

The Jesus diet: Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

God has become clear in the person of Jesus.

by [Paul Stroble](#) in the [July 26, 2003](#) issue

My father was a cook in the army. Years later, he still cooked as if he were preparing a meal for a division about to take a hill. He believed that food shouldn't be wasted, yet he cooked potfuls of it for a family of three. "Why didn't you like it?" or "What was wrong with it?" he'd say when I could only eat one very large plateful. And when I really did justice to his cooking he'd brag, "Paul ate six biscuits!" with the same pride as he'd say, "Paul has a master's degree from Yale!"

Then one year my metabolism changed. I was afraid of getting fat, so I started to watch what I ate. I felt as if I were letting Dad down by not eating enough to please him, but I was not so starved for his approval (pun intended) that I would risk becoming overweight.

Family meals at my Grandma Crawford's farm were plenteous too. A pump at her kitchen sink drew water from a cistern. An early model refrigerator held bottles of Orange Crush stocked just for me. When our extended family converged, there were we three, plus cousins, aunts, uncles and many more. And did we eat! At the kids' table, I made mashed potato and gravy lakes on my plate, then gleefully smashed them with my spoon. After dessert, some of the relatives lingered in the kitchen and cleaned up while others stepped outside to smoke and talk about Vietnam. A few collapsed in front of the black and white television set.

Today that family has dwindled until only my mother, several cousins and I remain. However well those wonderful meals nourished body and soul, they didn't guarantee immortality.

In John 6:1-15 we read John's version of another great feeding: the "feeding of the 5,000." From that account, we learn that Jesus "cooked up" an enormous meal for an enormous crowd. There was no fried chicken or pies, but apparently there was plenty of fish and bread. Twelve baskets of bread were left over, although apparently everyone gobbled up the fish. (I imagine a hillside covered with fish bones.) Perhaps some paused afterward to discuss the Roman occupation. And surely there was at least one father who announced proudly, "Zedekiah ate six loaves!"

Word got around that Jesus had put little expense and preparation, humanly speaking, into this meal; in fact, the whole feast had appeared from a boy's portion. Naturally the crowd followed him when Jesus headed across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. But this time Jesus offered a different type of nourishment. He offered them the bread of life—in other words, himself. In Jesus we have everything we need for life—if we define "life" more broadly than just by our physical needs. Jesus provides God's grace, God's help, guidance and assistance. He provides access to God for our prayers. He helps resolve some of our problems and adverse situations. Other situations he does not resolve for us, but even then he remains present for us as we bring our needs to God. He provides us life forever with God.

What do our lives look like when they're sustained by the bread of life? Many times in our churches, we aren't so much nourished by Christ as wearied by preparations. I'm talking not just about potlucks but about all the tasks of ministry. "Sometimes church seems too much like work," sighed a friend one Sunday morning, as she hurried to locate people for committee business. Pastors and lay leaders know that feeling. We become satiated by work and not quite filled by the bread and drink that satisfies us spiritually. We remain as needy as ever, and

wearied by our efforts.

But when our lives are fed by Jesus' living bread, they begin to look like those described by Paul in Ephesians. Then we attend to our words. We manage our anger. We work not only for our own needs but are mindful of others' needs and generous in responding to them. We encourage and forgive one another. We put away those things like "bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander . . . and malice," and pattern our lives on God's attitude toward us. Add other "fruits of the Spirit" to the mix, and we have a good picture of a person nourished by Christ and prepared by the Holy Spirit.

As we read in Ephesians 5: 1-2, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." This was not enough for the crowds that followed Jesus, of course. Like the Israelites who complained of hunger to Moses, Jesus' opponents complained about him. One can't help but sympathize with them a little. He was speaking eucharistically before there was a Eucharist, and his intimacy with God seemed blasphemous.

Yet even these first hearers, though disgusted by his talk of eating flesh, could understand other parts of his message. God has become clear in the person of Jesus. God approves us, gently draws us to Christ and teaches us. God has taken full initiative to provide sustenance sufficient for this life and the next. He does not even fret about how much we eat. He simply invites us to his well-stocked table of abundant blessing. As it was for those early listeners, so it is for us.