

Series: STAPLES - October 18, 2009

LEARNING TO FEED YOUR SOUL

2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:8-9, James 1:19-27

1. There are three things every baby wants. Mommy. Mommy--and Mommy. Mommy—to comfort me and hold me, Mommy to change me, and Mommy to feed me. No infant—at least that I'm aware of—is in charge of finding, making and eating their own meals. A baby supplies the hunger, the sucking instinct, and a **very** annoying warning signal that meal-time has, in fact, arrived. And then Mommy brings the meal.

-The next developmental stage in eating enhances Mommy's desire to wean the baby. And that development would be...? **Teeth!** Yes, the motivation has arrived. And a child's natural curiosity causes them to taste almost everything. Toilet bowl cleaner, dog food, cosmetics—pretty much everything within their reach.

-But they become **much** more discerning. Any parents here have children who are **picky eaters?** I mean, if it doesn't come in a candy wrapper or a MacDonald's Happy Meal bag—it's pretty much suspect. But over time, the whole process of **feeding** yourself matures. To the point where you can actually feed others—if it can be microwaved or eaten straight from pizza carton. The ultimate goal is to understand what our body **needs**—then **find** it, **buy** it, **prepare** it—and eat it.

-Sometimes this natural process of learning to eat gets disrupted for a variety of reasons. Some of you know Shawn and Bree Walsh. Their son, Lincoln, was born at 5 ½ months—weighing just over 1 pound. **[picture]** Lincoln was extremely fragile—and received all of his meals through a tube in his stomach. The problem is that after 3 months—this sucking instinct that all babies are born with goes away. **[picture]**

-At first, Lincoln really didn't know what hunger was—and never associated it with putting food in his mouth. When he was hungry, he would bring Bree the can of prepared food—and his feeding tube. To have food in his mouth that needed to be chewed and swallowed was terrifying! Because that process of learning to eat had been interrupted, he had to learn all over again not just to eat—but to **want** to eat. His story is fascinating—and an answer to the prayers of this church family! **[picture]**

-Here's my bottom line this morning. I'm concerned for followers of Jesus who have somehow lost the instinct or desire to learn to feed their own souls—and have something substantial to give to others. So, my question is—how are you doing at feeding the most important part of who you are--your soul?

2. Now, I suspect that **some** of you, right about now, are thinking, “Yeah, Yeah! I know what comes next. A guilt-producing, finger-wagging message on, **You should read your Bible more! Shame on you!**”

-And that's **not** where I want to go! First, guilt and nagging—hear me on this—is probably the **least** effective means of bringing change to **anyone!** Second, reading your Bible and hearing messages are only part of what our souls need to be

nourished. Our souls are nourished by engaging with others in true loving one another, helping one another, serving one another community. Our souls are nourished when we see and practice active love. Our souls are nourished when we pour out our love for God in worship. And our hunger increases as we serve others.

-Now, I can't cover everything today—nor should I. What I want to do is prime the pump---and encourage you—and help, if I can. Because of time, I will deal primarily with finding ways for the truth of God to make its way into our minds and then into our hearts—just so you understand that this is only part of what it takes to nourish and feed your soul. Are we clear?

-Now, how can we learn and use the truth of what the Bible says in a way that's meaningful and helpful. Here are some basics—just so we're on the same page.

- a. The Bible is actually a **library** of books—recording God's mission on this planet from the beginning until it's all wrapped up at the end of time. There are two major sections—the Old Testament or Covenant—which looks forward to the coming of the Messiah, and the **New Testament** or Covenant which tells of the coming of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus—and why His coming changed **everything**.
- b. Now, I've talked a lot in the past about the accuracy and the historicity of the Bible—why I have complete confidence in what it has to say about us, about life and about God. If you have serious questions about that I can either recommend some resources that may be helpful—or I'd love to sit down and talk.

-But the basis of everything I'm saying is based on the accuracy of the Bible. I've looked into that a lot—because I'm not about to waste my life using a resource to teach people that's full of inconsistencies and untruths. Don't just accept my word for that; but don't just brainlessly accept word on the street, either. If you have doubts, think. Look. Do research.

3. What Jesus said about the Bible in general—and specifically about his teachings is quite profound.

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.” (Matthew 7:24-27 NLT)

- a. The reason **why** the Bible is called the Word of God is because His Spirit was behind it the whole way. Paul, an early leader and author of a significant portion of the NT writes:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT)

-The words ***inspired by God*** mean, literally, that God breathed it. God worked through the personalities and ideas and culture of each author. But the truth He communicated through them went ***way*** beyond their own insight and knowledge.

