

Week 8 - Feed on the Word - 1Peter 2:1-3

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:17-24

Introduction

As we begin this morning I want to ask, how many of you would call yourself a reader?

When was the last time you read a book of any kind?

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 43 million U.S. adults possess low literacy skills

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that people aged 15-44 in the United States spend 10 minutes or less a day reading

And the Pew Research Center found that 23% of adults in the United States reported they hadn't read one book in all of last year

It's a shocking thing to discover, but the World Atlas actually ranks the United States 125th out of 194 nations in terms of literacy rate which is defined as the percentage of people over the age of 15 who can read and write

Some sources rank the U.S. even lower based on the reading behaviors listed above

And, I suppose that's only right because, as Mark Twain said:

"The man who does not read has no advantage over the man who cannot read."

We have a literacy problem in our country and I believe we would agree that it's quite concerning

But even more concerning is the fact that we have a problem in our churches with *biblical* illiteracy because the Bible is being sorely neglected in the personal lives of many Christians

And, as Mark Twain said, those who don't read their Bible have no advantage over those who can't read their Bible

Pastor and author, Ed Stetzer, wrote in an article for churchleaders.com back in January where he lamented:

"Both inside and outside the church, there is a problem. Non-Christians don't have even the general idea of the Bible they once did. Christians are not seeing the life change that real Bible engagement brings. The result is a nation in spiritual free fall, and while most cultural analysts point to such culprits as church leadership scandals and government failings, the true answers start with the foundational Word of God"

He goes on to mention a Lifeway Research study that found that, while 59% of churchgoers claim to read their Bible on their own at least once during the week, 12% admit to reading it rarely or never before stating:

"There is no excuse. It's not as if we don't have access. The average American—Christian or not—owns at least three Bibles. Even those who don't have one in their home can download it free to their smartphone or "steal" a Gideon Bible from a hotel room. The Word of God is more available than ever. People have died to bring us what has led to modern translations of Scripture, yet we are dying from lack of knowledge."

In our passage this morning, Peter continues expounding on how believers should live in light of their salvation

And his message in the verses before us is that Christ-followers should desire the Word of God just as a newborn baby desires his mother's milk

I hope you'll join me in your Bible and follow along as I read **1Peter 2:1-3** –

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The first word of verse 1 is "so" and that reveals that what Peter is about to say ties back into what he has just said and, in this case, it back to 1:22 as Peter explains in more detail what is involved in loving one another earnestly

And he says that the Christ-follower must give up certain attitudes and actions that are harmful to others

But it also ties into what Peter is about to teach concerning the spiritual milk of the Word of God which makes it a verse that transitions between the two topics having connection to both because, as we'll see, those same actions and attitudes affect our desire or appetite for the Word of God

Normally we look at the passage in the order it's written but we're going to mix things up a bit today and begin by looking at the most important imperative or command in these verses - you must have an appetite for God's Word

I. You must have an appetite for God's Word

Peter actually writes in verse 2 [**1Peter 2:2**] *"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation"*

It would be legitimate for us to ask how we know that the "spiritual milk" Peter refers to is the written Word of God

First, Peter has just mentioned the Word of God three times in the verses immediately preceding this passage

In 1:23 [**1Peter 1:23**] he spoke of the "living and abiding word of God" and in verse 25 [**1Peter 1:25**] he spoke of the "word of the Lord" that remains forever and that "this word is the good news that was preached to you"

Second, the idea that God's Word is spiritually nourishing is consistent throughout Scripture

Consider **Deuteronomy 8:3** where we read Moses saying to the people of Israel:

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

A teaching that Jesus repeats in **Matthew 4:4** while he was being tempted by the devil

Third, the idea of longing for God's Word is a well-known Old Testament concept

Psalms 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, is filled with the constant cry of the psalmist to have more of God's Word

Fourth, the imagery fits because God's Word is said to be life-giving and pure like mother's milk and reading and listening to God's Word involves taking information into oneself like drinking milk and the result is nourishment that results in growth

Those are four good, solid reasons to conclude that the "spiritual milk" of Peter's analogy is speaking of the written Word of God

