective of a sense of duty, even of drudgery. Inevitably this leads to a meaningless relationship with God, or we abandon it altogether. If the Lord is good—and He is—then why is it so difficult for us to delight ourselves in Him? Here are a few reasons to consider.

First, it requires that we invest quality time in such a relationship. Most of us are keen on investing in things other than relationships. Second, we are more inclined to be task-oriented than people-oriented. Tasks and accomplishments drive our lives rather than relationships to others, including God. Third, we find ourselves surrounded by just too many distractions. We become so devoted to them that they divert all our attention from Him. Fourth, whatever knowledge we have of Christ tends to be head knowledge rather than heart knowledge. We go through the motions of knowing *about* Him, but do not know Him *personally*.

Of course, we do find ourselves talking about our relationship with Christ, and of our obedience to Him, but we find neither passion nor pleasure in the experience. The heart has grown rather cold and callous. "The joy of the Lord is [my] strength" (Neh 8:10) does not exactly describe the spiritual song lived out in our daily lives.

On the other hand, our joy and delight in the Lord will reveal that our love for Him is real and our spirituality genuine. But when such love fades and such joy vanishes, then we know that self-centeredness has sapped the vitality out of our spiritual lives. One of the signs of the end, according to Christ, is that "the love of many will grow cold" (Matt 24:12). Here He is describing those who

previously loved Him and rejoiced in their relationship with Him. But in focusing on self, they destroyed that spiritual relationship.

Ellen White writes that "He [in Matt 24:12] speaks of a class who have fallen *from a high state of spirituality*." Then she searchingly asks, "Where is the fervor, the devotion to God, that corresponds to the greatness of the truth which we claim to believe?" Finally she candidly answers her question: "The love of the world, the love of some darling sin, has *weaned the heart* from the love of prayer and of meditation on sacred things. A formal round of religious services is kept up. but where is the love of Jesus? *Spirituality is dying*."⁴

Hannah Smith commented that the general public does not have the impression that Christians experience genuine joy in their lives. She was once told, "You Christians seem to have a religion that makes you miserable. You are like a man with a headache. He does not want to get rid of his head, but it hurts him to keep it. You cannot expect outsiders to seek very earnestly for anything so uncomfortable."⁵

But that is a far cry from what Jesus desired for all His followers. Said He, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). We can never find genuine joy and permanent pleasure except in Christ, the inexhaustible source. The reason that others fail to discern our joyous experience in the Lord is that we have not ourselves tasted and seen that He is indeed good.

God could say that David was a man after His own heart (1 Sam 13:14) because they enjoyed a heart relationship together. It becomes quite obvious from reading the Psalms that David possessed that joy and delight in the Lord. He said that his soul panted for Him as the deer thirsts for cool flowing water in a desert (Ps 42:1, 2) and that his flesh longed for Him as he longed for cool water in a dry and hot land (Ps 63:1). We cannot help sensing that he did indeed delight himself in God, and that he did taste and see that the Lord is good.

It all sounds like savoring a sumptuous meal, doesn't it? But the delicious spiritual meal that our souls hunger for is the Lord Himself. He is our real food that we taste, eat, and delight ourselves in. Enjoying such a meal with Christ does not in any way imply

rushing through some mechanical activity. Rather it points to a relaxed and exuberant time involving our whole being. It also calls for appreciating the ambience, savoring the aroma and taste of every morsel, and relishing the goodness of the One who is altogether lovely.

Let us consider how Jesus explained the importance of such a crucial experience when He visited the home of Martha and Mary (see Luke 10:38-42). Martha was certainly a thoughtful and conscientious friend as she welcomed Jesus into the house and worked so hard to make Him feel comfortable. On the other hand, Mary seemed totally oblivious to all the hustle and bustle of cooking and cleaning taking place around her. She completely absorbed herself in Jesus and what He had to say from the very moment He entered the house. He was all that she could think of, and she was determined to take advantage of every moment she could be with Him.

Martha's *service* to Christ, and Mary's *solitude* with Christ—what made the difference? Martha had *many distractions*, but Mary had *one attraction*. Martha "was distracted with much serving" (verse 40) while Mary simply "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word" (verse 39). She sat while Martha frantically raced back and forth. But where did she sit, and for what reason? That is the crucial question. Mary sat *at Jesus' feet listening to His word*. And that is all that matters when Christ is around.

