

Strength

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matthew 5:6

Hunger and thirst are powerful physical drives in our body. Since we cannot live long without eating and drinking, they are necessary for a strong, healthy life. In this Beatitude, Jesus links the physical to the spiritual. He connects the joy that comes in knowing God's righteousness to our physical cravings. The blessing we receive when we crave God's truth is spiritual strength. An ability to withstand the pull of sin from our physical self and the world around us. The promise is that God will always fulfill our desires to know Him better and to know more of His Word (Psalm 37:4).



When a person's diet gets disrupted, the signals of hunger and thirst get louder. The cravings for food and water become an all-encompassing need that overtakes every other thought. Deprivation of food and water leads to the breakdown of the body processes. Eventually, in the absence of food, the body begins to break down muscle tissue—literally eating itself in an attempt to stay alive. This leads to emaciation as the tissues that surround the bones become smaller and the skin hangs loosely on the bones. Throughout this process, the person becomes so weakened, that movement becomes difficult and many bodily functions slowly stop as the body focuses simply on survival. The sheer cruelty of slowly wasting away while craving food and water is unimaginable.

The process of spiritual starvation works in the same way. It slowly deprives us of the spiritual nutrients that we need to remain spiritually healthy and strong. We eventually become weak and emaciated, losing our ability to stand against temptation and our strength to live a life that glorifies God. Yet, probably the most horrifying reality of spiritual starvation is that it is always self-imposed.

Even when authoritarian government attempts have been made to withhold the Bible from believers, they have never succeeded. Brother Andrew was famous as the Bible Smuggler, a man who made it his mission to bring Bibles into communist countries. He would fill the trunk of his car with Bibles in the language of the country he was entering. He had many stories of times when the border guards who opened the trunk seemed to never see the Bibles. Throughout his ministry, thousands of Bibles were distributed throughout Eastern Europe to Christians who hungered for the truth.

Another missionary group trained Bible teachers throughout communist Europe. They would sponsor seminars in western Europe for pastors who could attain visiting visas. They also traveled to communist countries and smuggled in training materials for pastors who were not allowed to leave their countries. Despite persecution and opposition to the gospel, God always found ways to supply the hunger and thirst of believers for the truth of His Word.



The Joy of Relying on Truth

*Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."
Nehemiah 8:10*

The Foundation of Truth

There is a natural progression within the Beatitudes. Jesus begins with the recognition of spiritual emptiness—the need for something more. Then He moved to the sense of sorrow, the guilt and mourning, that is necessary for one to acknowledge an inability to solve the spiritual emptiness. Next is the acceptance of God's sovereignty as we bow to His will. Now we see the foundation upon which this new life is built. Without the truth of God's righteousness, we will founder. What metaphor does Jesus use in **Matthew 7:24-29** of the importance of a solid foundation? *Building a house on the correct foundation. Example of buildings built on the Black Sea coast that collapsed due to the lack of solid ground.*

Jokes aside, simply looking at food and water is not enough to sustain life. What connection do we see to that reality in this passage? *Hearing Jesus' sayings and **doing** them. Just hearing them is not going to help us grow in life. We have to obey Jesus' commands.*

What instruction does God give in **Joshua 1:8**, for moving from simply hearing His Word to doing it? *Meditate in it day and night*

How does the imagery of chewing on God's Word help us understand the importance of hungering for righteousness? *Chewing helps us break down the food into small pieces so that we can digest it, we enjoy the taste of the food if we take the time to chew it and savor it. Chewing on God's Word is the same, we have to meditate on it in order to break the concepts in it down into understandable chunks we can remember and put into practice. The Holy Spirit works through God's Word as we meditate to help us do this. We need to desire God's Word, just like we hunger for food—something we have to have in order to live. We cannot see it as optional to our Christian life.*

Matthew 7: 28-29 are Matthew's comments about the effect of the Sermon on the Mount. What do they tell us about the power of God's Word? *It was different from the scribes who were tasked with teaching and explaining the Bible. It was taught with authority because it was actually God doing the teaching. It had the power to change people's lives.*

What important principle about teaching and preaching do we gain from the people's reaction? *As humans, our words don't have the power and authority to change lives. Our teaching only has power when the Holy Spirit is present in it. Primarily the Holy Spirit works through God's Word, so we must speak Biblical truth to others.*



The Whole Truth

An ancient heresy in Christianity, Marcionism, is the rejection of the Old Testament as unnecessary for Christian study. This has recently gained new attention through the teachings of Andy Stanley of North Point Community Church when he famously called for Christians to “uncouple” from the Old Testament, emphasizing that only the New Testament matters. Albert Mohler explains:

The Old Testament deity was repugnant to Marcion, who argued that Christianity just make a clean break from Judaism. The Old Testament, he taught, reveals a vindictive law-giving creator deity who bears no resemblance to the merciful redeeming God revealed in Jesus Christ. As Irenaeus, one of the most significant church fathers argued, “Marcion himself divides God in two, saying that one is good, the other judicial, and in so doing takes God away from both.” Marcion was embarrassed by the Old Testament, and so are many modern people.¹

What two answers does Jesus give to this heresy in **Matthew 5:17-20**?

