

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is in. Across the American culture there are very few things as in vogue. In our current millennium, people are flocking towards it like they did Elvis in the 50's and hammer pants in the 80's. In every medium, big and small, spiritual expression is growing like fire over thirsty grass – that is to say, you can hardly miss it! It shows up on TV, on the bestseller's list, in movies and through the ever increasing popularity of spiritual groups. Spirituality has busted out like the next Harry Potter movie or the new American Idol winner.

This interest in spirituality, however, is not as overt as one may think. For instance, among atheists and agnostics, a group we would expect little by way of spirituality, 50% believe not only that all humans have souls but that there exists an eternal afterlife.¹ Given that even our resident atheists are quite spiritual, it is not all that surprising that

¹ <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-describe-their-views-about-life-after-death/>

among 18-29 year olds in the US, being spiritual or close to God was the most selected among primary life goals.² This spirituality, though mostly a hidden yet powerful undercurrent of our culture, manifests itself even in our most popular TV dramas. The TV series, *Lost*, portrays facets of almost every major religion. The series makes numerous yet veiled references to the number 108, a sacred number within Buddhism. *Lost*'s muslim character, Sayid, is often shown praying, while Charlie, the show's Catholic, has flashbacks containing numerous religious symbols. Bestseller's like the *Celestine Prophecy* and the *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* represent a growing trend among Americans—spirituality absent God. Such observations have led the *New York Times* to comment saying, “So, anyone laboring under the delusion that the generation weaned on MTV will move us closer to being weaned of an abnormally high level of religiosity... may have to keep waiting.”³ Of course, if we assume that this spiritual interest has translated into new Christian converts on fire for Christ, we would be sorely wrong. In fact, even a cursory look at the available statistics reveals a different story. The US is currently the *only* nation in the world whose birth rate is higher than the rate in which people are coming to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.⁴ Perhaps even more

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/20/opinion/20blow.html>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/20/opinion/20blow.html>

⁴ Source

staggering may be that the US, once deemed a Christian nation, currently stands as the country with the *third* largest amount of people who do not subscribe to Christianity.⁵ Moreover, the percentage of Christian inhabitants is steadily declining.

The facts are in and hands are raised high with questions. But perhaps at the heart of all our questions is this: Why in such a spiritual society are so few people being drawn to Christianity?

To the aforesaid question there is no simple answer, at least no answer that will fit on a bumper sticker. It only seems reasonable, at least to me, that if spirituality is in, but Christianity is not, then Christian “spirituality” in the US is not all that spiritual. This statement could possibly offend some, but before you write off the idea, please remember that I did not say Christianity itself is not actually spiritual —indeed I believe that opposite to be true. There is no shortage of biblical passages that attest that Christianity was meant to be a spiritual religion. One example is Jesus telling His disciples to “worship in spirit and in truth,” which explicitly teaches us that Christian worship ought – and was meant to be – intensely spiritual.

We cannot say that the problem is that Christianity is not spiritual, but rather that its inherent spirituality has been lost in a cacophony of habit and laziness. The sanctuary bell

⁵ <https://www.wnd.com/2008/07/70601/>

has become an uninteresting and uninviting noise, and those looking for more than just spiritual clatter have stayed far from the pulpit's voice. And those Christians looking for spiritual harmony are often met with broken notes, driving them from church to church in search of the divine melody. This often leads Christians, on one hand, to become listless robots. And, on the other hand, in some form or another, hyper-charismatic.

Some spiritual groups will create "spirituality" through emotion, empty promises, manufactured abilities, or by dreaming up spiritual gifts that are not in the service of a spiritual life. I once saw a preacher of a so called mass healing give the Cleveland Indian's baseball team over to the Detroit Tigers in the name of Jesus. Jesus must care little for baseball considering the Indians won the season series that year 11 games to 7.

Once while at work, a refrigerator repair man began to tell me that God had worked powerfully in his life a few days earlier. He was overjoyed, changed and enraptured by God's powerful movement in his life. Naturally, I was intrigued and visibly excited about what might have transpired, already allowing my mind to postulate what possibly could have happened: a miraculous healing or unexpected salvation of an unbelieving soul. He began his story talking about how God had led him to a Fred Meyer store. At this point I was on the edge of my seat, God working in a public venue in a powerful way! This I had to hear. What exactly did God do? God led

the refrigerator repair man to the futon section. My mind racing with possibilities, a weeping woman, divine intervention, what did God have in store for him in the futon section? Well, apparently God's divine prompting led him to the perfect sized futon cover—not too big or too small, he knew because he had called his wife to confirm. Now, excuse my skepticism, but I'm certain that even the most devote atheist could find the right sized futon.

Another time I saw a man tell a woman that he was going to heal a fungus on her finger. After he had prayed and the fungus remained unyielding, he told her that it would be gone in a few days. I am sure this was true because it was a fungus that would be gone in a few days anyway.

While these three examples were firsthand experiences, fabricated spirituality is rampant. Just as a young child who is having trouble making a friend at school might create an imaginary one, the American church has created an imaginary spirituality to fill its void.

So what is the reason for this spiritual dissonance in American Christianity? Perhaps it is because the church has been too focused on programs and the organization of the church. Or perhaps it is because we have equated spirituality with the hyper-charismatic movements or eastern mysticism—rendering spirituality taboo. Maybe it is because modern Christianity has sought to love God with only the mind and has left the heart and soul to become vestigial organs of the Christian life. Maybe it is a combination of these things or

maybe it is something altogether different, I do not know. What I do know is that people outside of Christianity are now seeing it as boring, hollow and full of a bunch of religious cretins and hypocrites—people who are, for all intents and purposes, Christians by name only. This has caused the author, Dan Kimball, to suggest that they “like Jesus but not the church.”⁶

Furthermore, the harsher reality is that many who hold to the truths of Christianity are feeling and thinking something similar. Your reading of this book suggests that you probably believe there might be something more for Christians and their spiritual lives. I believe that Christianity has the potential to be the most spiritually fulfilling religion in the world. It can move past the boring, insignificant, and monotonous caricatures of the church, into a powerful and transforming force in our lives and world today. Put more simply, I believe Christianity can bring life to our spiritual lives.