- b. Peter, head of the early church and himself the author of parts of the New Testament tells us more. He says:

For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes when he received honor and glory from God the Father...Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:16-17a, 20-21 NLT)

- Peter says, "The prophets who wrote these Scriptures did ***not*** sit down one day and decide to write a book based on cool thoughts they had. They were eyewitnesses to God's intervention in human history—and it was the Holy Spirit who moved them to record it. They ***...spoke from God.***

-Why am I saying all of this? It's because if you're going to take the Bible seriously—and take the time and effort to imbed it in your heart, you need to be convinced that it's not just another religious book.

4. I've been reading and studying the Bible for a long time. Let me tell you what I see, and why I've given my entire life to studying, teaching, and doing all I can to live by this book.

- a. First, it gives us an accurate picture of God by revealing how He has worked with humans over the years. There are things that you can know about God—just by looking at what He has made. You can see that He's powerful and brilliant. But what you would never see without special revelation is that it's been wrecked by something called ***sin***—or rebellion against God's leadership. You also wouldn't see that God has a plan—and is working that plan—to one day make ***everything*** new and right.

-Without special revelation, you'd tend to just see Jesus as a very special teacher and prophet who showed up—not God Himself. You'd tend to see the cross as a horrible tragic end to Jesus' life—not part of God's plan to make everything new—including us.

-We get so used to things the way they are that unless our hearts and minds are regularly re-calibrated by the teaching of the Bible, we tend to make God

just like us: A God who believes in the Canadian dream where there's a chicken in every pot and a Mercedes in every garage. A God who hates other's sins—but doesn't mind mine. A God who doesn't require what I don't want to give. A God who agrees with my politics, my financial strategy, the way I treat people and the way I live life.

-Bottom line? The truth revealed by God is our only hope if we are going to be saved from our **narcissism!**

- b. The Bible also gives us a heads up on the landmines in life. We were created in the image of God—to reflect who He is—and live under His leadership. When we rebel against the way He has created us and created everything else—it leads to death and has the potential to destroy everything we love. If you see anything that's diseased, polluted, decayed, spoiled or hurt in some way—sin is behind it. It's that simple.

-Does anyone here have a laptop? If you have a nail loose on your deck—would it hurt to pound it back in with the laptop? Probably. Not the nail, the laptop. It wasn't **made** for that. We were not made for sin—it **wrecks** us.

-Listening to what the truth of God has to say about life is good for your emotional, relational, physical and spiritual health. This truth is more healthy for you than working out every day and eating broccoli. But to help you, you have to not just know it and believe it—you have to trust it. Actually **do** it!

- c. But it goes **way** deeper than that. It pulls the cover off my life—and reveals who I am. We'd like to believe, when it comes to our hearts, **it's all good!** But it's not. It's the Bible that says that my heart—and yours—is deceitful. Bent in the wrong direction. We **want** to do good—but we can't pull it off. As hard as we try, our good gets tainted with pride and criticism of others. And since the heart is the place where we make our decisions—our decisions are tainted. We will do things to others, do things to ourselves—make really, **really** bad choices—and **deceive** ourselves into thinking that **we're** in the right! God's Word is the only truth I know of that cuts through all the junk and exposes it for that it is. The book of Hebrews says it like this:

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.
(Hebrews 4:12-13 NLT)

-Sharp, cutting, exposed, naked—tough words! But it's better than the alternative—an unchanged life before the One before whom we are **all** accountable. This is truth you and I **want** to know! **Need** to know!

5. One of the major problems we face as followers of Jesus living in the 21st century is the avalanche of news, opinion, information—the stuff you hear every single day—sold to us as **the TRUTH.**

-Jesus taught that life is **not** about me; and life is not about what you can get, but what you can give. Jesus said that greatness comes from servanthood—not achievement. Our culture says that we create our own truth. Jesus said, **I Am** the Truth. The world system says that everything will end when the planet heats up, there are too many people, and not enough fresh water—or in some giant nuclear fireball. The Bible says that God will determine the end of time—and create a new Heaven and a New Earth. That grace and hope and forgiveness is available to everyone—through Jesus. The message we are fed every day almost completely contradicts the truth Jesus came to reveal.