And Peter focuses on desire as he says that the true follower of Jesus Christ must long for it like newborn infants

Before we go any further let's make sure we understand that Peter isn't putting his original audience down by his use of this analogy -

Peter wasn't calling his audience young or immature Christians as Paul did in **1Corinthians 3:1** when he called his readers "infants in Christ"

After all, some of Peter's original audience had likely been Christ-followers for thirty years or so

In using the analogy of an infant's craving for milk Peter is only describing the way a Christ-follower should long for the Word of God

And, as any parent, and especially a nursing mother, knows, that means frequently and eagerly

When an infant wants milk, they let their desire be known and they don't stop until they get what they're after

Newborn infants don't just prefer something, they intensely desire it and, at that moment, their desire is the most important thing in the world and they do everything they can to make sure their longing is fully gratified

One might say they are maximally motivated to get that milk and they won't be satisfied for long with a substitute finger or pacifier - once they realize it's a phony that gives no milk they are going to spit it out and resume their cry for milk

And the same should be true of the Christ-follower

It's not enough for us to respect or even revere the Bible as compared to other books

Peter says that only the true Word of God should satisfy the longing of a follower of Christ

So let's look next about what Peter has to say about the character of God's Word

II. The character of God's Word

Peter gives us three characteristics of God's Word in these verses:

First, he says that God's Word is **pure**

The Greek word here indicates that the milk is not watered down or adulterated

It's free from impurity or imperfection as nothing has been added to it or taken from it

In fact, the same word is used in verse 1 where it is translated as "deceit" only with the Greek letter alpha added to the front of it which negates the meaning

In other words, Peter is saying that the milk of God's Word is not deceitful

In the comedic television series, Parks and Rec, the character Ron Swanson once declared, "There's only one thing I hate more than lying: skim milk which is water that's lying about being milk."

Still, there are many churches where the Word of God is consistently watered down to make it more palatable to their congregations

Kathy once had a conversation with a woman who told her that the church she went to was a "happy church" where they didn't look at what they considered the "negative" parts of the Bible

But the pure milk of the Word of God sometimes tells us things that will make us uncomfortable

The Bible doesn't sugar-coat things for us to make us feel good about ourselves as it cuts through all manner of self-deception and gets to the heart of the matter to expose where we have problems so that we can work on them

Hebrews 4:12-13 tells us that the Word of God is "*Living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword*" that it "*[discerns] the thoughts and intentions of the heart*"

And it says that "*no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account*"

Of course, in many other churches and in many popular "Christian" books and articles, people are fond of adding things to the Word of God as they mix in their opinions and what passes for contemporary wisdom

Back in 2008, there was a huge scandal in China when it was discovered that unscrupulous operators were adding melamine and other agents to the diluted milk they were selling to make it appear to have more protein so that it would pass quality control testing

And, since this milk was used in infant formula and baby food it's estimated that 294,000 babies died from the kidney disease caused by the melamine and another 54,000 were hospitalized but recovered

Adding anything to the Bible is just as toxic as adding melamine to milk

The Lord gave John a warning regarding messing with the purity of his Word that, while it applies to the book of Revelation itself, can easily be seen to apply to all of God's written Word as it comes at the very end of it

We read in **Revelation 22:18-19** –

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Determine to not be led astray by deceitful milk that may go down smoothly but crave the pure milk of the Bible so that you can be informed and corrected by it

Second, Peter says that the milk of God's Word is "**spiritual**"

This one is a bit more difficult to understand simply from reading the English word "spiritual" because the Greek word behind it means something more like "reasonable" or "rational"

And what Peter is indicating here is that he isn't talking about literal milk but using milk as a metaphor

Paul uses this same word in its only other New Testament usage in **Romans 12:1** where he writes:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And of course Paul means that presenting one's body as a living sacrifice is the rational or reasonable duty of a believer

He in no way implies that we are to offer ourselves as a literal sacrifice to God which would mean the death of us but that our reasonable response to God's goodness toward us is to yield ourselves fully to him

And Paul speaks to Peter's meaning concerning the Word of God being a thing that is grasped by the intellect in the next verse in Romans 12 [**Romans 12:2**] where he says:

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed **by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Far too many Christians have succumbed to the notion that feelings are of paramount importance in their spiritual walk

But feelings or emotional highs and lows are dangerous if they aren't accompanied, and actually brought about, by the knowledge and understanding that we find in God's Word

We cannot shy away from lofty thoughts that stretch us mentally to focus on feelings nor can we be afraid of the emotions that we feel as we come to understand God's thoughts

There must be a balance between the logical and the emotional in the life of the Christ-follower and our hearts should be stirred as our minds are stimulated by the reasonable and rational nature of the Word of God

Third, Peter says that God's Word is **nourishing**

Just as a mother's milk provides the nutrients that are needed to facilitate growth in her infant child, so does the Word of God provide what is needed that the follower of Christ might "*grow up into salvation*"

And, once again, Peter is talking about the activity of progressive sanctification that will only be perfected in heaven

But as we progress toward the ultimate goal of sanctification in this life, God's Word contains all we need to nourish and protect us as well as give us the standard by which we measure our progress kind of like the pencil marks on the door frames of many homes that chart the growth of the children in the household

God hasn't preserved his Word for us in written form simply so we can know what it says and be better informed sinners

He gave us his Word so that we might learn it and apply it and grow to be more like his Son

God's Word is the pure, rational, and nourishing milk that a Christ-follower must have if they are to grow up into salvation

The same Word of God that is required for the new birth of salvation is the same food the growing child of God needs

As the English Puritan, Thomas Watson, is quoted as saying:

The Scripture is both the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born, but the “the Word of truth”? How does he grow, but by “the sincere milk of the Word”?

But what if you find that you really don’t have the hunger or longing for God’s Word that Peter says you should have?

I suppose the first thing you must do is to make sure you are truly a child of God - that you are in fact saved

I know that might sound harsh but I’d rather insult you here this morning than see you deceive yourself only to discover that you never actually accepted Christ

See, Paul says in **1Corinthians 2:14** that the unsaved, or “natural” person can’t accept, can’t understand to accept, the things of God because they are spiritually discerned

And **Romans 8:7** tells us that *“the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot”*

But Jesus promised his disciples that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to teach them and help them understand [**John 14:26**] and we know that all believers are indwelt with the Helper, the Holy Spirit, at the moment of the salvation

So it’s possible, if you don’t have any desire for the Word of God that you just might be lacking the Holy Spirit and are still in need of salvation - make certain where you stand

But, assuming that you are indeed saved and still struggling there are things you can do to increase your appetite for God’s Word

III. How to increase your appetite for God’s Word

The first thing you must do is: **stay away from the “junk food” that we are tempted to substitute for God’s Word**

It wouldn’t matter how nutritious a meal Kathy prepared for me at home if I were to stop at McDonalds on my way home and fill up on double cheeseburgers and fries, I wouldn’t have room for the meal she had prepared

Look with me at **Proverbs 4:20-27** where we see the admonition to keep away from spiritual junk food –

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.

Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.

For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.

Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.

Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.

Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

We looked earlier at the purity of God’s Word and how it is without deceit

Frankly, I have to tell you that many of the books you will find labeled as “Christian” are anything but pure as they are far too often watered down or added to and quite often they are both diluted and adulterated just like the milk in China back in 2008

They are junk food that tastes good and goes down easy and they satisfy our appetite without having the nutrition we need to help us grow as God would have us grow

They’re worse than empty calories because consuming them often keeps us from the nourishment of God’s Word while making us feel like we have read something worthwhile

And, of course, the same is true when it comes to sermons, devotionals, studies, articles, and the like because it doesn’t matter if the means of consumption is through reading or hearing - it’s still junk food that fills without nourishing

Stick to consuming the pure, spiritual milk of God’s Word in whatever form it comes and skip the junk food

The second thing you can do to increase your appetite is to **remove sinful attitudes and actions that hinder it**

The fact is, sin gets in the way of wanting to read God's Word because it convicts us of our sin which doesn't make us feel all that good

So what are some of the attitudes and actions that get in the way?