Speaking about Christian people, the Bible tells us in Ephesians 2:4, 5, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.” This verse tells us that faith in Jesus Christ enables us to become spiritually alive. There is no question as to what this means, given that Paul has already clarified its meaning one verse prior. In 2:3, Paul shows us

⁶ <https://www.amazon.com/They-Like-Jesus-but-Church/dp/0310245907>

that those who have yet to accept God’s gracious gift of salvation are still caught in their sin and are consequently hell-bound. So when Paul writes that we have been made alive in Christ, he is making it clear that by becoming Christians, we may unfetter ourselves from the shackles of sin and death and become partakers of life forevermore. When we truly understand Paul’s definition of what it is to be spiritually alive, then we understand that becoming spiritually alive is, by orders of magnitude, more important than any decision in the world —be it that the ramifications are eternal. It is my hope and goal that every reader of this book has or will become spiritually alive. However, having spiritual life is not at the heart of this book. In John 10:10 Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Jesus did not only come and die that we may be spiritually alive, he came that we may experience life to the fullest. A more literal translation of John 10:10 translates the final phrase “to the full” with a single word, “abundantly.” Just like an artistic ability comes with the potential to create magnificent artistic works, so the gift of salvation comes with the potential of a spiritually fulfilled life. Though not every person born with the gift of art paints portraits, so not every Christian is spiritually fulfilled. It reminds me of one of my favorite quotes from Mel Gibson’s, *Braveheart*, “Every man dies, not every man truly lives.” In fewer words, not every Christian who is spiritually alive, experiences life abundantly.

The word abundant can be defined as “present in great

quantity; more than adequate; oversufficient.”⁷ And a quick look at a thesaurus will reveal the following synonyms:

abounding, ample, bounteous, no end of, overflowing, rich.⁸

For the sake of clarity, I will liken it a woman who has just received a plot of land for a garden. This plot has an enormous amount of latent potential for blossoming, flourishing and thriving life. She is equipped with everything she needs to create a marvelous arabesque of colors, with intertwined flowers and foliage—full of beauty and life. Many of you may be alive in Christ – insofar as you have received salvation by “receiving the plot” – but are also overtly aware that your spiritual life falls a mighty distance from its abundant potential – like an untended field conquered by the whims of weeds and weather. Often our spiritual lives seem more like the untended and fruitless plot than the flourishing garden—our spiritual lives are, for all intents and purposes, dead.

One meaning of the word dead is, “lacking power to move, feel, or respond.”⁹ These definitions for death reveal that it is completely possible to be spiritually alive all while being void of the abundant life that Jesus came to give. Sometimes we lack so much in abundance that we are little more than the dead. This almost dead spiritual life should not be confused as something that leaves one totally incapacitated

⁷ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/abundant>

⁸ <https://www.ththesaurus.com/browse/abundantesaurus.com>

⁹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dead?s=t>

by sin or destined for hell. It is, rather, like the untended plot. It still has value and potential but at this time it is dead. Paul has a similar emphasis when he writes about the spiritual lives of two men who had not held firmly to their faith or good conscience. In 1 Timothy 1:19 he writes that these two men had experienced shipwreck of their spiritual lives. Though the meaning of this verse is often disputed,¹⁰ for our purposes, it serves as a great metaphor for those who have temporarily useless spiritual lives, like a boat that has run aground.

The abovementioned definitions that have been put forth leave us with three categories of people: (1) Those who are spiritually dead, (2) those who are spiritually alive, but whose life is not abundant, and (3) those who have life abundantly. Everyone in the world fits into one of the three groupings listed. Looking at the lives of three individuals will aid in creating a clear trichotomy among these categories.

We must resist the temptation to represent the first group of people with extremes. Too often when we talk about people who do not have a relationship with Christ we resort to using the most extreme examples—as if all unchurched persons are closet sociopaths. Sometimes we want to go down Wikipedia’s list of atheists¹¹ and find the people with the worst tract records and point to them and say, “See what

¹⁰ There is theological disagreement even among the authors of this book.

¹¹ Yes, this really exists.

happens when you are spiritually dead!” Or we want to point out that the greatest killing sprees in history have been enacted via the leadership of just fifty-two atheists.¹² But this is disingenuous. For me, a better depiction of this comes from the life of a woman whom I knew personally. Trisha¹³ grew up in a Christian home but never gave her life to Jesus. At a young age she began to feel the void of spiritual emptiness and began to try to fill the void with other things. At first, her attempts lead her to a man that, through the tender lies of false love, impregnated her just after high school. Her marriage to her child’s dad ended as quickly as it had started—like a sudden flame with nothing left to burn. In dire hope to reignite, she fled from one man to another, only to find more false hope and hollow promises. As relationship after relationship came and went, it was apparent that men were not the missing piece to the jigsaw puzzle of her heart. Though she continued searching for fullness in the fleeting

¹² “The total body count for the ninety years between 1917 and 2007 is approximately 148 million dead at the bloody hands of fifty-two atheists, three times more than all the human beings killed by war, civil war, and individual crime in the entire twentieth century combined.” - The Irrational Atheist (<https://www.amazon.com/Irrational-Atheist-Dissecting-Trinity-Hitchens/dp/1941631622>)

¹³ A pseudonym for anonymity.

warmth of men, she began, instead, to hide the hole from herself by drinking it further and further from her consciousness. The alcohol became like food and water. But like any temporal relief, the alcohol began to wane, and the hole resurfaced. Her daily binges could no longer hide the ever-growing chasm in her soul. She continued to try and fill a spiritual hole with physical things and illicit drugs became an active part of her regiment. Her fight to fill the void culminated with her committing a crime that has put her in a cell for several years—a cell that is far more shallow and lit than the deep and dark hole still growing in her soul.

Being spiritually dead lead Trisha to do things in her life that as a young person she would have never considered possible. She was not any worse of a person than the average human being, but apart from Christ, there was a giant hole deep in her spirit. This hole constantly left her feeling depressed, lonely and without hope. Not all people apart from Christ try to minimize these feelings with sex or drugs – indeed I can think of many such persons as I write this now – but these feelings are consistent among people who do not know Jesus and Trisha’s story illustrates where such feelings can lead. If someone is without Christ and finds themselves always wanting something more, and when he finally receives or achieves the thing he thinks will satisfy him, and it does not, then this person adequately sums up our first category.

The second category is perhaps the easiest to illustrate. It may be as simple as turning to the person next to you in

church. Churches, as it would seem, are full of people who have new life in Christ that is, unfortunately, devoid of all vigor that should follow thereafter. In his book, *The Seven Faith Tribes*, George Barna relays that his research has shown 66% of all Americans to be in this category—a category he calls “Casual Christians.”¹⁴ The estimated population of the United States is over 304,000,000 which gives over 200,640,000 examples to pick from in order to illustrate Christians who are without the abundant life Christ came to give. With all of these options the decision on who best illustrates this group is nothing short of obscure. To say there is a best choice would be like saying there is a best leaf on a tree or best drop of water in a bucket. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, I’ll choose as an illustration the person I know best: me.