Martha soon had had just enough. Exasperated, she complained to Him that Mary was not helping her, and that He was a part of the problem in allowing her sister to get away with it. Jesus answered her with love and concern: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (verses 41, 42).

Many things worry and trouble us when we really need only *one thing*. The many things that we spend our entire lives worrying about will eventually vanish, but the one needful thing will never be taken away. Doesn't this direct our minds back to what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 about keeping our priorities in order? "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

There He exhorts us, first of all, to seek the *one* important

thing—Himself—and then we will find *all other* things taken care of. Life is more than food, drink, and clothing. We should not let life's turmoil so distract us that it eclipses our view of the Life. Focusing on Jesus will straighten our priorities out, for "when once the gaze is fixed upon [Christ], the life finds its center."⁶

Hospitable Martha, in her concern to make sure that the meal tasted good and the house looked meticulous, missed enjoying communion with her special Guest. What Martha, the ideal hostess, did was important, but it was not a priority. "Here is a magnanimous gesture but a mistaken one," explains Ken Gire. "Because Jesus does not want food; He wants fellowship."⁷ Tasty meals, immaculate homes, and perfect hosting—wonderful as they are—can get in the way of loving fellowship with friends.

So many things get in the way of meaningful and delightful times with God and others. And finally when we really want to do something about it, it may be too late. Attending a funeral of a friend, I overhead someone lament the fact that he had always intended to get together with the deceased individual but had never gotten around to it. Stephen Grellet wrote: "I expect to pass this way but once, any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

Martha, out of courtesy, might have actually listened to Jesus at the very beginning. She might have been torn as to what to do, for she loved Jesus too, and would have enjoyed visiting with Him as well. Gradually, she found herself drawn more to the kitchen and pulled farther away from Jesus. Thus she found herself increasingly caught up in her frantic preparations. In the anxiety of the moment to serve Jesus, she began focusing on herself.

Consequently, her attitude changed not only toward her sister but also toward her Saviour. She accused Mary of laziness, and even blamed Jesus for indifference. And that is what subtly happens when performance becomes our priority. We focus on self, critically comparing our performance with the performance of others—or lack of it. And our criticism of others knows no limits. No one is immune to its attack, not even Jesus. Martha implied that the all-caring Jesus was uncaring!

Unfortunately, our performance for Christ may supersede our

devotion to and love for the person of Christ. The spiritual danger is subtle and real, for our dedication to His service may crowd out our devotion to Him as a person. If we are not careful, the savior of our success may supplant the Saviour of our souls. "As activity increases and men become *successful* in doing any *work for God*, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to *make a savior of our activity*. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work."⁸

Martha would make a very efficient and self-giving church member, to the delight of any pastor or church board. We need many like her in the Master's service today—men and women who are energetic and resourceful. Although we do not want to dismiss such fine qualities in any church member, at the same time they must, first of all, be subordinated to Christ, and must issue forth from devotion to Him and delight in His person.

"The 'one thing' that Martha needed was a calm, devotional spirit. . . She needed less anxiety for the things which pass away, and more for those things which endure forever. . . There is a wide field for the Marthas, with their zeal in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good."⁹

One has to wonder how many times Jesus misses us when He comes by to enter into fellowship with us. Sadly, He too often finds us preoccupied with so many things, including serving Him, that we do not seize the opportunity to delight ourselves in simply being with Him. Planning to try us again, He reluctantly leaves, ardently hoping that the next time He comes by He will not only find our homes and kitchens open to Him, but, more important, our hearts.

And when He returns, will our welcome to Him be shown by sitting at His feet and listening to His voice, or will we be feverishly fretting about many things? What kind of welcome will our churches give Him when He stops by? Will our reception consist more of labor than devotion? "The church seem content to take only the first steps in conversion. They are more ready for *active labor* than for *humble devotion*, more ready to engage in outward religious

service than in the inner work of the heart. Meditation and prayer are neglected for bustle and show."¹⁰

It is really a matter of priorities. Misplaced priorities can lead us to miss Christ. May this prayer become your and my heartfelt prayer, so that He may become our foremost priority and our supreme delight: "Forgive me for being so much distracted by my preparations, and so little attracted by Your presence. For being so diligent in my duties, and so negligent in my devotion. For being so quick to my feet, and so slow to yours. Help me to understand that it is an intimate visit You seek from me, and not an elaborate meal."¹¹

The beautiful description of the love relationship of Solomon and his bride can illustrate the quality we yearn for in our love relationship with Christ. Said he to her: "Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens." Responds she: "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love" (S of Sol 2:2-4, NIV).

