

FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD: A FIVE-COURSE FEAST EVERY SUNDAY!

I have preached for over half a century. Simply being in the presence of other believers encourages my heart. Through the years, I have been blessed by being around people who know an important truth: what happens at church matters.

Church members have many different needs. On Sunday morning, we head for the same place, sustained by the same truth, united by the same Lord, hungry together. We come to feast, expecting that God's truth can still our hurried hearts, believing that God's words will provide hope that anchors us to the unseen.

We come to feast together. We come to be nourished together. Woe to the church that fails to understand and fulfill this purpose of our coming together! I feel sorry for church members who attend expectantly and go away partially filled—or empty! God's plan calls for a five-course feast every Sunday! If the church where you attend does not share a five-course feast every Sunday, you should ask why!

God's Word is at the center of the worship of the church. Worship is our priority, for in worship we feast on Scripture together and are nourished. On Sunday, the church is nurtured by Scripture, sharing the meal that sustains the spiritual health of believers. Our love for God and his Word is evident as we feast together. Churches feast on God's Word by singing it, praying it, reading it, hearing it preached, and reenacting it. Those who lead worship must be guided by this truth. **Song leaders:** lead God's people to sing God's message. **Prayer leaders:** pray God's Word. **Preachers:** be sure the message preached is God's message from God's Word. And **in the Supper**, may we never forget that we are reenacting the foundational message of God's Word!

The result is a five-course feast, a banquet for the hungry, spiritual nourishment.

Singing God's Word

The noise of the world grows dim when the voices of the redeemed rise together.

Singing too often becomes so normal that we fail to consider why we do what we do. If our singing disappeared, would it matter? According to Scripture, yes. Singing together is a gift, a spiritual action that unites us, an action God uses to nourish our souls with the truth of his word. It is a biblical command: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). As Paul writes to the Colossian church, he connects the indwelling of the word of Christ with singing.

That text suggests that our songs should be filtered by the message of Scripture? When we sing the word, our goal is that God's Word will nourish our souls. Singing is a part of our Sunday feast! We are doing more than encouraging, proclaiming, and praising. We are being fed, satisfying our spiritual hunger.

Sing with an open Bible!

Praying God's Word

In prayer we speak to God, but we also listen and are fed.

Prayer is simply calling on God. Prayer is to be guided by the word of God. We pray "in Jesus' name," according to his will. Prayer easily turns to my needs and wants and wishes. Prayer easily turns away from a focus on God, his will, his way, his word. How blessed are we to assemble and be led by those who use Scripture to shape our prayers. The needs, confessions, and praises, the gratitude and supplications of the church combine our voice with God's eternal message. Praying is part of our Sunday feasting!

Those who want to understand how to lead prayer will find the many of the prayers in the Bible helpful in leading God's people into the mind and heart of God. Praying right is easier when you pray from the Bible.

Pray with an open Bible!

Reading God's Word

How often have you thought of the Scripture reading as a feast?

Scripture reading has disappeared from the worship of many churches, except for what the preacher includes in the sermon. What a gift is it to have Scripture read with meaning, emotion, understanding! We are

served God's Word in the company of other believers, feasting with those who share the same hearty spiritual appetite. Scripture reading is not routine, hurried, getting the right words in the right order. Scripture reading washes our souls with the cleansing, nourishing, life-giving words of God.

Read along with your Bible open!

Hearing God's Word Preached

The preacher, with some audacity, must never forget that when he speaks, God speaks!

The preacher who does his work well puts on his chef's hat to bring to the people the message from God most needed in the moment. In addition, he seeks to make the meal attractive, delicious, balanced, nutritious and satisfying. The well-prepared sermon is an obvious feast – satisfying the God-hungry soul.

As in singing, praying, and Scripture reading, the sermon requires audience participation. Hearers must feast. Hearers are not being spoon-fed. Hearers must think, process, apply. God's gracious words give substance to the feast desired by a hungry family of believers.

Listen with your Bible open!

Reenacting God's Word

The communion feast is more spiritual than physical!

In the Supper, it is easy to mistake the nature of the feast. Focusing on the physical aspect only, one can easily conclude, as did a young boy: "That's not much of a meal!" The abundance of the feast shared around the table at communion is not for the physically hungry but for the God hungry. Scripture guides the hearts of the hungry.

Every Sunday! My expectation! My hope! My goal! Worship, preaching, sharing. Sometimes we feast abundantly, sometimes less so. But I depart with praise, having feasted on God Word, with that word dwelling in me abundantly. Genuine satisfaction, genuine nourishment. And the more I dine, the more my appetite for God's Word grows.