I have been a Christian since I was four years old – insofar as I had accepted the most rudimentary concept of the Christian gospel: Jesus’ love. Like most young converts to Christianity, I was brought up in a Christian home. My family was extraordinarily loving and so were the churches I had attended. I had every opportunity to have a spiritual life that flourished. Despite the freshly tilled soil of a loving family and the showers of spiritual guidance, my garden, my spiritual life,

¹⁴ <https://www.barna.com/research/americas-seven-faith-tribes-hold-the-key-to-national-restoration/>

was so very typical. As the years transpired my childish faith remained just that—undeveloped and stagnant. I avoided what most Christians would consider the “bad” sins, but freely indulged in whatever could be justified. I neither prayed much nor loved much. I cared about what did not matter, indulged in what would never stay—living for the temporal, fleeting pleasures of a non-eternal world. Let not my prose confuse you; sex and intoxicants were not my drugs of choice. For me, it was the glory of athletic success and the honor of academic superiority. My habits were no less sinful than the habits of the addict or the philanderer. As the demon Screwtape advised his nephew Wormwood in C.S. Lewis’, *The Screwtape Letters*, “...remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy [God]. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”¹⁵

I did not allow Christ to have control of my life. If my life was a puzzle, Christ would have certainly been a piece, somewhere in the inconspicuous middle, forgotten amidst the innumerable surrounding pieces. The puzzle created a clear image of a haphazard, worldly life. I had succeeded in making

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, pg. 60, 61.

Christ a piece of something for which he should have been the picture. I was still a Christian and this was evident every now and then, but my spiritual life meant very little to me and resulted in very little to those around me. I did not feel the joy of God and I did things that I regret to this day. During that period in my life I was spiritually alive but had no resemblance of an abundant life. While my destination was heaven and I had the ability to avoid sins, there was an emptiness inside of me, much like that of Trisha, that left me daily trying to satisfy those deeply spiritual hunger pangs. Of course, had I remained in such a state I would not be here to write this book. There is an invigorating power available in the Christian life, a power that enables the bland to shine and the least to be great.

I could at this point discourage all readers by illustrating the third category using grandiose characters of Christian history. From the meek and mild Mother Theresa, to the booming oratory of Billy Graham, there is no shortage of eminent, spiritually vivacious individuals. I would hate the readers to think that this third category is a mere reverie of impossibilities, a rut of rarely-happenings.

If I were to use someone such as the Apostle Paul to illustrate this third category it would be like describing the way Michael Jordan played basketball and then telling you that if you want to be good at basketball then you need to play like him. This would just leave you discouraged and probably cause you to give up on your efforts.

Instead, I need not look any further than my own family to find a perfect example of what it is to be a Christian who has life abundantly.

My Grandma accepted Jesus into her life at a very young age and throughout her years she has let every circumstance be affected by that relationship. My Grandma will never have her life chronicled on a national television program and there is nothing about her presence that would ever show anyone that she is anything but ordinary, but her spiritual life is remarkable. Her life is not without hardship. Indeed we are often defined by our hardships. My Grandma had her husband leave her empty handed with two young children grasping at her hems. To shatter that which was already broken, her father died in a devastating car accident shortly thereafter. Calamity had hit like an unexpected tidal wave, but still, in the midst of it all, she found hope. Grandma was sitting in church one day shortly before her father had died and she was not singing during worship, her father leaned over and asked her why she was not singing, she responded, "I just don't feel like worshipping today." Without hesitation, her father offered back, "Worship is not about how you feel." He made his point clear that God deserves worship even on the days that we don't feel like it. The Sunday after her father's death, she stood before the singing saints of her church, morose and distraught, wanting only to cry and not to sing. Words, however, never die and she heard the voice of her father reverberating within her. She sang, she worshipped, she loved

—and her father, no doubt, even then, was proud.

My Grandma is a great example of someone who is abundant or full, not because of her ability to worship at church when times are rough, but her ability to worship with her whole life everyday. My Grandma has an eternal mindset that enables her to live in light of eternity. She doesn't just pretend to look forward to being with God someday in Heaven as so many in our American churches do, but she is genuinely and passionately excited to spend eternity with Him.

Her desire to serve God with everything makes her the most loving and giving person I have ever known. She has served in children's ministry for most of her life, but her greatest ministry has probably been done to the people in our family. No one would claim that she has changed the world, but all people close to her would be quick to say that she has changed our world for the better. The best example of this was when she took care of her mom for the final days of her life. It was hard work as my great grandma was having major heart problems coupled with severe dementia. My grandma took care of her without hesitation and without complaint. It was the most beautiful picture of love and ministry I have ever seen first hand and it happened by a person who is ordinary in all ways except for how wonderfully abundant her spiritual life is. No matter how boring or how difficult life becomes, my grandma's need for spiritual fulfillment is always satisfied because of her amazing relationship with God. She truly has an abundant spiritual life. It is no wonder why my little cousin

affectionately calls her, “our little saint.”

I hope the aforesaid illustrations aid in creating a clear trichotomy between the categories. It is no wonder now that I am going to ask you to think and reflect and determine what category you fall in. I hope and pray that you have accepted Jesus Christ into your life as the savior of the world. If you have not, do not continue normally, but skip to the last chapter of the book entitled, *The Bread*. For those of you who have accepted the salvation of Jesus Christ, I encourage you to seriously reflect on the condition of your spiritual life. Some questions that may aid you in this endeavor are as follows:

- Do you focus on understanding God’s will for your life?
- Do you pray?
- Do you read the Bible?
- Do you go to church?
- Do you hang out with godly Christian people that will help you to understand how God wants you to live?
- Are you growing spiritually?
- If you look back a year from now, were you in the same place spiritually that you are today?
- Are you committing the same sins today that you have been committing for a long time?
- Can you see any difference in your life from when you were first saved?
- Are you able to make decisions in everyday life

based on what you believe God desires?

- Do you act like a Christian around non-Christians?
- Can people tell that you are a Christian if you do not tell them?
- If you did tell them would they be surprised?
- When is the last time you told somebody about the saving work of Jesus Christ?
- Has your relationship with the Lord caused you to be more patient, kinder and more loving?
- Does your spiritual life produce results or is it not making any difference in your life or any of the lives around you?

These questions were specifically designed so that you can have a clear picture as to whether or not your spiritual life is thriving. Are you spiritually fulfilled? Now stop reading for a moment and honestly reflect on your answers to these questions as you consider the state of your spiritual life. Is it abundant or just alive?