The Song of Solomon here captures in such a superb way what the psalmist means by delighting ourselves in the Lord. It does not depict, by any means, the too often hectic, hurried, and stale relationship we have with Christ. On the contrary, it describes the great joy we have in each other's company. The blissful time to bask in the cool shade of such intimate fellowship, and to relish its taste for the sheer delight of it.

Remember that the Lord invites us to a spiritual banquet with Him, and we will feast with the Lord. Banqueting with Jesus is never like hastily gulping our fast food from a drive-in restaurant. It is neither like frozen dinners swallowed while glued to television nor like munching on snacks while reading the newspaper.

Visiting some countries in southern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East has clearly shown me how sharing a meal with someone can be so relaxed, delightful and conducive to human relationships. Somehow, in the West, we have been conditioned to think that if we take time to enjoy food and fellowship, we are wasting our time, perhaps depriving ourselves of a chance to make more money or get something important done. But this is

not so. For in being so obsessed with gaining riches and temporal things, we squander life itself—this life and eternal life to come.

I have counseled numerous parents and youngsters having difficulties in their family relationships about the quality time they need to have together. I will never forget some of the responses.

"Dad, you are always gone. You never spend time with us," one says.

"Mom, you are always so busy. It is impossible to talk with you," another protests.

"I am killing myself to make a good life for you, and I wish you would start appreciating this for a change," the father answers defensively.

"We are doing all of this for you," the mother joins in.

"Dad, Mom, we do appreciate the money, the cars, the nice home and everything, but we just want to spend time with you. We want to go places together, do things together," one of the children answers back.

Too busy making a living, we cannot make a life with our loved ones and with our God.

In his book *The Table of Inwardness*, Calvin Miller uses the Latin term *otium sanctum*, translated "holy leisure," to explain how to delight ourselves in Christ amid the busyness of everyday life. It is not trying to squeeze Christ into our hectic mode of existence, but inviting Him to totally invade and rule it.¹² "Holy living is not abrupt living," Miller suggests. For "no one who hurries into the presence of God is content to remain for long. Those who hurry in, hurry out."¹³

In our relationship with our Lord we are to devote ourselves to Him more than anything or anyone else. Our beloved Christ is like a luxurious fruit-laden tree under whose shade we delight to sit, and His fruit is sweet to our taste. This is tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, and this is the intimate experience that we so desperately need.

"In the midst of this maddening rush [in the world], God is speaking. He bids us come apart and commune with Him," Ellen White observes. "Many, even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of

Christ's loving presence, pausing perhaps moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work."¹⁴

Why do we hurry away from Christ's loving presence? Why do we make such hasty excursions to Him and eagerly pull away from Him? It is as if we suffer from the paradox of being unable to stay with Him, yet unable to remain away from Him. Is this because we are not accustomed to feeling comfortable in close relationships? We have an innate need to really know and be known, but we are afraid of the experience. Like our first parents, we hide from our God behind some flimsy fig leaves. But He already knows us, and in spite all that we are, He greatly loves us and longs to be close to us.

Furthermore, in our task-oriented society, we often do not feel at ease reaching out to others—even to friends and family members—unless we have a need, or we can come up with some sort of excuse or explanation. This mind-set frequently affects our personal relationship with God. We do not often seek Him simply for the joy of being with Him, but rather because we are in desperate straits. Even when we rush to Him under such circumstances, we still do it rather reluctantly and impersonally. One may compare such an encounter to that of paying bills or going to the dentist—unpleasant but essential.

But relationships require more than discussing issues and tackling problems. Do we ever feel that we miss being with God when we have not needed to seek His help for some time? For example, when it comes to our good friends, do we miss them and feel like seeing them just for the joy of being with them? Do we feel free to drop by to see them, or do we experience some unexplained reluctance to do so? When we sometimes feel reluctance, do we find ourselves pressed to furnish an excuse or fumble for an explanation in order to justify getting together with them?

