
Hand Feeding

By Dr. Sam Wolfe
Huntsville, Alabama

JESUS SAID, THEY NEED NOT DEPART: GIVE YOU THEM TO EAT.

MATTHEW 14:16



Introduction:

This may sound like a strange subject to you. However, it is a very common practice. Babies must be hand-fed, and likewise many disabled people. So physically, there are situations in which Hand Feeding is a necessity.

And in the spiritual realm, the careful observers who teach God's Word can understand the supreme necessity of Hand Feeding. In fact, it is absolutely and vitally necessary, else our ministry is in vain. I have heard preachers, rattling along and sounding like an empty wagon on a rocky road – nothing but leaves like Jesus observed on the fig tree—and usually it's nothing but noise. But I must confess—I have, in times of neglect of adequate preparation in prayer, sounded the same way. Therefore my remarks are not unduly critical of others, but intended to encourage ourselves to follow the biblical example.

A. Give You Them to Eat.

In Matthew 14:15-21, we read the account of Jesus feeding the five thousand. *And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart: give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they who had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children"*

Now take note of what Jesus said to His disciples: *"You give them to eat."* This is an example of the principle, that what God does He does through His people. Paul tells is in his Ephesian letter – He gave *Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, Evangelists for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (4:11-12).

Jesus demonstrated His concern and multiplied the five loaves of bread and two fishes, making them sufficient to feed the multitude. He gave the food to His disciples, filling their baskets, who then fed the people – thus **they fed the people from out of the hand of God.**

❖ **We must keep our baskets full – we cannot feed others from out of an empty basket.**

The disciples could not have fed the multitude in their own power; their baskets were empty, but consider how God provided—He always provides more than enough. There were twelve baskets left over after feeding over five thousand people. It is God's plan for those who handle His Word to feed the people from out of the over-flow of their heart. Revealed truth from the Word is nourishing, enriching, enlightening, and strengthening.

❖ **It is the Work of the Holy Spirit to fill our Baskets.**

Oh, the fascinating uniqueness of God's Word. It is alive and inexhaustible, old, but ever new, simple yet profound, complete and sufficient to meet every spiritual need we have.

And these two things are divine tools for filling our baskets.

1. Spiritual Discernment

The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual eyes to see what human eyes cannot see. The hidden secrets are revealed to our spiritual eyes. The Lord told Cyrus, God's anointed, *And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, who calls you by your name, am the God of Israel.* (Isaiah 45:3).

It is a divine mystery that hidden truths of God's Word are revealed to the diligent Spirit-filled men and women who break the bread of life to others, enabling them to feed others **from out of the hand of God.**

2. Divine Illumination

Oh, wonder of wonders – The Holy Spirit not only reveals the enriching truths of the Word to us, He illumines our minds with **light to understand the needs of His people.** As we study the Word with deep concern and prayer, we discover, **by divine illumination,** truth that stimulates and enables the spiritual growth of God's people. **The Spirit knows what they need.**

Naturally, we are **Deficient** but, He makes us **Efficient.** He enables us to meet the needs of the people **as He knows them,** and He gives us what the people need—not a lot of stuff that only impresses them with our own intellectual knowledge. We may never know what the situation is in the lives of those whom we face so we must confess as did Paul, *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves...but our sufficiency is of God”* (II Corinthians 3:4).

A Divine Principle

I just referred to Cyrus from Isaiah 45. There we find the Lord's word to this man, the powerful king of Persia who gave aid to the Jewish captives in their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. Calling Cyrus as His anointed, the Lord said that He held the king's hand to subdue nations before him and He also told Cyrus that He will do several things to open the way for His people to pass. Then the Lord made a very significant promise to Cyrus in verse 3.

And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, who calls you by your name, am the God of Israel.

I have sought the meaning and understanding of these things the Lord promised Cyrus. The first two verses reveal military or physical, political and mental acts of God, but verse three puzzles me considering the fact that the king, a kind and congenial man, but was not a Godly man. Now why did God use an unsaved man as Cyrus was? Because He can do whatever He wants to do. Proverbs 1:21 *tells us, The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns whithersoever he will.*

So what were the *“treasures of darkness* and the *hidden riches of secret places?”* I don't know whether or not they belonged to Satan's kingdom of darkness, but I see a principle here. I am not concerned about their meaning now, but my heart is fixed on, and I rejoice in what God

can and does do. He can take us down into the rich soil of His Word to the bedrock of truth and **the Holy Spirit will so amplify and draw to our mind truth we can pass on to the people we minister to.** There are truths in the Scripture that the carnal and careless mind cannot comprehend, but *what is concealed God can and will reveal.* No, I am not referring to extra biblical speculation, but to what was *God-breathed in divine inspiration—the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places.* These are the spiritual milk and meat of the Word the babes in Christ and the maturing saints of God need in order to develop *“unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:13).