When we look at these questions I think that most of us can attest that our spiritual lives are not as abundant as they can and should be. In fact, we can probably attest that we function at a near-dead capacity all of the time. It makes sense why spiritual-seekers are not genuinely drawn to Christianity when they look at the average Christian and see only a barren field—where they would like to see fruit, blossoms and color

they see only weeds and overgrowth. This poor spiritual state of American Christianity is bad news, but the glorious good news is that we have the potential for so much more. God has not created man with an insatiable desire for more – an unquenchable spiritual longing – God has enabled us to have that longing satisfied, the thirst quenched, the desire satiated.

So, if we have this potential, but our spiritual lives are dead or close to dead, what must we do? The answer to this question lies in the definition of the word alive: “having life,” or “not dead or inanimate.” This definition refers, of course, to the physical realm and not the spiritual, but, as will be shown later on, the difference is really quite small. Our hearts beat, we inhale and exhale, and our brains send neurological signals to different parts of our bodies to perform operations needed for life. But are these things a requirement to be definitionally alive?

When I was a sophomore in High School, a question was posed by my biology teacher, “what does it mean for something to be alive?” My class thought, like you may be thinking now, that such a question should be easy to answer. We offered the aforementioned characteristics (i.e. heartbeat, breathing, and neurological synapses), adding also the ingestion of water, the presence of feelings and the ability for movement. However, and as great as these things sounded to our biology class, our teacher shot them down with remarkable ease, carefully articulating the life forms that do not share these properties but are indubitably alive (e.g. plants

do not have heartbeats). So now I ask, do you know the answer? What makes something alive?

If you are like me and my high school biology class, you can probably come up with a myriad of different characteristics present in most life forms. But you may, like my biology class, fall quite a distance short of the actual, scientific definition of *alive*. After many attempts, my biology class began to wonder if there was an ACTUAL and definite answer to the question. Our teacher, when he realized that our attempts grew tiresome and our minds were exhausted, told us the definition of life congenial to most biological scientists. My teacher taught us that in order for something to be alive it must: (1) Take in food, (2) grow, (3) adapt to its surroundings and (4) reproduce.¹⁶₁₆

Not too long thereafter, I had an epiphany. I was sitting at my computer and, like most epiphanies, I had an idea that came from the mysterious realm of nowhere: *Those four principles from biology class can be a model for a good spiritual life*. As time has transpired I have grown to realize that this idea is not just a model for a good spiritual life, but it will necessarily be present in any life that truly has an abundant life—It is an indicator, a measurement, a guide.

It is my fervent belief that if enough Christians put this model into practice, Christianity in America would be viewed as it ought to be viewed—genuine. If this is going to happen

¹⁶ Mules, ligers, infertile, not mean

on a wide scale though, we must start with the people we see in the mirror. If we want to have a thriving, flourishing, blossoming spiritual life, then we need to take in spiritual food, grow spiritually, adapt to our spiritual surroundings, and reproduce spiritually. What it is to be physically alive is remarkably similar to what it is to have an abundant spiritual life.

I trust that this first book, *Spiritual Food*, will serve as a fantastic beginning in the process of moving you in this direction. In fact there have been times in my ministry prior to the completion of this book where I have wished I could simply hand somebody a copy of it and say, “You should read this,” knowing that the ideas within its pages would have impacted their life powerfully. Even more, in my own life I can recognize times when the things written here would have been the perfect thing for me to read. I believe in this book’s ability to elevate our spiritual lives (with the help of the Lord) so much that when the words of this book were simply ideas bouncing around in my head, I said more than once that if I do not write it then somebody else should.

It is my prayer that you read this book with an open heart, prepared to grow and to change, for hereafter a journey lays waiting, a journey to flourish and thrive. So read and ingest, but most of all, let your life become abundant.

CHAPTER 1.5

A NOTE ABOUT FOOD

When I was much younger, I participated in what is called the Thirty Hour Famine. My body was not accustomed to being without its tri-daily dose of nutrients. I became lethargic and achy; my stomach, I believe, began to consume itself. To physically be without food is one of the worst experiences I have encountered—and it was only for thirty hours! Imagine going for days on end, robbing yourself of essential nutrients that your body needs to survive. An occasional fast is one thing¹⁷, but when it becomes a lifestyle it is dangerous.

As is already obvious, the comparison between our physical and spiritual lives is precise. If we wish to have an abundant life than we must take in food. Spiritual food gives us spiritual vivacity or spiritual energy—without it we will be spiritually inert. In fact, the consumption of spiritual food is so vitally important that our entire spiritual lives rest on its

¹⁷ As Foster points out in his book, “Spiritual Disciplines,” fasting can actually be quite healthy.

foundation. If we do not take in food we will never grow. If we do not grow we will never adapt to our surroundings, and if we never adapt to our surroundings we will never reproduce spiritual fruit. For all intents and purposes, are spiritual lives mimic our physical lives in this regard.

We all know that if we do not eat physical food for a long period of time we will become extremely unhealthy. In fact, a “markedly reduced appetite or total aversion to food”²¹⁸ characterizes the disease called Anorexia. This disease is a major problem for the health of any person who suffers from it. What is worse is that there are many other major health issues that come along with it. These include permanent stunted growth, a lack of ability in the body to deal with diseases, and infertility. As you can see these problems match the four things that make something alive. Anorexia actually sucks the life out of a person and spiritual anorexia drains the spirit.

However, the difference between anorexia and our spiritual lives is that while the first can lead to death, the second will not if we have faith in Jesus Christ. It will, on the other hand, lead to near-dead spiritual lives, empty and hollow – holding desperately to life by the weakened threads of a distant faith. So if we desire to be more than just walking spiritual cadavers, we must eat. But what exactly ought we to eat? It is not only about eating something (though that is a

¹⁸ <https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=2268>

good start), it is about having a well-balanced food intake. While a strict diet of McDonalds will certainly keep you alive, it will keep you far from healthy.

The question is best answered by looking at how we typically act with our physical food. For instance, when preparing a meal, one typically thinks about what will be both nutritious and enjoyable. Nobody thinks to themselves, *what is the bare minimum that I need to eat in order to stay alive*. Unfortunately, however, we DO think like that with our spiritual lives – or at least it seems we do. We focus on taking in the spiritual food that will simply keep us alive. Since belief in Jesus Christ is a means to an end, we too often allow ourselves to forget about all the fullness in between. We may even think, *If I am saved in the end, why does it matter whether or not I live out my salvation now?* Of course this type of thinking is not expressed outwardly by most Christians. However, given the available data, this seems to be the case, or at least when it comes to spiritual food intake.³¹⁹ We must extricate ourselves from this sort of debilitating thinking if we ever wish to live spiritually fulfilled lives now.

