

Renewal overview three. Daily Bread and Eternal Bread. John 6. Most of us have witnessed the horrible images of people who are malnourished or even starving to death. I've never been in the situation of not having enough food to sustain my life. However, in my younger days, as a wrestler, I certainly learned to empathise more closely with those who face this plight. To stay competitive, wrestlers often lose as much weight as possible to compete against smaller and lighter athletes. Therefore, to reach my most competitive weight I often went for days at a time where I ate little to nothing. During my more prolonged fasts I would move beyond feeling hungry only in my stomach to a state where my whole body would cry out for sustenance.

The evidence of the gospels makes it clear that the poverty and lack of available food in the world in which Jesus lived was certainly more acutely felt than it is in our society. For many who lived in first century Israel, the words, "Give us this day our daily bread" was not just a line in a prayer, but a plea to God for enough food to eat that day. It's sobering to consider Jesus' words regarding the great crowd that followed him into the wilderness to hear him teach, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way" (Matthew 15:32). Despite their hunger and lack of food this crowd was so captivated by Jesus that they refused to leave him. (This is the same Jesus who calls us to remain with him and in his word today [John 15:4]).

However, having had their physical appetites satisfied with bread, things seem to have changed for this crowd. After seeking out and finding Jesus again, Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. (John 6:26) There seems to be something about a well-fed stomach that quickly quenches a spiritual appetite. Therefore, Jesus warned them (and us), "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." (John 6:27)

The material things of this earth will never supply the soul with the spiritual nutrition it needs. And in the same way that a person can become malnourished, even while overindulging in junk food, so people who overindulge in the material things of this world can ruin their spiritual appetites and place themselves in danger of starving their faith to death.

Are you only working to attain the perishable bread of this earth or are you striving to feed yourself with the eternal bread of heaven? (See John 6:48 – 51) What steps will you take to ensure you keeping coming to Jesus for your daily bread?

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1. Why do you think that John mentions that the Jewish Passover Festival was near just before he tells us about Jesus bread miracle? (John 6:4)

2. Why did Jesus test Phillip by asking, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" What answer was Jesus looking for? (John 6:5 – 9)

3. Why is the focus of Jesus miracle more on the bread than on the fish? (6:10 – 13)

4. What correlations can you find between the number of loaves (6:9) and the number of men in the crowd (6:10); and the number of Jesus' disciples (6:70) and the number of baskets full of bread they collected after everyone had eaten (6:13)? What significance might there be in these numbers?

5. What does it mean that the crowd intended to make Jesus king by force? (6:14 – 15)

6. What similarities and differences are there between the manna that God provided for Moses and his people in the desert, and the bread that Jesus provided for the crowd in the wilderness? (John 6:30 – 34)

7. What does Jesus mean when he declares that he is the true bread of heaven? (John 6:35 – 40)

8. How can we feed on Jesus as the bread of life? How do you do this? (John 6:53 – 58)