Few of us feel free to see friends just for their sake, just for the joy of being with them. And that is perhaps because heart-to-heart interaction makes us uncomfortable. We would rather avoid such intimacy by distracting ourselves in discussing other safe issues. Is this possibly one reason what we prefer to entertain in our homes

large groups rather than one person or family? That way we have less risk of vulnerability and closeness.

Although our loving God welcomes us with open arms when we run to Him in times of distress, He also longs to see us come to Him at all times simply because we love Him and enjoy being with Him. Genuine love is always seeking togetherness with the beloved. "We come to the Lord not because we want something from Him or even because we have something we need to share with Him," Larry Richards explains, "but simply because *we want to be with Him*, and with Him alone."¹⁵

But what can we do about the quality of our communion with Christ? How can such communion become a delight to dwell on rather than a drudgery to endure? How can we take our hectic time and make it holy time? How do we learn to enjoy lingering long in Christ's loving presence?

We need to earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the excellence and all-sufficiency of our Lord. He is what our hearts desperately need because He alone possesses in Himself all that we have ever longed for. Christ is the only true source of love, peace, acceptance, security, friendship, riches, and eternal life. By uniting our lives with His we possess all things.

Hopefully we can all think of one ideal friend whom we greatly love and admire. A best friend with whom we have enjoyed a long and loving relationship. Take such quality friendship and multiply it by eternity, and there we have Jesus. Isn't this the kind of ideal and best friend that we have been searching for? Christ has our very best at heart, for His thoughts are only of good, and not evil. He created us for His pleasure, He sacrificed His life for our restoration, He longs to live His abundant life in us today, and He yearns to lavish on us His eternal glory at His coming.

If we can have this type of Friend, why should we hesitate to come to Him and stay with Him for the sheer delight of just being with Him? Why not hasten to be in His loving presence at every opportunity we have? It is easy to take such an ideal Friend for granted, but it is not that easy to maintain our vital relationship with Him unless we jealously and continuously guard and nurture it.

For you see, I know from personal experience. In rushing to

finish this chapter about tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord, I had to guard lest I let writing spiritual things in any way compete with my spiritual priority of sitting at the feet of Jesus. It would be quite an irony, if in the process of rushing to finish this book on Christ and spirituality, I find myself overlooking the joy of spiritual communion with Christ. May He ever remain the one attraction among the many distractions. And may He ever continue to be the joy and delight of our hearts as we taste and see that He is good indeed.

Let us suppose that some friends invite us to eat their home. At mealtime they want us to sample the fine whole-wheat bread they just made. However, before we can try it, we hear a detailed discourse describing all the wonderful things about the tasty loaf of bread. As our appetites quicken, we hear them winding down their lecture on the bread's ingredients, nutrients, taste, and texture—only to have them whisk it away at the end. Baffled, we wonder how useful an exercise the experience was—learning all about the fine qualities of the bread, yet stopping short of actually tasting and seeing that it was good.

While few people would actually do that to us in everyday life, in the spiritual realm it, unfortunately, occurs all too often. The bread of life contains all the spiritual nourishment ever needed for spiritual restoration. However, all too often we test this bread but never taste it, describe it but not digest it, and analyze it but not assimilate it.

The Scriptures present an intimately intertwined relationship between themselves and the living Word. Jesus Christ and the Holy Bible are both referred to as the Bread of Life. Moreover, both were conceived by the Holy Spirit, who leads us to encounter the living Word in the written Word. Both give spiritual strength and life to all who taste and see that the Lord and His Word are good.

Scripture interchangeably uses such descriptive terms as "taste," "eat," "rejoice," and "delight" to illustrate our intimate relationship with the Lord and His Word. Jeremiah said: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer 15:16). Notice the progression in this text. God's words are, first of all, to be found, implying a desire to search for them. Second, finding such words is not enough in

itself, for then we must eat them. And finally, partaking of the life-giving words brings profound joy to the heart. George Mueller accustomed himself to continue feeding on the Word until he rejoiced in God, and then he felt ready to face the new day.

David declared: "How *sweet* are Your words to my *taste*, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps 119:103). And, "I long for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my *delight*" (verse 174; see also verses 97, 111, 127, 162). And he says of God's judgments: "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:10).

