



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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**“Starving & Parched”**

**April 18, 2010**

**Dr. Matthew J. Hook**

**John 6:35**

**(Mud pie in hand): How many of you, when you were little, made “mud pies” for yourself or your mom?** It reminds me of being a little kid and playing in the backyard. It’s fun. It’s innocent. It’s dirty! But for some extremely poor people, it’s the only hope they are hanging on.

**Have you heard about Haitian mud cakes?** Even before the earthquake, food prices were rising so much so that Haiti’s poorest, usually women and children, can’t afford even a daily plate of rice, and some take desperate measures to fill their bellies. They make mud cookies, or mud cakes. Women get dirt, and add water, and if they have it, a little shortening, smooth out the mud, lay them out to bake in the sun, sell them and eat them for 5 cents. And it’s gross. And it’s not healthy. But it fills their stomachs when there’s nothing else... How could they *do* that? And how could a world like ours allow people to *have* to do that? **To me, it’s a reminder of how broken our world is.** And eating these mud cookies gives them other problems, until they can get some real food. Did you know since the earthquake, this congregation has given over \$20,000 to Haiti? And it reminds me why I give to the church. Because the Methodists are in Haiti trying to help. I believe the church really is the hope of the world, because the church contains the message of Jesus-to help the poor. It’s no accident you’re here. You really can make a difference through this church here.

Today, you and I may not be physically starving, but many of us are spiritually starving.

You know, **God made us to feed on Him.** Body, mind, and spirit, God is the fuel for the human soul. The thing that breaks my heart is *we’re* filling up on mud. It’s like trying to eat newspaper. And no matter how nicely they lay out the cookie, it’s still mud. And when we don’t “feed on God,” we end up poor, parched, and hungry.

Our souls get emaciated. When our souls are starving, several things happen:

- We get bored and lonely.
- We end up skimming through our relationships. We can’t go deep. We can’t just “be” with others, even our friends, our spouse, or our children.
- We end up trying to escape. The only thing we can think of is how to insulate ourselves from the world’s problems, not realizing that they are ours too. We build better systems in our houses to eliminate the inconveniences of having to think about anything too much.
- We increase our velocity. The pace of our lives becomes frenetic. We go and we don’t stop; and as our velocity increases, our soul gets left behind and a gap occurs that gets filled with all kinds of stuff.
- We go for entertainment. It’s not just in the way it makes us think (which can be devastating); it’s in the way it *keeps* us from thinking. Today we take our bearings, our worldview, not from the Bible, not from the physical world, but from the little (and big!) screens around our house and in our pockets. “They” decide for us who is important, what to

think about, even how to dress each day. We orient ourselves to the world through what we see and experience on the screen. Here's a scary one: If you watched any shows this week, you spent more time with it, than the average dad spent face to face with his children in a week! (and that even means one ½ hour shows.) Freaky.

- We medicate ourselves. Even to the point of taking drastic measures, and our society ends up with people who are either addicts, victims, or extremists.

**And I think it's traceable to the condition and the consumption of our souls: eating what amounts to dirt, end up parched and starving.**

Here's what I wrote myself this week: Did you ever think the reason your life stinks at the moment, the reason you're starving for attention, for someone to care, for something to do that amounts to something, the reason you're starving for meaning and purpose in your life is because we forget God?

God made us to feed on Him. And the reason for many of your problems and mine is that you don't know or forgot or don't ingest "**the Bread of Life?**" That's what Jesus called Himself. That's why the world's the way it is. He left it to us to share His love, pass out the bread, and get a grip! I believe our feeding on the Bread of Life could even have an impact on the amount of "mud cookies" the people of Haiti have to consume.

Here's what Jesus said starting in John 6:32 *"Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not hunger, and the one who believes in Me will never thirst."*

**What are you feeding on?** What are you filling your mind with? What are you filling your time with? What are you filling your life with? Is it the Bread of Heaven? Bread was the staple, daily food for the people Jesus was talking to.

If you're like me, you might be feeling defensive by now, and you say, "I'm fed on Sunday mornings." But that's just once a week! To grow and stay healthy and strong, you need to eat more than once per week!

**What did Jesus eat?** Normal food, obviously. But look what he told His disciples when they were in Samaria in John 4:34 *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."* So what's our job?