Look with me at verse 1 of our passage [**1Peter 2:1**] where Peter writes:

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Malice describes general wickedness that comes from within a person and refers specifically to having it in for someone

J Vernon McGee defines malice as "congealed anger" or "an unforgiving spirit"

Malice is hostility or dislike toward another that includes the desire to see them suffer harm and malice leads to other sins like rejoicing or finding pleasure in another's misfortune

Simply put, malice is the desire to hurt someone with words or deeds

Deceit is a term that literally means to bait the hook or to set a trap

It involves trickery or falsehood that harms someone else

You engage in deceit when you are selective with the facts of a matter in order to gain some advantage

Here's the thing, every word you say can be true while engaging in deceit if your intent is to give a wrong understanding- it's a clever form of deliberate dishonesty for personal advantage

Hypocrisy is insincerity or putting on a false face

It refers back to the practice of actors wearing masks to portray different characters and it reveals a desire to shield the true nature of who one is or what they do

Envy is a horrible trait that virtually all of us have experienced at one time or another

It's the pain that one feels when they see someone else excel or be happy

The thing about envy is that it isn't just the desire to have something that someone else has, it's resenting that they have it at all

The Stoics defined envy as "grief at someone else's good" and we're told in **Matthew 27:18** that Pilate recognized it was envy that caused the religious leaders to seek Jesus' execution

Slander means to speak evil and it's any speech that harms or is intended to harm another person's status or reputation

Again, unlike with the definition our legal system relies upon, what you say doesn't have to be untrue for it to rise to the level of biblical slander

Slander is simply unkind speech that runs someone down and it involves spreading gossip and rumors - and it can even sadly involve sharing prayer requests or expressing concerns to others in just the right way

Peter says we are to "put aside" *all* forms of those attitudes and actions and the picture is of someone removing their dirty clothing and discarding it - it indicates a wholehearted action taken with extreme prejudice

Removing relational sin from one's life opens them up to desire for God's Word

Lastly, Peter says you can increase your appetite for God's Word by remembering the goodness of the Lord

Recognize that Peter isn't casting doubt on the salvation of his readers with the word "if" in verse 3 [**1Peter 2:3**] as that Greek word could just as easily be translated as "since"

It's a proposition of fact that means their knowledge of God's prior goodness should spur them on to seek more of God

Peter is quoting here from **Psalms 34:8** where David exclaims "*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!*"

A person acquires an appetite for something through experience with it - from having tasted it

And tasting is a personal matter - I can't taste something for you and you can't taste it for me and no one can taste something from a distance, you must get personally involved with it

And Peter says that having tasted the goodness of the Lord should lead to a desire for more of it

But again, tasting involves contact and if one has not experienced the Lord's goodness of salvation they will not have the appetite Peter is urging here

Conclusion

The late Howard Hendricks is quoted as saying, "Dusty Bibles always lead to dirty lives"

And as we have seen, dirty lives will keep us from our Bible - it's a vicious circle that we have the ability to break out of but it is a matter of the will and we have to want to do it

As followers of Jesus Christ who have tasted of the Lord's goodness, we have no excuse for not craving the pure, spiritual milk of God's Word and our appetite for it should be born out of the experience of our salvation

Perhaps it's been a while since you cracked open the cover of your Bible on your own -

Well, there's no cure for that neglect other than to cure it so determine to make time to read it

I'm not big on saying there is any particular time of day to read or amount you need to read because those things are artificial adulterations that conspire to make us feel guilty when we fail to live up to them

Simply pick up your Bible, ask God to bless your reading, and read it - taste it - remember the goodness of your Lord

Then, as you build your appetite, begin to feed on it - actually study the Word, meditate on what you have read and discuss it with other believers

Come to the text with questions and a desire to learn from it

Then put what God teaches you into practice

As James cautioned - don't merely be a hearer of God's Word but also be a doer of it **[James 1:22]**

Allow God's Word to mold and shape you into the image of Christ

I can almost guarantee that, should you begin to faithfully do those three things, you will soon find you need the Word of God just like a newborn infant needs her mother's milk

Let's pray

Ephesians 4:17-24 (page 978)

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.