In March of 2008, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, a debilitating disease that causes damage to the central nervous system. My symptoms were: tingling all over my body, a loss in coordination, and difficulty doing athletic

¹⁹ <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>

things that once seemed easy. The most frustrating part was that I had gone from being a college baseball player (a good one at that) to a person who could barely run or jump and had hardly any ability to catch or throw a ball. The diagnosis radically altered everything about my life and completely altered my understanding of health. Nothing more fundamentally changed than my view of food. When I first learned that there was a possibility of my having Multiple Sclerosis, I immediately begin to research. One of the first things I found was that – though many health officials refuse to give it credence – a healthy diet can play a significant role in helping minimize the symptoms. Without hesitation I begin to strictly follow a diet that some believed could pay major dividends in my fight against MS. This diet cut out gluten, dairy, red meat, and chocolate. I felt like I could not eat anything that I was accustomed to eating. It was very difficult and at times frustrating to be consistent in avoiding these things. Sometime later my symptoms went away. The annoying tingling that was once so frightening I got out of bed to write an “In case I die” had disappeared. I regained my ability to run, jump, and play. I no longer dropped everything thrown to me and my ability to throw a baseball more than five feet and in the right direction came back. I attribute the disappearing of these symptoms to God first, but my diet second. What strikes me now is that I could have gone on eating normally and continued to live with my symptoms, but I would not have been living life up to my fullest potential. My

strict diet has not just kept me alive, it has added to the fullness of my life. We need to begin to recognize that spiritual food should also be adding to the quality of our spiritual lives. Just as we desire more from our physical food than life sustaining nutrition (e.g. taste), we should also desire more from our spiritual food. We should not be content with having spiritual lives that are incapable of running, jumping, and playing, but should develop good spiritual eating habits and expect that the incapacitating symptoms of spiritual hollowness and lethargy will disappear.

CHAPTER 2

A SPIRITUAL DIET

At this time it is of some importance to reflect on what it is I mean when I say, “spiritual food.” While the Bible only makes one explicit reference to spiritual food (e.g. the exact phrase), the definition used hereinafter, is merely a shortened phrase to describe a very powerful biblical theme. The term *spiritual food*, then, is defined as *anything we take in that helps us know the will and work that God has for our lives.*

The development of this theme can be seen clearly in John 4:34. In this verse we see the disciples coming back from the city with food for Jesus—no doubt trying to supply their rabbi with something delectable (or at least non-stale bread and water). With food in hand they tell Jesus, “Rabbi, eat something.” Jesus enigmatically responds, saying that he has food that they know nothing about. His disciples, surely at this point were accustomed to being confused, questioned one another saying, “Could someone have brought him food?” Jesus answers their queries in John 4:34, saying, “My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

Moreover, and along these same lines, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Righteousness has become a rather nebulous word in our present culture. When asked to define it, I am almost certain that the meaning would not be unanimous—in fact, it would probably be rather haphazard. However, righteousness was clearly understood and defined among 1st century Jews (Jesus’ original audience). According to 1st century Jews, righteousness was having a right relationship with someone.¹²⁰ “Righteousness” was used for all types of relationships. For instance, when a husband and wife had a relationship that was wholesome and pure, loving and respectful, the Jews would employ the Hebrew word *tzedek* (righteousness) to describe it. Jesus is referring to this same

²⁰ The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (Volume 3), page 80 (“Righteousness in the OT)

type of righteousness—insofar as we are to desire a wholesome and pure relationship with God. We know from elsewhere in Scripture that this righteous relationship starts first with faith in Jesus Christ, and culminates in doing his will and work. Jesus’ metaphorical language here allows us to make a more appropriate connection between spiritual food and the will and work of God.

While Jesus emphasizes the action or the doing, I would like to emphasize what it is that gets you to that point. Admittedly, it is not easy to merely do the will and work of the Father if we are unclear as to what that is. We cannot, therefore, begin to do without knowing *what* to do. So our definition of spiritual food focuses on the knowing – call it the lesser food – while Jesus’ definition of spiritual food focuses on the doing – call it the greater food. This lesser food should not be considered or deemed unimportant, because our ability to partake of the greater food is contingent on our first having been filled with the lesser.

Of course the best way to know the will and work of God is to read the Bible. Cliché, yet fundamentally true. However, to say that reading the Bible is what you need to do in order to have an abundant life is essentially equal to saying that in order to remain physically healthy one must eat food—it is obvious, but nonspecific.

So let us be specific. I, and probably many of you, have taken several health classes during my educational experience. In these classes we would inevitably talk about the *Food*

Pyramid. As you well know, the *Food Pyramid* is a chart specifically designed to outline a well-balanced diet. The reason the *Food Pyramid* is apparently quintessential to every health curriculum, is because it is impossible to have a physically healthy life apart from a diet that provides the body with the proper nutrition. This chart is a helpful guide for fostering good eating habits.

Our spiritual lives, in this regard, are fundamentally the same.²¹ A healthy spiritual life requires a healthy spiritual diet. Jim Cymbala, pastor and author, says it best in his book, *The Church God Blesses*, “Even though we are complex physical beings, we are more essentially and importantly spiritual beings!” He goes on to say, “And just as vibrant health and growth in the physical realm are critically dependent on proper, well-balanced diet, so also our spiritual side is in critical need of proper spiritual food.”²²

When we eat food – particularly healthy food – we rarely reflect on why such food is classified as it is. We know that grease-drowned sausage bites are unhealthy, and carrots are healthy. We may even know that grease-drowned sausage bites are unhealthy for various reasons including its high fat content. But what most probably do not understand (my apologies to the connoisseur), is why carrots are healthy. The answer is found in one word, nutrients—something we have

²¹ See Appendix A for Spiritual Food Pyramid

²² *The Church God Blesses*, page 42

probably heard a lot about but have little understanding of. The consumption of these “chemical compounds” is the reason a well balanced diet is so essential to our physical lives. Nutrients are defined as, “substances found in food that provide energy, regulate metabolism, and help with growth and repair of body tissue.”⁴²³ A healthy diet can come in many forms – and in fact does – but no matter the model, a wholesome diet must contain the proper nutrients.