They Need Not Depart

Why do they go away? I think we all know the answer—**they cannot be fed from out of an empty basket.** Where do they go? I would not dare guess how many different cults there are in our city. And oh, the startup groups meeting in store-front buildings and other facilities are numerous. These people are either spiritually famished and unfed Christians who are in a state of spiritual deterioration, or unsaved. And too, many are disgruntled and can't find a place of peace and satisfaction anywhere until they yield themselves to God. **So that's where many go.**

A Sad Day

As I write these lines, we are expecting the great American solar eclipse when the moon will go between the sun and the earth, causing total darkness for a very short time. I say it's a sad day, for **it is getting darker and darker spiritually**—we are experiencing a spiritual eclipse of the truth of the Word of God. In many churches, the truth is overshadowed, neglected and obscured. A number of years ago, my family and I were on vacation. On a Wednesday night we visited a small church in the town where we were staying. After a short time of singing, the pastor went to the pulpit to greet the people and while he was talking about mostly nothing, he was turning through his bible looking for appropriate Scripture to read, but found none. Then after a short time of more idle talk, he dismissed the people. Although this situation may not be typical, are there not times when men are prayerless, careless, and calloused, and cause an eclipse of the truths Gods Word the people need for spiritual nourishment.

B. Out of the Hand of God

George Muller, 1805 – 1896 was, in my opinion, the greatest man of faith who ever lived. His ministry was the building of orphanages in Bristol, England, that housed and fed over 2000 orphan children. He never asked a man for money, but prayed for God's supply, and he obtained it. Space allows me to share only two illustrations, although there were many that would “blow your mind.” On a particular morning, there was no food at all for breakfast, but Mr. Muller had prayed the night before. While the children were seated at the tables, he said, “Children turn your plates up and thank the Lord for breakfast, but there was no breakfast.” Momentarily, a man from a catering service appeared at the door with this exciting announcement. **“I was told to bring this food, that was prepared for a special event, but it was cancelled.”**

On another morning a similar situation occurred when a wealthy man was awakened in the middle of the night, impressed of God to send food to the orphanage to feed the children. He was obedient to the divine impression and sent enough food to last a month.

It was said about George Muller, *"He fed the children from out of the hand of God."* Oh, how wonderful for the Holy Spirit to **open our minds to truth to share and the minds of the people to receive what He gives us**. And He will establish a divine connection between us. **Thus we feed others from out of the Hand of God**. Who can deny that this is God's method of operation for pastors and teachers? Sermons are dime a dozen, but true ministry is much more costly in prayer, diligent study of God's Word, and the submission of our baskets to His hand.

C. Required of the Pastor/Teacher

You **may be** familiar with the expression, *brown bagging*? It refers to people taking their lunch to work in a brown paper bag. While in a restaurant one day, I saw a man open a brown bag and take out a tomato. The restaurant did not have tomatoes on the menu, so the man had to "brown bag" **as many of God's people have to do in church** when God's man has nothing with which to feed them.

So my preacher/teacher friend, let's avail ourselves of God's plan to fill our baskets so we can **feed others from out of His hand**. In the book of Acts, we discover a pattern of Paul's ministry to the churches he was used of God to establish. When he returned to visit them, it is said that he *"confirmed"* them. The meaning of this word is to *"strengthen."* So a major objective of his ministry was to strengthen the saints.

Jesus said to Peter, *"When you are converted, strengthen your brethren"* (Luke 22:32). Peter was a saved man, but he needed to be converted from the self-life and self-dependence before he could fulfill God's purpose for his life—and he **was converted and he did what Jesus commanded**. He became stalwart in the faith and God gave him a marvelous ministry. Read his two epistles to the Jews scattered abroad by persecution. In his writing, one cannot help but see that his basket was filled by the Holy Spirit with truth. And **he fed His brethren from out of the hand of God**. My dear preacher and teacher friends, on what are you building your ministry? I want to close this article with this statement:

**The Foundation of Success in Life and Ministry Is
Basing Your Life on
Receiving from God and Giving to Others.**

Jesus said, "Whatsoever you ask in My name, that will I do"
(John 14:13).