**TO FEED & BE FED:** You need a steady diet of feeding and being fed.

**TO FEED:** Help feed others: find a way to serve. Join a mission team. Get involved in a project around here, that helps feed others. Offer others the Bread of Heaven. Find a friend who is far from God and pray for them. Begin talking to God about them, and see how soon you'll talking to them about God. Support the missions and ministries here.

I love that this church is a bunch of "doers." The Methodists traditionally have been pretty good. Many of us have offered folks "a cup of cool water," but we forgot to do it "in the name of Christ." It's like we're too polite. And of course, doing good works doesn't save you. But without them, it's hard to believe we've put our faith in the Living God of the Bible. We need to share Christ in both word and deed. Which is more important? Well, that's like asking "Which is more important—

breathing in, or breathing out?” It depends on which you did last. ☺ You know, people around here has yet to see the goodness of God in someone sold out completely to His work and mission. May they get a glimpse through you! Help feed others.

AND BE FED: Jesus told Satan when Satan tempted Him: “*Man doesn’t live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*” (Matthew 4:4).

- Read the Bible. Work through the New Testament Plan for the rest of this year.
- Join a Bible study. We have several right here. Find a friend you can touch base with each week as you walk through the New Testament.
- Join a small group of people who can encourage you, hold you accountable, and help you see yourself the way God sees you.
- Unless you are making time to study God’s Word seriously, He’s never going to be real. You’re going to feel empty.

The main reason we DON’T? No time. Listen, I know you’re too busy. I know you get bored. I know you can’t imagine adding anything to your life; because that’s me too. But maybe the other reason we don’t “BE FED” is because the amount of mud we’ve eaten has affected our perceptions, like shipwrecked sailors who drink salt water. It fills them up, but then it dries up their cells and affects their brains and drives them insane. And many of us have been filled with nothing but saltwater and mud.

Listen to a few people who emailed me this week about the NT Walk Through:

**Scott Hershner** emailed me this: “When you brought this up, I told myself I will find the time and I did. Every morning while eating breakfast before work, I sit down and read the passages for the day. The problem has not been that I can’t keep up, the problem is that I want to keep reading and have to slow down to stay with the group. (which honestly ends up working out if I get up late and skip a day). It has been better than I expected. I found time where I thought there was none.”

**Katie Major**—God’s word has really made a profound impact on my life. Perhaps something that has really helped shape me is just emulating Jesus as much as I can... Even going through being unemployed I have kept my sanity knowing that God has my back and that there he will help me along the way.

**Kurt Dutcher**—I grew up in the Methodist church but had only read individual verses of the Bible, never continuous books. I read during lunch at work and find myself always wanting to read ahead to hear the walk with Jesus described by another disciple.

**Ruth Ann Gould**—Gary has never read the Bible before, so it has been a new experience for him. I haven’t read the Bible since I was in Sunday School. It’s been a chance for us to do something together that we have never experienced before. We both have enjoyed this part of church that can be shared with other people too. We never would have sat down and said “Let’s read the New Testament.” So this has been an inspiration

**Joyce Etzel**—I find it so exciting. The more I read, the more it makes me want to read. Thank you for inspiring me to read something I’ve always wanted to and I just kept putting it off. Joyce PS. As far as making me a better person, unfortunately, I’m still rotten as ever so I’ll keep reading!

These words could be your words, if you would begin to feed and be fed. What if you and I had a chance to do this? What if, say, we didn’t watch TV or anything on the net until we met with God in His Word. Or what if we didn’t have physical food till he had spiritual food. We would discover that...

**Jesus offers life, not escape from life.** Don't settle for passive distraction, being just a spectator. God is calling you into the game! Go for the full life that God has offered. Jesus himself said "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" John 10:10. TV says "I have come to take you out of life." Jesus says "I have come to give you full life and to redeem your life! TV says I can pull you out of the emptiness of ordinary life. Jesus says follow me and I can help you invest your daily life with meaning and purpose." He IS life. He redeems life. He doesn't offer us a life free from hardship. He promises to bring good out of the hardships we face. Romans 8:28 "*All things work together for good for those that love the Lord.*" He offers us forgiveness, healing, and a new life. TV says run. But God says "My promise is to redeem your hardships. Share them with me, and experience these two things: deeper trust in Me, and My strength in your life.