Eating healthy was a fundamental part of my early athletic life. Of course, at that stage in my life, I was not always the most disciplined. However, I knew that if I wanted to excel in my athletic endeavors, I needed to ingest the proper nutrients. Proper nutrition (1) gives an athlete *energy* on the court or field, (2) regulates an athlete’s *metabolism*, (3) it helps them *grow* muscle, and (4) it aids in the *repair* process of body tissue after competing. These benefits of proper nutrition are easily identifiable. For example, if you have ever tried to workout on a completely empty stomach, you’ll remember that any power you thought you might have had was quickly depleted—after a short period of time, 15 pounds felt like 50. Or maybe you have stuffed yourself full of a bunch of junk food and then a few hours after you are noticeably hungry again. Your body lacked the nutrients it needed to regulate your metabolism. If nothing else, understand that proper nutrients play a dramatic role in everyday life.

²³ <https://quizlet.com/25650712/chapter-3-nutrition-for-wellness-flash-cards/>

The good thing is there is really no difference between the effects of proper nutrition on an athlete's health, and the effects of proper spiritual nutrition on a Christian's life. In fact, these four traits are the very reason that we so utterly need spiritual food. Spiritual food, with good "nutrients," provides us with spiritual *energy*, will help regulate our spiritual *metabolism*, assist in spiritual *growth* and will aid in the *repair* of damage that has been done to our spiritual lives.

METABOLISM

Before we can effectively understand what a spiritual metabolism is, we must first have a cursory understanding of the role our metabolism plays in our natural lives. Science defines the metabolic process as, "the sum of the chemical reactions that take place within each cell of a living organism and that provide energy for vital processes and for synthesizing new organic material."²⁴ To state it more plainly, metabolism is the process in which the body takes the food we ingest and, through chemical reactions, turns it into something beneficial for the sustainment of life.

Metabolism can be best explained by comparison. Our metabolisms operate much like a fire does. The sort of things we require for a fire we also require for our metabolisms. When starting a fire we require an initial spark and also

²⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/science/metabolism>

require a sort of fuel, like kindling and wood. The way the fire will burn and the duration of its flame is largely contingent upon the type of fuel we use. Moreover, a fire without consistent replenishment of fuel will eventually turn to nothing more than fading embers, the dull orange of a fire long forgotten.

If we do not feed a fire consistently then we eliminate its light and its warmth. But a fire fears more than starvation. There is a certain danger that an overzealous fire-starter is all too familiar with. If we overfeed a fire, stacking numerous logs upon a new flame, we are in danger of snuffing it out. If we feed the fire a smaller amount at a consistent rate, we foster its growth and strengthen the flames ability to handle larger quantities of fuel.

Our metabolism works just as I have said above. It requires a consistent supply of foods in order to remain healthy. An overfed metabolism is slowed and an underfed one is starved. Consistency is fundamental to a healthy metabolism.

At its base, our spiritual metabolism is not fundamentally different than our biological metabolism. Those with an undying passion for the Lord are known as being on fire for Christ. This terminology is not unfamiliar to us. We see it, for example, in the names of our worship music (*Fire Fall Down*), our ministries (Acquire the Fire) and our books (*Ignite the Fire*). This startlingly powerful metaphor should be the goal of all Christians. But all too often this fire metaphor becomes

nothing more than empty rhetoric or a marketing tool. Too often this fire metaphor becomes nothing more than a line we repeat in a song we do not quite understand. The sound of it on our tongues is all too familiar, but have our hearts ever truly tasted it? This old adage of being on fire for Christ has gone to the wayside like so many adages before it—a line said because it’s familiar, not because it’s understood.

So let us understand it now for it is too important to become lost to the apathy of familiarity. Our spiritual lives are fires. Those who talk about wanting more passion for God but never seem to get it have forgotten this. Our fires are sparked when we accept Christ as our Savior and the Holy Spirit enters our lives. But if we do not give our spiritual fires fuel to burn, how do we expect God to fan the fire in us to flame? We cannot blame God for our lack of passion no more than we can blame a fire for failing if it has nothing to burn. God will never snuff us out. In Isaiah (later repeated in Matthew) God said, “a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice...” How can we remain faithful when we have but a smoldering passion to do so?

We must start by giving our spiritual fires (henceforth known as spiritual metabolism) something to burn. The supply for our spiritual metabolism is the spiritual food that we are talking about in this book. We must feed our spiritual metabolisms constantly and consistently. It seems that people who genuinely desire to have an increased passion for the

Lord are often times at a loss as to how to get it. Following the lead of a good fire builder or a healthy eater is the only approach that will accomplish this goal. Constantly feed the spark of God's love with a consistent amount of the proper supplies and your spiritual life will be set ablaze.

Our fire for the Lord needs to burn more intensely and our spiritual metabolism requires regulation. This is the first way that spiritual food will help us have an abundant spiritual life. Fortunately for us, the benefits of spiritual food do far more than stoke our spiritual metabolisms.

ENERGY

A healthy spiritual diet inevitably gives us an abundance of spiritual energy. Of course energy is not a hard sell in a society obsessed with it. Almost everyone drinks some type of energy enhancing beverage (if you count the smorgasbord of varying coffees). You can find energy pills at any grocery store and advertisements touting products that will increase overall energy and acumen. Though we all may not give into the the energy craze, we certainly all recognize its importance in a busy society. Additionally, we all recognize that it is food that gives us the strength and energy we need in a day. If we stop eating our daily requirements for food we will almost immediately feel the ramifications. We become lethargic and, sometimes, completely unwilling to do even the simplest tasks. If we go too long we will begin to starve—weak and waning,

our zest for life will run dry as everyday will become a pursuit of crumbs. And how is our spiritual life any different? Without spiritual food we become lethargic Christians—Sunday becoming nothing more than another chore, a chore we are sometimes too tired to do. How can we have an abundant spiritual life if we neglect the very things that would make it so? When we do not eat enough spiritual food we lack spiritual energy and then it becomes hard for us to perform the spiritual tasks that we feel and know we should be doing. Things such as worship (through music), teaching God’s Word in a Bible study, praying and overall living a life pleasing to God become more and more difficult with every spiritual meal we miss. As these things and others become difficult it is our tendency as humans to quit doing them. For many Christians that have never had a proper spiritual diet, they never begin them at all. If we quit or never begin these tasks and others that God has for us then we are living lives outside the will of God and will assuredly not have an abundant spiritual life.