-Anyone know what it's called when a story that's not true is told and retold and retold—reinforced with music, slogans and slick images? It's called **brain-washing**. Over time, unless there truth to counter-act it, you **buy in!**

- a. The specific danger we face could be called the **law of exposure**. When we are exposed to a message again and again—we think about it. It becomes part of the flow in our minds. And what we think about we ultimately become. Our thoughts shape **us**—our values, how we act, what we buy into and how we live. That's just the truth about the way we learn.

-It's **possible** to call yourself a follower of Jesus—because you believe in Jesus—and yet live by an alien value system—and totally **miss** the plot in life. What if you or I did that—then passed into eternity having lived a life based on lies? I mean, does it matter if you impress everyone here—and they write you up in textbooks and put a big granite marker over your grave—and God writes, **FOOL** over all you've done?

- b. Paul, early leader writer of Scripture, suggests a better way. This is what he writes:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me - everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9 NLT)

-Notice the first qualification Paul mentions here when it comes to thinking. It needs to be... **TRUE!** Something can't be pure, excellent or praiseworthy—unless it's **true**. And we need enough of this truth to counteract—to wash—clean the lies out of what the world system says is true and right.

-But that's not enough. Paul says that you and I need to put into practice all that He's taught and practiced—which is included in his letters. Anyone know what the words, **put into practice** mean? You need to actually **do** it. And **then** the God of peace will be with you.

-Illustration. You and I drink the water of Lake Ontario. Think of all the fish. Think of the chemicals. Think of all the swimmers who don't feel like getting out

of the water to go to the restroom. Think of all the boats flushing their toilets. What happens between the lake and this glass of water? **Filters**. The water gets **washed**—and it needs to, cause it's contaminated. You and I need a **grid** of truth that washes and filters what we read, watch and listen to.

-Only God's Word has the power to do that. Paul says this about Christ's self-sacrificial love for His people, the Church:

He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's Word. (Ephesians 5:25b-26 NLT)

6. Here's our challenge as people who want—and **need** to know and understand the truth God's Word offers. This book contains about 1300 pages of small print—and it's ancient—and it was composed in cultures **very** different from ours.

And the life it teaches goes **contrary** to some of the most basic urges we feel. The truth journey—from this book...through our senses...to our minds...to our hearts...to the way we love, think and act is a **long** one! Some people get discouraged and give up along the way. Has anyone here ever been discouraged? If so, you're the person I want to talk to—because the truth is **so** worth the effort.

- a. The first thing you need to do is figure out how you learn best—and cooperate with it—don't fight it! The tools of our culture are phenomenal for that! If you learn best by listening—then **listen** to the Bible. If you learn best by watching the Bible—**watch it!** Or **read** it—which is less expensive than the others.

-If it's helpful to have others there—where you can discuss it—do that. If it helps to listen to teachers teach it—do that. Cooperate with how you learn. CD. Ipod. MP3. Whatever.

-Make sure you choose a readable translation in the language you grew up with—whether that's Spanish, Portuguese or Cantonese. I enjoy the New Living Translation—and I read out of a Study Bible. If there's something I don't understand—the notes are right there to help me.

-One of the great advantages of the internet is a bazillion great teachers and resources available—and I could make some recommendations if that would help. -I would say this; the Bible was meant to be learned and studied in community with others.

We call those communities **Roots** groups and ministry teams. Whatever community you choose, I would urge you to travel with and be encouraged by others in your study.

- b. If you're just starting, I would recommend that you begin with the New Testament—and I would read the first four books—the Gospel accounts of Jesus and get to know what He taught as thoroughly as you can.
- c. The third thing to remember—the Bible uses a **lot** of different literary devices. Jesus was using hyperbole—exaggeration for the sake of effect-- when he said

to cut off your hand if you're having a problem with it. As I mentioned earlier, the Bible uses parables, metaphors, poetry, narrative, prophecy—and humor. -Something else to be aware of. In Jesus' day, recording history accurately did **not** necessarily mean recording it in chronological order. Writers would cluster events for the sake of impact. Don't let that throw you—things **do** change over 2000 years!

-And be careful as you're reading to watch who is speaking to whom. Jesus says some very specific things to specific people. You have to read what is record as a narrative—as a narrative, not a personal promise. To read his promises or commands to specific people like He's promising you something—or commanding you to do something is not helpful. This is where you need to take a look at the big picture of what the Bible says on a given subject.