When we get sucked in to feeding ourselves a diet of nothingness; when we're feeding our minds dirt, or living as a spectator, spending hours and hours of uncritical TV watching, surfing, or video game playing, it can't help but be counterproductive to forming the image of Christ in us.

Imagine what it would look like if this week, we began adding nutrition to our life's diet. Paul coaches us to "*Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed in the things right in front of you. Look up, be alert to what is going on around Christ – that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.*"

I can't help but think the less mud we digest, and the more we feed on the Bread of Life would impact the world in far-reaching ways, even to the point of others around the world haven't to eat less mud cookies themselves. May it be so!

## STUDY GUIDE for John 8 – 12

Some of the “Oh, *that’s* where that comes from!” verses of John 8 - 12:

- “Let him without sin throw the first stone...” 8:7
- “I was blind but now I see!” 9:25
- “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” 10:10
- “I am the good shepherd...” 10:11, 14.
- “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...” 11:25.
- “Jesus wept.” 11:35 (The shortest verse in the Bible).
- “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” 12:24
- “The one who loves his life will lose it, while the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” 12:25.

**Monday: Read John 8. Jesus Claims Deity & Faces Conflict.** The Woman Caught in Adultery (1-11).

Jesus’ opponents bring only the woman and release the man, to use her against Him. Jesus’ character is revealed. How has the way Jesus treated this woman helped you face some of the sins you struggle with? What do you think about this statement: “Jesus accepts you just as you are, but loves you too much to leave you that way.”? Do you need His freedom to live anew? Testimony Test (12-30). Here the Pharisees refer to an TO law: any fact must be established by 2 witnesses. Jesus’ claims are unsupported and must be rejected. But Jesus is supported by the active testimony of God the Father. Now, the testimony is also in the hearts of those who hear His words and believe. How do people you know misunderstand Jesus? How is Jesus ‘light’ in your ‘darkness?’ Children of Abraham & the Devil (31-47). How many people do you know enslaved to sin who claim to be “free?” What are you proud of in your spiritual heritage? Jesus the I AM (48-59). I AM is the most sacred name for God (YHWH). What can you do for someone who is honestly seeking God?

**Tuesday: Read John 9. Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind.** (1-34) This is a great story, because the authorities just don’t get it! They question the man over and over again, until the man asks them “Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?” (27). Have you found anything helpful in dealing with people who ridicule your faith? Has it ever led to your being excluded from a group? Spiritual Blindness (35-41). How would you score your own spiritual sight: 20/20? 20/800? A few ‘blind spots?’ Why? What could correct this?

**Wednesday: Read John 10. The Shepherd & His Flock.** (1-21). What turning point was significant to you in terms of hearing “God’s voice” and responding? How do you discern God’s voice among so many others that vie for your attention? The Unbelief of the Jews (22-42). What has convinced you that Jesus is Messiah? What ‘old ways’ of looking at Jesus must you overcome by faith?

**Thursday: Read John 11. The Death of Lazarus.** The News of It (1-16). Have you ever felt God wasn’t listening when you prayed? Can you think now that it is because God was preparing something greater: a new revelation, or new understanding of Him? Jesus Comforts Lazarus’ Sisters (17-37). What struggle last stretched your faith? What difference does knowing this chapter make at your funeral? Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead (38-44). Spiritually, do you feel like you are: still in the grave? Alive, but with old grave cloths? Alive and set free? Why? The Plot to Kill Jesus (45-57). What would you have done if you were on the Sanhedrin? Knowing yourself, would politics or truth win out with you? How have you tried to keep Jesus in line with your religious traditions?

**Friday: Read John 12. Jesus Anointed at Bethany** (1-11). Another embarrassing moment for Jesus, but a lavish one as well. If you had a year’s salary or time to use for Christ, how would you use it? How is or how isn’t that reflected in your budget and priorities now? The Triumphal Entry (12-19). What do you like best about parades? Bands? Famous personalities? Clowns? Vendors? What convinced you that Jesus is your

King? Is your worship life like a hero's victory, or a funeral dirge? Jesus Predicts His Death (20-36). This is HEAVY: Where is Jesus calling you to *die* so that you might *live*? What do you tend to hold on to rather than follow Jesus? The Jews Continue Their Unbelief (37-50). Where do you find it more difficult to live your faith—at home or work? Why? When have you felt pressured by fear to keep quiet about your faith? What happened? What have you found most helpful in letting people know where you stand with God?