Some Christians, on the other hand, continue to do said activities even while their spiritual energy wanes. Attempting to live spiritually without spiritual food is like running a marathon on an empty stomach. It is a set up for failure and grave mistake. An exhausted athlete will easily fail in his goals and become injured. An exhausted Christian will just as easily fail in his goals and fall prey to easily surmounted temptations. Some Christian leaders exemplify this truth

perfectly. Overwhelmed with work and study they forget the importance of personal edification and starve themselves to exhaustion —growing too tired to continue in their ministry. In his book, *Vintage Church*, Mark Driscoll includes a letter that he wrote to his congregation. In this letter Driscoll details the exhaustion that stemmed from running a spiritual marathon on an empty stomach. “I was working far too many hours and neglecting my own physical and spiritual well-being, and then I hit the proverbial wall. For many weeks I simply could not sleep more than two or three hours a night. I had been running on adrenaline for so many years that my adrenal glands fatigued, and the stress of my responsibilities caused me to be stuck ‘on’ physically and unable to rest or sleep. After a few months I had black circles under my eyes, was seeing a fog, and was constantly beyond exhaustion.” He goes on to describe how the ministry demands continued to grow and caused him to consider that which he had never considered before. “I seriously pondered leaving Mars Hill Church for the first time ever. I still loved our Jesus, loved our mission, loved our city, and loved our people. However, I sunk into a deep season of despair as I considered spending the rest of my life serving at Mars Hill Church.”⁶²⁵

Driscoll was fortunate that his love had not grown cold as it so easily can for those who neglect spiritual food. The repercussions can take many forms but most often we see

²⁵ *Vintage Church*, 153

people hit rock bottom emotionally, give into temptations (like so many pastors in our country today), and/or turn their minds, hearts, and actions as far away from Christianity as they can. Inactivity in our spiritual lives is never good. However, activity without spiritual nutrition is a roadmap to failure.

Many reading this book lack activity in their spiritual lives. I would offer that this should change, but before you jump into a ministry or start working on making grand changes to your spiritual life you need to recognize that without a good spiritual diet you will never be successful at the things you want to accomplish. Instead of jumping into more activity you need to work on your spiritual eating habits so you can have the energy and spiritual acumen to do what God has called you to do.

Others reading this book already have active spiritual lives. Perhaps some are even pushing themselves to the max. This may be causing those readers to feel burdened, weary and as though they are constantly functioning near the point of exhaustion. Every day these people may think “How am I going to find it in me today to...” The answer to that thought is spiritual food. It is the only thing that will provide us with the spiritual energy we need to do the things that we know God wants us to do and the things that we are already doing for Him.

As is clear then, whether you are hard at work for Christ or desire to be, you require spiritual food for energy —without

it you will be assigned to exhaustion and eventual failure.

The regulation of spiritual metabolism and energy, then, are two important examples of spiritual food's benefits. Two forthcoming and additional benefits, however, are just as important. As we move through these benefits I hope to excite your desire for the great things that eating properly can do for your spiritual life.

GROWTH

Growth is one of the most important things that nutrients helps to foster. As already mentioned in the introduction, growth is one of foundational attributes of life. Since growth is such an important topic we have made it the focus of the next book in this series and will only briefly explain it here.

Christians who seek a stronger and deeper relationship with God are really seeking to grow spiritually. Those who want to be on fire for Christ are desiring growth. In fact, the majority of the New Testament is written by those who are seeking to cultivate Christian growth. Paul, James, Peter and others are writing so that Christians will grow in love and wisdom. This growth is measured by our likeness to Christ. As we become less like the world and draw closer in likeness to Christ, we are experiencing Christian growth. The Bible refers to this growth as sanctification.²⁶ Paul says in 1

²⁶ *Hagiasmos* “to be set apart or made holy.”

Thessalonians 4:3, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” All should agree that since it is God’s will for us then it should be our will as well. Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 1:16 to, “be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

Spiritual food is not just a step in having an abundant spiritual life, it is the very bedrock on which it rests. What man can grow physically without food? What man can grow spiritually without spiritual food? Many people desire to have a stronger relationship with God but, having no understanding of where to begin, never make a genuine effort. You cannot expect your wants to magically manifest. The process is sometimes slow but it is always sure. You must eat before you grow. As the old adage goes, Rome was not built in a day—but it was built. As 1 Peter 2:2 wisely notes, “ Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, **so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.**”⁸²⁷

REPARATION

The final benefit of spiritual food comes in the form of reparation. One of the most self-evident truths of our world is that bad things happen—both naturally and by our own doing. These natural and self-perpetuated bads coalesce and cause

²⁷ Emphasis ours

deep spiritual lacerations. We hug our fears and struggle against our worries, angers and guilts. We all silently or openly wish that certain events in our lives had never happened at all. Sometimes these things leave us empty and bereft of hope. We see spiritual leaders caught up in sin who fall as Goliath did so long ago. We remember the pain of accidents that took loved ones from us. We recall our own sins that make us cringe and wonder how forgiveness could ever be an option.

It is clear that there is no person without problems - spiritual or otherwise - past and present. Many of these things have left us with open wounds. These wounds are a burden on our spirits. Sin binds us and pain taunts us when we are vulnerable. Wounds left untended can be fatal. If we do not tend to our spiritual wounds, we, like a fallen and bleeding soldier, will be drained of life.

Sometimes we are too ashamed of our wounds to seek help in their reparation. We would rather slowly die than be exposed. Do not let Satan lie to you. Jesus came to heal wounds such as those you hold now. When opponents accusatorily asked Jesus disciples why He hung out with tax-collectors and sinners (people despised in 1st century Israel), Jesus responded, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus is the Great Physician; there are no wounds beyond repair.

Anyone seeking an abundant spiritual life will find the

journey impossible if they do not first seek healing for these untended spiritual wounds.

Being aware of these wounds, however, is but half the battle. We cannot, by a simple wave of our hands, heal ourselves of these wounds. Spiritual wounds, like physical ones, are healed by a process that we have no control over. Band-aids and stitches do not themselves heal anything, they merely encourage the healing the our bodies do naturally. It goes without saying that there are many things we should do when we are physically wounded (antibiotics and medical attention). However, a lesser known factor in physical healing has much to do with our diets. The *Alternative Medicine Review* states, “Healing of wounds, whether from accidental injury or surgical intervention, involves the activity of an intricate network of blood cells, tissue types, cytokines, and growth factors. This results in increased cellular activity, which causes an intensified metabolic demand for nutrients. *Nutritional deficiencies can impede wound healing, and several nutritional factors required for wound repair may improve healing time and wound outcome.*”⁹²⁸

No matter the interventions employed to heal physical or spiritual wounds, our efforts would be for nought if we are malnourished. Our bodies cannot heal without nutrients no more than a car can continue without gas.