-And sometimes what the Bible is saying is descriptive—a history of what actually happened—not prescriptive for all other followers of Jesus to follow. It's important on any given subject to look at the broader teaching of the Bible on things.

-Another hint along this line. The Bible is not a magical book. You know, where you run into a problem and use the **flop, stop and point** method of discerning what to do. You can't just rip verses out of context to make them say what you want. It's not fair to anyone to pull specific phrases from the New Testament that seem to support what **you** believe—and then excuse it by saying, "Hey, I'm only quoting Jesus!" You have to read a book, a passage, a verse as it was intended to be read.

-Another tip. Look at subjects the Bible treats—like money, giving, respect for authority, Jesus' identity and the gifts of the Spirit in the light of **all** the Bible says. You can be **very** passionate about an issue—find a verse and think, "Wow! Look! God agrees with **ME!**"—and be totally off on the overall truth the Bible teaches.

- d. A reading tip that may be helpful to you. I like reading from several different books of the Bible at once. For example, right now I'm reading through Leviticus—and I'm right in the middle of the mildew and skin disease passages. I want to know the **whole** Bible—but it's hard to be inspired by rashes and body fluids! That's when reading from at least one other passage is helpful.
- e. Something else to remember. And that's the **point** of the truth in the Bible. It's about life transformation. It's not about the accumulation of Bible knowledge to impress others and win arguments. It's not like God is putting gold stars on some refrigerator in Heaven for how much we know—or guys like Haggai or Obadiah are going to ask us in Heaven, "Hey—how'd you like my book?"

-The point of the Bible is not having a basis on which to judge and criticize others on how well they're doing. The point of the truth in the Bible is **not** how much of it you get through. It's how much of that truth gets **through you**—and, specifically how it washes and renews your mind and transforms you into a

radically, loving person. If **love** and **grace** and **compassion** isn't the obvious result of your exposure to truth, then you've either lost the plot—or missed the point.

-Paul, an early leader, says **knowledge PUFFS up**—it leads to arrogance and the criticism of others. **Love BUILDS up**. As you read the Bible—or listen to it—or watch it—however you choose to expose yourself to it, just realize that there's a **lifetime** of information there. Take enough time to really, **really** think about it. Chew on it. The point is not how many chapters you get through in a year; the point is the transformation of your heart.

- f. Now. There's something really important I need to say at this juncture. Truth is intended to be...? **Not** accumulated like baseball cards—but **Lived**. It is possible to learn and learn and learn—and just become spiritually obese. It's possible for the gap between what you know—and what you live—to get bigger and bigger and bigger. And that gap between what you know—and how you live is called **hypocrisy**.

-When you keep eating and eating and don't exercise, the food begins to work against you—and it can kill you. If you're not getting exercise—putting your truth into practice by actively loving God and loving others—then truth will become a game of knowledge that you play. And God **never** intended truth for that purpose. Are you living the truth you know? Is the exercise you're getting increasing your appetite and making you strong? That's the way it's supposed to work!

-Something else. Some of you know the Bible pretty well. Keep an attitude of humility in it all. And remember that the Bible was never, **ever** intended as a club for you to use on others. One of the most annoying things you can do to people—especially people far from God—is quote the Bible at them. The most impressive thing you can do is live like Jesus in front of them!

Q & A

7. Our temptation—with the glut of information we face—and the fast pace of our lives—is to read the truth of the Bible like we're reading a novel or a self-help book. We pick a passage and say, "Hmmm. That sounds nice." And then we just walk away! James, half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Early Church writes:

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. (James 1:23-25 NLT)

-Every single day of our lives, we are fed untruths. The only antidote—is **Truth**. Our souls were made to run on **truth**. There's a little voice inside that's like a re-run from **A Few Good Men**, "You can't **handle** the truth!" And I would say, "Yes you can! You

were **made** for truth! God's word is a sword—a scalpel that will save our lives. God's word is a lamp—that helps us to see where we are going so we don't fall on our faces. God's Word washes our hearts from lies. God's Word has the power—when we listen and do what it says—to transform the way we think—and the way we live.

But it's not just about you. It's about the others God has called you to bless—to give your life to, to serve, to teach, to help. You need to learn to feed yourself—for **their** sake. So—will you take the time and the effort to **do** that?