

Famine OF THE WORD By Wayne Cordeiro

“The time is surely coming,” says the Sovereign LORD, “when I will send a famine on the land – not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11, NLT).



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Amos identified it right off. It would be a famine, but it wouldn’t be recognizable in the grocery stores. The shelves would still be filled with several varieties of bread, and a few aisles over, shoppers would find an equal amount of bottled water from the springs of France to Fiji. But nevertheless, a famine would ravage the land.

It would be a famine of *hearing God’s Word*.

I remember it well. It was a month filled with travel. First I was off to Florida to speak at a large gathering for young leaders. Then to Denver for a leadership forum, back to preach for the weekend, followed by a denominational conference on the West Coast. I realized that on any given week, any halfhearted seeker of knowledge could find one or more conferences somewhere in the country ready to accept their registration. And resources! The Internet runs with a swift current of free materials and helps for just about any aspect of ministry or Christian life.

Still churches are failing, families are fractured, and ministries flounder.

One day, I’d like God to turn our eyeballs around. What if we could see not the physical shape of a person, but their spiritual shape? Let me explain it in this way. What if you ate just once a week – one big meal on the weekend and then snacked on tidbits during the week – and kept that up for thirty years? In what shape would you be? We’d be emaciated and gaunt with sunken eyes and sallow cheeks.

This perfect description of an eating disorder accurately describes the inner state of most Christians. Without spiritual strength, we believe firmly one thing but quickly succumb to the enticing

invitations of doubt, anger, and moral compromise.

It’s time we break the famine. So where do we begin?

Self-Feeders

One of the most critical disciplines that distinguishes fruitful lives from unfruitful lives is our ability to feed ourselves. Conferences, seminars, and weekend services are wonderful, but they were never designed to be a substitute for a self-feeding program, a daily time in the Word of God.

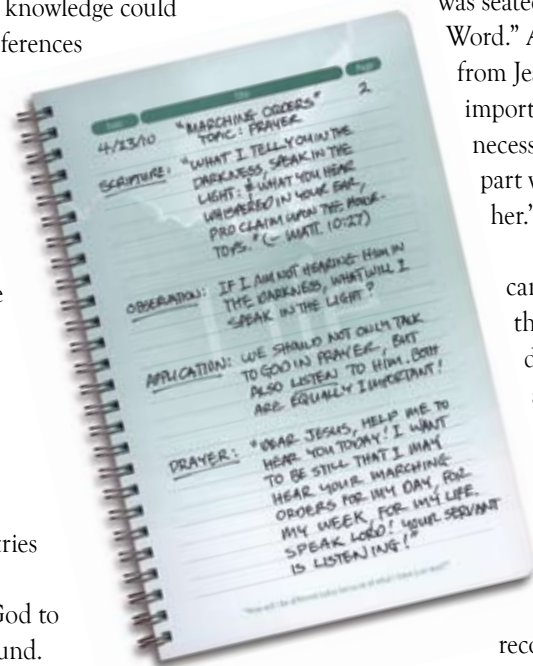
In Luke 10, we stumble upon these poignant words that we must not dismiss. While Martha was entrenched with the busyness of life, “Mary was seated at the Lord’s feet listening to His Word.” And when Martha demanded a ruling from Jesus as to which activity was more important, Jesus replied, “Only *one thing* is necessary, and Mary has chosen the good part which will never be taken away from her.”

Only one thing is necessary. We can’t get much clearer than that. With that understanding, I began a lifelong discipline of daily devotions. A systematic reading plan would take me through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice every year. And focusing on one of the most prevalent scriptures that stood out to me, I would journal on it.

Using a simple acrostic, SOAP, I recorded the promptings of the Spirit of God to my life. About ten years ago, I compiled these principles into a *Life Journal*, which is being used in thousands of churches and has been translated into more than 25 languages. The basic process is to dedicate a daily time to sit at His feet and allow His Word to speak. Then in respectful response, we make a journal entry that follows these guidelines:

Scripture: Write the verse or verses at the top of the page.

