

The Bread of Life Discourse—Developing Spiritual Intimacy with Jesus (John 6:52-59)

Only Jesus can truly satisfy the spiritual hunger of our hearts. We long for meaning, purpose, connectedness with our Creator. We crave the eternal within our limited human existence. We know that there's more to life than what we see and experience around us, beyond even our greatest pleasures and achievements. We simply want more. We need more. We need that which only Jesus can provide, eternal life, life in communion with God. Our longing for spiritual intimacy can be met only through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus offers us this kind of life.

Intimate union with Jesus is essential for entering into eternal life (6:52-53).

Jesus offers eternal life, life that's presently rich and abundant and life that will extend into the endless future in the joyful presence of God. This life is available through spiritual union with Jesus, a faith relationship with the Son of God.

The Jews argued among themselves about the meaning of eating Jesus' flesh (6:52).

Throughout His Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus had been challenging His audience to look beyond their physical cravings and see their need for spiritual bread. Jesus, in fact, is that bread, the "bread of life" (John 6:35, 48). We need to consume Jesus, a spiritual concept that portrays our need for faith in Jesus. In fact, Jesus said that the bread from heaven is His body, His flesh, referring to His physical, sacrificial death on the cross (John 6:51). Faith in Jesus includes faith in His substitutionary death. It was this idea of eating Jesus' flesh that forced His audience to argue among themselves. They debated with one another what Jesus meant when He said that He would give them His flesh to eat. They certainly recognized that Jesus was using a figure of speech—He wouldn't have endorsed cannibalism! But what exactly did Jesus have in mind? Had they been willing to receive the truth, they would have already realized that Jesus was calling them to receive Him into their lives by faith (compare John 6:40).

Jesus stated that there is no life apart from eating His flesh and drinking His blood (6:53).

Jesus pressed His point by emphasizing once again the veracity of His words by using the formula "truly, truly." He then declared that no one can have real life apart from eating His flesh and drinking His blood (compare Leviticus 17:10-14). As the Son of Man, the messianic God in the flesh, Jesus demanded nothing short of total commitment. We must invite Jesus into such a spiritual union in our lives that our relationship is comparable to consuming Him. It's interesting to note that Jesus later instituted the practice of communion among His followers in which we

symbolically, through the bread and the cup, consume His body and blood as a reminder of His sacrificial death. In other words, following Jesus means that we engage in spiritual union, spiritual intimacy with Him through faith in His sacrifice on the cross. Through such an intimate faith relationship we receive life, life eternal.

**Intimate union with Jesus refers to an
abiding faith relationship with Him (6:54-56).**

Jesus describes our faith relationship with Him in terms of consuming Him, receiving into our lives His body and blood. This kind of intimate, abiding relationship is the foundation of eternal life.

Jesus promised that those who consume His flesh and blood have eternal life (6:54).

Without Jesus there is no hope of eternal life. On the positive side, however, Jesus declared that anyone who “eats” His flesh and “drinks” His blood receives eternal life. That life includes our future resurrection in “the last day.” We experience real life now, and we enter into resurrection life in the future. All this is possible by consuming, by faith, all that Jesus is and all that He has done for us as our sacrifice on the cross.

Jesus described His flesh as true food and His blood as true drink (6:55).

In contrast to that which cannot satisfy the deepest longing of our hearts—personal achievements, wealth, pleasures, thrills—Jesus offers “true” bread and “true” drink. His flesh and blood, offered as our sacrifice on the cross, alone satisfy the hunger of our hearts.

Jesus explained that consuming Him means to have an abiding relationship with Him (6:56).

Granted, it seems strange to our ears to hear Jesus speaking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. However, Jesus uses this bold image to drive into our minds the concept of deep spiritual intimacy with Him. He uses another term, “abide,” to clarify His meaning. Those who eat and drink Jesus are those who abide in Him and those in whom He abides. To abide (or remain) in Jesus means to take up residence, to be at home, to put our feet up with Him. We’re at home in Jesus and Jesus is at home in us. In John 15:1-17 Jesus expands on this idea of abiding in Him. Those who abide in Jesus produce spiritual fruit—obedience and love. We’re to abide in Jesus because Jesus abides in us through faith (John 15:4; compare 1 John 2:24). Spiritual intimacy is a two-sided relationship. When we receive Jesus by faith, He makes Himself at home in our lives. Likewise, we make ourselves at home in Jesus, molding our lives to be like Him. This is the nature of our intimate spiritual union with Jesus.

**Intimate union with Jesus is based on His
divine relationship with the Father (6:57-59).**

The Son of God in His humanity maintained a spiritually intimate relationship with God the Father. This relationship forms the foundation for our spiritually intimate relationship with Jesus.

Jesus said that we can live because of Him just as He lives because of the Father (6:57).

One of the attributes of God is His self-existence. He inherently possesses life. He is the living God. Jesus referred to the Father as the “living” Father. This living Father had sent Jesus into this world. Jesus, the Son of God, experienced life in this world in dependence on the Father. He said, “I live because of the Father.” The Father’s life extends to His Son. In a similar way, the life of Jesus extends to His followers, those who have eaten Him, that is, those who have received Him by faith. All who receive Jesus will live both now and forever.

Jesus identified Himself as the true bread from heaven who alone gives eternal life (6:58).

Jesus again referred to Himself as the bread that came down from heaven (compare John 6:32-33, 41, 51). The Jews’ ancestors ate bread from heaven in the wilderness, the manna provided by God. But this bread sustained them only for a lifetime. Eventually, those who ate the manna died (compare John 6:49). But those who consume Jesus by faith will live forever. Jesus is the source of eternal life. Intimate spiritual union with Jesus connects us with the life of God, life unending. It satisfies our deepest hunger.

Jesus taught these truths in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:59).

John here notes that Jesus delivered this Bread of Life Discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum. Capernaum was Jesus’ adopted hometown. Because space was limited in the synagogue, those who questioned Jesus about giving them more bread must have constituted but a small remnant of those who had been the recipients of His miracle on the previous day. However, they likely represented the attitude of many others. Many were searching for bread, bread to satisfy their physical hunger. Many were also looking for something greater, bread that would satisfy their spiritual hunger. Jesus is the bread of life. He alone can satisfy the hunger of our hearts. But we must be willing to trust Him. We must consume Him, receive Him by faith as our sacrificed Savior. Our longing for spiritual intimacy can be met only through faith in Jesus Christ.