1. Jesus came to *fulfill* the Old Testament, not *destroy* it. *His life was a fulfillment of the prophecies and of the truth taught by the Mosaic Law — no one was able to achieve holiness on their own.*
2. The Old Testament has *eternal relevancy*.

What warning is there in this passage to preachers and teachers who promote this view of the Bible? *They will lose their standing in heaven.*

What’s interesting about Jesus’ statement is that it indicates they will be in heaven, just that they will lose rewards for belittling the Scriptures in their teaching. Who does Jesus hold up as an example in **verse 20**? *The scribes and Pharisees had such respect for the Scriptures.*

While He pointed to the careful use of the Scriptures by the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus also gave a warning about the intent of their teaching in **Matthew 7:15-19**. What does He compare them to? *Wolves in sheep’s clothing.*

What is the key to evaluating teaching for truth? *The fruit of the lives of the teacher and those who adopt the teaching.*

How does acceptance of heresy and false teaching endanger the church? *It open doors to those who do not believe to ridicule the truth or discount those who correctly preach the truth. In the example of modern-day Marcionism, it has led to Christians who do not understand the story of the Bible as a whole. They often believe in a Christianity that is weak and accepting of sin because they fail to recognize the holiness and righteousness of God that is presented in the Old Testament. It also leads to incorrect views of God.*

How do we prevent its spread when we hear it being promoted? *We need to speak out, by proclaiming the whole truth of the Bible. We have to know our Bibles and study carefully so that we can pinpoint when people are misrepresenting God’s truth by using Scripture out of context, incorrect interpretation, or simply lying about what the Bible says.*

¹ <https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/10/getting-unhitched-old-testament-andy-stanley-aims-heresy/>
Janelle Swann, 2025



The Priority of the Truth

Hunger and thirst are signals that control our days and direct our time. They are so important that we plan our day around the schedule in which we eat and drink. Without these rhythms our days are disrupted and feel strangely wrong. After all what are we to pray for in **Matthew 6:11**? *Give us this day our daily bread.*

In **Matthew 7:7-11**, Jesus connects our daily need for food, to our need for the truth.

Ask	Seek	Knock
<i>Desire God's truth</i>	<i>Pursue God's truth -- action</i>	<i>Persist, repeat, continue in our pursuit of God's truth</i>
<i>Given – God will fulfill our desire for truth</i>	<i>Find – God will give us answers to our questions</i>	<i>Opened – God will reveal Himself to us through His truth, we will come to know Him like we are seeing Him face-to-face.</i>

Jesus uses two negative examples to help us understand the power of the truth God gives:

1. A stone is unable to provide *nourishment*
2. A snake is *harmful*.

How do these descriptions help us understand the problem with allowing false ideas to be the basis for how we live our lives? *False ideas give us no spiritual nourishment and instead are harmful to our spiritual growth. Unfortunately, they often come out in our decision-making and in the advice we offer to others. It leads to a Christian testimony and witness that is harmed by unwise behavior and a lack of spiritual discernment. These are the kinds of Christians whose lives look just like the world around them, offering no hope of change to those with whom they interact.*

As a final note on how we are not to simply hear God's truth but act upon it, what does Jesus say sums the entirety of the Old Testament? (v. 12) *The Golden Rule*

How does **James 1:25-27** describe a life that prioritizes God's Word? *Blessed in what she does. A joyful life that properly reflects the truth of God to the world around her.*

In our modern wealthy world, we are far less familiar with unhealthy hunger. Our problems lie in the other direction, an unhealthy attachment to too much food. The Biblical analogy for that is seen in James 1:21-25. It is when we eat freely of God's Word but never allow it to go deep in our hearts and change us. Much like those whose hunger signals have been subverted by sugar to make them constantly crave more food and sugar while also destroying their bodies, we are addicted to *hearing* God's Word. We get fat and unhealthy as we sit in the pews listening to God's Word but never eating it. Sadly, rather than giving God's truth to others, rather than allowing it to change our attitudes and behaviors, we simply crave the sugar high of a great church service. As Jesus pointed out, the measure of our spiritual health is how we treat others because it is in our actions that we show who we really are.