Observation: Write a paragraph to describe the setting. Then, taking into consideration the context, describe the scene in which the verse is found.



Application: Give the Word an appropriate claim on your life with an action point. This takes it beyond knowledge and into obedience.

Prayer: Write a prayer to express your heart, your thankfulness, and your commitment to do what the Holy Spirit just said.

Watermarked on each page I have penned this reminder:

“How will I be different today because of what I have just read?”

This one simple self-feeding program has become a life-long adventure for many. It has been the best thing I have done for our congregation at New Hope Christian Fellowship. I guarantee that if you will do the same, it will change the trajectory of your future, your faith, your family, and your ministry.

China’s Lesson

A few years ago, I made a teaching trip to China where twenty leaders of the house church movement came together for leadership training. I was told to be ready to teach (standing the entire time) from 8:00 a.m. until 6 p.m. for three consecutive days. Thankfully we took a short break for lunch.

The leaders rode a bumpy train for 13 hours before meeting at a predetermined locale. Gathered together in a small room without air conditioning, they sat cross-legged on a wooden floor. Dressed as humble farmers, their faces were weathered but radiant. Deep lines etched into each countenance evidenced stories of trials and supernatural perseverance.

To get a bit more acquainted with one another, I asked them to tell me a little about who they were. One man had just been released from serving 12 years in prison. His crime? Faith in an unseen Messiah.

“How many others of you have spent time in prison for your faith?” I asked.

Eighteen of the twenty leaders raised their hands. If government authorities discovered this non-registered religious meeting, these home group leaders would immediately face a three-year prison sentence – while I would be deported within 24 hours. They had come to the meeting two-by-two and one-by-one so they would not arouse suspicion.

“Aren’t you afraid?” I asked.

“No,” they quickly replied. “We’re not afraid.”

I had brought 15 Bibles and passed them out, necessitating a few of the leaders to have to share. I asked them to turn to 2 Peter, chapter one. As we were about to read the passage aloud, one elderly lady handed her Bible to another leader. I thought that a bit strange since Bibles were so scarce, but I didn’t call attention to the

exchange. After we began to read aloud, however, I understood why the first lady willingly gave up her Bible. She was quoting the whole chapter from memory. During a short break, I asked her how she memorized such a large portion of Scripture.

“Oh, I have much more memorized,” she replied through one of our interpreters.

“But how did you memorize so much,” I asked, “when there are so few Bibles available?”

“In prison,” she replied. “You have lots of time in prison!”

“But don’t they confiscate your Bibles?” I pushed back.

“Oh yes,” she answered. “That’s why people visit me and bring handwritten Scriptures on pieces of paper.”

I continued my questioning, “What if the guards found you with them? Wouldn’t they confiscate them as well?”

“Yes,” she said. “That’s why I memorize the Scriptures as quickly as I can! You see, they can take away the paper, but *they cannot take away what I have already hidden in my heart.*”

By the end of the two days, I had fallen in love with these warriors of the cross. Realizing my own inadequacy to help them in their daunting task of reaching China, I asked, “How can I pray for you? What do you want the most?”

“Pray that we become like you,” came their immediate request. “We do not have freedom of religion. We have only a few registered churches, and the rest we cannot attend. We are a persecuted church. Pray that we can soon be like you!”

I shook my head sadly. “I can’t do that. I cannot pray for you in that way.”

“But why?” they asked with incredulous eyes.

“In America,” I began, “if church is more than 30 minutes away, people won’t go. Too far. . . Yet you came here after riding 13 hours on a train. In my country, if you can’t sit on cushioned chairs and be in the comfort of air conditioning, people will find better things to do. In your country, you have been sitting on wooden floors without air conditioning for three days.

“In my country, we have an average of three Bibles per family, and we hardly read any of them. In your country, Bibles are scarce, yet you memorize Scriptures from scraps of paper!”

“No, I won’t pray that you become like us. But I will pray that one day, we will become like you!”