As we look at such biblical references, we clearly sense that the divine bread of life can be personally experienced as surely as eating our daily physical bread. Christ, is ever revealing Himself in His Word, encouraging and empowering us. And we can experience it as immediately as tasting fine food, and as readily as enjoying being with a faithful friend.

Jeremiah and David clearly come across as taking their time to feast on the words of God. They are not interested merely in thinking about the words, or even hearing them. But they linger in God's presence, slowly savoring every bit and morsel of His spiritual meal, and assimilating its nutrients into every fabric of their being. Each summons every faculty to such spiritual activity. The reason they delighted themselves in the word of the Lord is that they delighted themselves in the Lord of the Word.

Jesus, in John 6, referred several times to Himself as the "bread of life" (verses 35, 48, 51). Then He added that this bread is His flesh, which when eaten gives life eternal (verses 51, 53). Said He: "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed" (verse 55). Whenever we eat, it should remind us that He gave His body for us, and whenever we drink we remember that He spilled His blood for us.

Yes, we receive life from eating His flesh as we receive it from appropriating His words. "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (verse 63). In studying Scripture we are meeting the Saviour. For in seeking His words we find ourselves "brought into communion with Christ."¹⁶ As we feed on the Word of the Lord we are feasting on the Lord of the Word, and in receiving life from His Word, we are receiving *His* very life.

"He who by faith receives the Word is receiving the *very life* and character of God."¹⁷ Andrew Murray compares the word with prayer, declaring that in prayer we give ourselves to God, and go up to dwell with Him, while in the word, God gives Himself to us, and comes down to dwell with us.¹⁸

In Christ giving Himself to us in His Word, He also speaks to us just as He spoke to His contemporaries when He lived on earth. I used to wish that I could hear Christ's voice speaking specifically to me. But I learned in time that He indeed does. "The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God's Word. . . . The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One."¹⁹

In childhood we first hear before we are able to speak. Similarly, if we do not listen to God speak to us, then we do not learn how to speak with Him. Unfortunately, even then we often do more talking to God than listening to Him. "To speak words that reach and touch God, affecting and influencing the power of the unseen world, depends entirely on our hearing God's voice," Andrew Murray explains. "The extent to which we listen will determine the extent to which we learn to speak in the voice and the language that God hears." Murray continues: "As the words of Christ enter our very hearts, becoming and influencing our lives, our words will enter His heart and influence Him."²⁰

It is true that we are what we eat. If we eat poor food, we have poor health, but if we eat good food, we have good health. More than that, we biologically become the very food we eat and assimilate. When we feed on Jesus, He becomes our health and life. For "what food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. . . . A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that *His life becomes our life*."²¹

No wonder that we may find even some Bible scholars, who devote themselves to the study of the Scriptures, spiritually anemic and lacking the joy of the Lord. They squander their precious time losing sight of the Lord in His Word. Knowing the theory but not the power of the Word, they analyze but do not assimilate. Such

individuals delve into but do not digest, critique but not consume, the Word.

While it helps to spend some time in analysis, we must still go beyond that to taste and see that the bread of life is good. Only here will we truly find spiritual vitality, and without it we become famished and emaciated. "We must be Christians in whom the Word is never separated from the living God Himself. We must live as Christians to whom God in heaven speaks every day and all day long."²²

But some may say that they tried to taste the Word of God, but unfortunately found it neither good nor sweet. In fact, it was bland and boring to them. Consequently, either they have given up Bible study altogether or they just read it out of routine or duty. Why do we, then, suffer such deprivation and lack of joy in God's Word? At least five thoughts come to mind:

First of all, have we experienced Christ's love and fellowship in our lives? If we haven't, then it is understandable why we do not enjoy His Word. When we genuinely love someone, we become quite interested in knowing about that person. Likewise, we need to experience a loving relationship with the living Word in order to delight ourselves in His written Word.

Second, we tend to be impatient, expecting quick results. We give up easily unless a desired outcome is immediately forthcoming. But no project will produce worthwhile results unless we have put considerable effort into it. Things of value take time to cultivate and enjoy. We often ask whether doing something is *fun* when we really need to ask whether something is *right*. This applies particularly in the spiritual realm.