It should be no surprise that in such a fallen world there

²⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14653765>

are fallen people, people whose history has left them with deep and untended spiritual wounds. Of course spiritual food is one of the most fundamental components to health. But how does this play out realistically? Peter had felt the miraculous healing power of God's word as explained in the Gospel of John. Amidst his own fear and the frantic frenzy of an oppressing crowd, Peter had denied his Messiah three times. He denied and fled from the very one who he vowed never to leave. The guilt of what Peter had done bore so heavily upon him that it's no wonder why when he ran to Jesus' empty tomb that he was surpassed by the disciple whom Jesus loved and came upon it second. But when Jesus came to Peter in his resurrected form he, in his infinite mercy, resurrected Peter from his sorrow and guilt. He asked Peter, "Do you love me?" He asked Peter this three times. For each time Peter had denied Jesus, Jesus allowed Peter the opportunity to proclaim his love. Each shattered piece of Peter's heart was not shattered further by condemnation, but was restored, healed by the miraculous power of God's love and word. But Jesus does not heal without purpose. He revealed His will to Peter and commanded him to tend God's sheep.

The healing power of God's Word is not limited to the stories of the New Testament. God's healing is evident in the simple testimonies of those with us today. One such testimony comes from TestimonyShare.com:

“I remember the first panic attack that I ever had happen was when I was a little girl. I had a tormenting thought engulf my mind. “What if my mom died?” Oh my goodness, I became so scared that my mom was going to die. I would cry and lay on my mom’s lap, hoping that God would never let that happen to me. Of course, now I know that it was just Satan trying to steal my joy as a child, but I never really dealt with my problem of fear until I was much older.

As I grew up, I would have these times in my life that were really stressful. I would feel anxiety attacking my mind and body. As time passed, I slipped further and further away from the presence of God. I began to reach for the things of the world. I started drinking alcohol and partying. This only led to more guilt, shame and anxiety. Whenever I felt anxious, I would reach for a strong drink; something that would calm my nerves and make me feel numb. This went on for 14 years. Finally, I found myself hitting rock bottom, what could I do? Who could I turn to? Even though I had drifted so far away from God for all of these years, I made the decision to make a change in my life. I could not continue to slip further into the pit. I decided to go back to the cross. I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal savior and began to rebuild my life.

In 1996 I came under such an attack of the enemy that fear tried to overtake my life. I was so afraid that I was going to lose my mind and end up in a mental institution. The more I stressed about it, the stronger the attack became. I would have all of these really strange feelings and my mind became consumed with such torment. I would cry out to the Lord, ‘Please help me’ I am desperate! I am pleading to you God; please take this from me! I went to several different doctors and their diagnosis was that I had a panic disorder. The doctors prescribed Xanax and antidepressants. But wait God, I am trusting in you to take care of me. Why do I have to take this medicine when you are King of Kings and Lord of Lords? You are the Great Physician. I continually warred with the idea of taking all of this medicine when God is the healer. Satan would tell me, ‘God will heal others but not you. You are not worthy of his healing.’ Satan would also tell me that I had an evil spirit and that is why I was in this mess. Everything Satan could throw at me, he did. I became so tormented with crazy dreams that I could not sleep. I would

ask God 'where are you?' I was sinking into a pit and needed help. I didn't want to leave my house, I would get in the car and this terrible cloud of anxiety would engulf me. I would want to go back to my house as fast as I could get there. Help me God Please!

My wonderful husband Bill, and my mother, father and two sisters prayed diligently for me every day. I also had a very close friend Vonda Bishop who helped me and prayed with me. Finally one day, God placed an anointed woman of God in my life. Sister Mildred Dalton. She was an older, very wise minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She began to take me under her wing and teach me God's ways. She informed me that I was sowing all kinds of bad seeds over myself with the words that I spoke. 'Oh I'm going crazy' and 'I am afraid I am having a nervous breakdown.' Sister Dalton told me where the precious promises were in God's Word for my situation. She had walked through the same attack earlier in her Christian life. She would tell me 'Listen to me, don't listen to the devil.' I began to quote God's Word over myself every day. 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind' (2 Timothy 1:7). When I found this scripture, I stood on it with everything in me. Every time I would start to feel panicky, I would quote this scripture over myself. You see, I didn't have to do anything but stand on God's Word. God's Word is medicine to those whose find it. Of course you can't claim God's promises if you don't serve him, but if you are a believer; then it will work for you. I began to search the Bible for God's promises for me. I wrote all of those down and quoted them daily over myself. I continued to pray and ask God for his strength and help. In the midst of the storm, I used the sword of the spirit, which is God's Word to defeat the devil. This did not happen overnight, but baby step by baby step I walked out of the attack. Every day I became a little stronger and finally I looked back and I was out of the attack. I renewed my mind with God's Word, and became victorious. I built my faith by quoting His Word.”¹⁰²⁹

²⁹ <http://www.testimonyshare.com/god-healed-me-from-anxiety-and-depression/>

God can work with us in the same way. If we would just listen to the still small voice that speaks to us - both in our hearts and through God's holy Scriptures - we would not only hear God's healing words, but also his wise instruction. God formed from His very words the galaxies and all that rest within it...yet we doubt he can heal our wounds? God formed man from dust and knit each of us together within the womb and we have no time to appeal to Him? Each infinitesimal atom and hair upon our head is not beyond God's awareness nor our problems beyond His concern. Many of us have become modern day Pinocchios, our wounds as deep as his nose was long. Like Pinocchio, as our problem worsens we flee from what we need the most, our Maker. We need not become slaves to our problems - puppets to our own demise - for God calls us out much like a certain character did to Pinocchio, "Little puppet made of pine, awake. The gift of life is thine."

God's gift of life will cut through the strings of our puppethood and take us from being mere marionettes to our problems to being growing, energized and healthy Christians with untempered passion. That is the goal of spiritual food. There are those, however, who are simply ignorant of the benefits of spiritual food and go about their daily lives missing something they know nothing of, like an undiagnosed sickness one prescription away from health.

Then there are those who know very well the benefits of

spiritual food but are simply not eating it, or, quite frankly, not eating it properly. These people suffer from poor spiritual eating habits. The same God that gave us physical life also gave life to our spirits. Just as He created the body to be strong and not suffer from malnutrition, He too wants our spiritual lives to flourish. God has created us as eternal beings and thus we must start recognizing that our *true* health is utterly dependent on our spiritual diets and out of this we must start eating accordingly. For us to begin this process we must be aware of the spiritual diet problems that so many Christians suffer from. It is to these problems that we now turn our attention.