Of course, some things are fun as soon as you start them, but that must not be the main criterion. On the other hand, there are many things in life worth doing, but we do not always feel like doing them. Yet we do them because we know they are right to do. With time such worthwhile endeavors become increasingly easier and more enjoyable. Then they become *real fun*.

Most of us know from experience that it is not that easy to start and sustain a physical exercise program. Take jogging, for example. It is not initially fun, and it takes discipline to keep it up. Our sore and aching bodies tempt us to give it all up for good.

However, with perseverance, such activity becomes progressively invigorating, enjoyable, and even something we actually look forward to.

Third, we are so used to tasting and consuming unspiritual foods that our spiritual taste buds become too depraved to enjoy wholesome spiritual foods. The body craves whatever we get it used to. How can we enjoy the bread of life if we have been feasting on unspiritual junk foods? How can we relish studying the Bible if we have been saturating our minds with whatever we find in the hedonistic media? Or if we have been caught up in what the world has to offer, how can we enjoy what the Word has to offer?

If we get so conditioned from childhood to consume inordinate amounts of sugar in our food, then whatever is naturally sweet is no longer sweet enough for us. We even pour more sugar on breakfast cereals whose first ingredient is sugar! Therefore, we should not be surprised and become discouraged if the word of God does not taste good initially. We need to give God time to recondition and recreate our spiritual taste buds. Each of us needs to alter our spiritual diet by eating His Word and staying away from spiritual junk foods. He will help us recover the capacity to appreciate and enjoy the wholesome spiritual food that He offers us.

Fourth, even the most tasty food does not appeal to us when we get sick. But we still must eat in order to regain our stamina and strength. I remember my childhood years when I would become ill. My mother would prepare my favorite food and bring it to my bedside. I would take a bite or two of it and then discard it. I simply did not have the appetite or the taste. Under normal circumstances I would have quickly devoured it. Now she would encourage me to eat, explaining that her food tasted as great as before, and that I especially needed to eat it on account of my illness.

It is likely that when we are spiritually sick, spiritual food does not feel appetizing to us. However, we must not go merely by feeling, but by principle. We must eat in order to regain our strength, and soon we will recover our appetite for spiritual food and it will become an integral part of our everyday lives.

Finally, we need to keep in mind that discouragement is one of the most formidable weapons Satan uses against us, especially in the area of communion with God. He knows that for us to continue

such communion would break his power over us. Therefore, he tries his hardest to defeat us, realizing that if he succeeds here he would overwhelm us in many other areas as well.

Years ago when I resolved to commit myself to a devotional life, I decided to do that every morning. I chose mornings because that is the best way to begin the day, energized by a hearty spiritual breakfast. However, at times circumstances forced me to forgo my spiritual breakfast. Satan would seize on that, causing me to become demoralized and to question the depth of my commitment. A sense of failure would flood me, affecting my entire day.

One day as I sought God's help, He impressed me with the commonsense thought that while the first meal of the day is most important one, still if you sometimes miss your breakfast, it does not mean you have to go hungry all day. You still can eat a late breakfast, lunch, or supper. Certainly eating something sometime during the day is much better than simply eating nothing. The thought was a timely spiritual insight and apt analogy. It does not mean that our entire day has to be ruined if sometimes we miss our devotional time in the morning. We definitely do not have to be spiritually famished all day, for we can take time at noon, in the evening, or sometime between to meet with God for spiritual nourishment. Now if I have to miss my devotional time in the morning (which I never like to do), then I make sure to satisfy my spiritual hunger later in the day.

Of course, analysis of the word has its place, but our priority here is to experience Christ's life becoming our life. The ultimate purpose of God giving His Word was not merely to dispense helpful information but to invest His life in us, so that His life may in turn become ours. For only His life can quicken and transform ours, molding and fashioning them after His likeness. Jesus said: "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). They contain His very spirit. And whoever by faith receives His words receives His life (John 5:24) and the semblance of His character.

Endnotes

This article is taken from chapters 10 and 11 in Dr. Samaan's new book, *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub.

(See description on the following page.)

Assn., 1995), and was preached as a sermon at the National Convention of the Adventist Theological Society on May 19, 1995.

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22 Murray, *The Inner Life*, p. 90.

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