

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Biblical review of *New Choices - New Boundaries*, by Rich Buhler

In recent years, the Christian community has been bombarded with books teaching us how to properly nurture, love, and care for ourselves. The word "codependent," only vaguely defined, buzzes in our ears and prods us to look inward at our own needs. We are challenged to rethink our traditional biblical concept of JOY: Jesus, others, you. Rich Buhler has added yet another book to the shelf.

In all fairness, Buhler does present some of the basics of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He recognizes our need for eternal salvation, and he expresses a genuine concern for his fellow human beings. He seems to sincerely promote a concept of nourishment that does not echo the selfishness of the "me generation," recognizing that we do have obligations to our fellow man as Christians who are serving the Lord. However, there are some fundamental problems with his writing that must be dissected with a biblical scalpel.

New Choices - New Boundaries concerns the important topic of spiritual nourishment. Like many modern books on spiritual issues, it expresses the opinions of the author without scriptural support to back its conclusions. Can we find a Scripture that commands us to nourish ourselves before we can nourish others? Can we even find a Scripture that commands, or even allows, us to seek our own nourishment? Is there any verse that says we are responsible for our own nourishment? If not, then who is? Can we discover verses that direct us to the proper source(s) of nourishment? Does Scripture indicate one source, or many? Does the Bible speak to both physical and spiritual nourishment, and is there a distinction made? What does the Lord tell us about nourishing family, Christian brothers, nonbelievers, and even enemies? Scripture is not silent on these matters, but rather speaks authoritatively to followers of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it addresses the matter sufficiently. God's power has given us *everything* that we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3, 4), not merely an incomplete revelation. Our job in this critique is to examine Buhler's teachings in light of Scripture, and to support conclusions firmly with God's Word.

There are four fundamental problems that can be discerned in reviewing this book. First, we are being instructed to do something--nourish ourselves--that is **not** commanded by Scripture. In fact, Ephesians 5:29 and other verses tell us that we already do this much too well. The great challenge of the Christian walk is not to learn *how* to nourish oneself, but rather how to *stop* focusing one's energies on that inherent tendency to nurture self. Secondly, our priorities are scrambled. Scripture is clear that the Lord is to be put first and that we must *die to self* in order to serve Christ. In doing so, God promises to meet our needs in abundance. Third, Buhler illustrates many of his ideas by comparing physical nourishment with spiritual nourishment. Although he does recognize that the first is temporary and the latter eternal, we need to seriously question whether these analogies are valid. Scripture makes some significant distinctions between basic physical necessities and spiritual needs; the analogies it does make are quite different from Buhler's, whose basic idea of "nourishment" extends far beyond the basics required to sustain life.

Does Nourishment Begin with Self?

The basic premise of Buhler's book is that nourishment must begin with self, and that one cannot nourish others without first nourishing himself. One's own nourishment must come first. Buhler also claims that "you are responsible for your own nourishment." He believes that self-nourishment is difficult for many people, particularly those who have suffered childhood abuse and consider themselves "ineligible" for proper nourishment and the good things in life. Several attempts are made to defend his position as one that does not promote selfishness. The arguments are appealing, but not convincing in light of Scripture. While it is true that a person must be spiritually filled in order to give meaningful love to others, we must question the view that one's own nourishment is top priority. We will see later that God does not by any means leave us spiritually malnourished, and yet, nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to seek our own nourishment, much less seek it *first*. On the contrary:

"For no man ever hated his own flesh, but **nourishes** and carefully protects and cherishes it, as Christ does the church." (Ephesians 5:29, Amplified)

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be **lovers of themselves**, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their

parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God**--having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them." (1 Timothy 3:1-5)

"For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 2:1)

These Scriptures point out the inherent selfishness of our nature. We are already naturally self-nourishing. Books that promote greater self-nurture are unnecessary, despite objections from their authors that the ultimate intent is unselfish. Such writings, sensible though they seem, have a subtle appeal to the flesh.

Buhler tells us the story of a friend who is critical of his emphasis on self yet turns down his request to substitute on his radio program because of his own vacation plans. Supposedly, this man makes self-nourishing decisions and doesn't realize it. Buhler doesn't fault him for such decisions, but disagrees with his conclusions that we are not called to nourish self first. There are several problems with this analysis, and it actually serves to illustrate our inherent love of self. First, we must inquire as to further data. Did the man have a commitment to his wife and/or children for this vacation time? Could this "vacation" have actually been a missionary or other trip giving service to others? Rarely does a person vacation alone; turning down Buhler's request may have been the man's only way of keeping important commitments previously made to others. But there is an even more important point here. The man's theology regarding self may have been correct, but even so, he may have found it difficult (as we all do) to set aside the concerns of self. Self-nourishment is so very much a part of our nature that even with the best efforts, and the proper theological view, we never totally overcome the tendency to self-love. What we *do not need* is further instruction on how to nourish ourselves, but a great challenge to take up our crosses and follow Christ, putting **Him** first.

Is it really accurate that "**you** are responsible for **your own** nourishment?" This appears on the surface to be a needed call to responsibility, but it must be examined more closely. There is a place in Scripture for proper care of the body and resources that God has given:

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore *honor God with your body.*" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20)

It is clear that we are to responsibly care for the bodies that God has given to us. In 1 Corinthians 12, we learn about the varied spiritual gifts that the Spirit distributes as He determines. We have a responsibility to learn what particular gifts we have, and then to use them for the common good, in a manner that honors God. However, these biblically defined responsibilities differ significantly from Buhler's analysis. First, our motives is clearly the glory and honor of God, not the nourishment of self, not even (at this point) the nourishment of others. The Lord comes first. Second, this self-care is far more limited than Buhler and other modern writers would have us believe. Only in modern America could such a book be prosperous among Christians. I would be embarrassed to send it to a believer suffering severe persecution under a Communist or other anti-Christian regime, but I dare suggest that such a believer is unlikely to consider himself spiritually malnourished. Consider Paul's instructions to Timothy:

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer." (2 timothy 2:3, 4)

Also consider the physical sufferings endured by Paul for the sake of the gospel:

"Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in dangers from bandits, in dangers from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:24-29)

Was Paul putting his own nourishment ahead of others? Was he taking responsibility for his own nourishment? Would modern psychologists label him "codependent?" Would we say that he was undernourished, or could there be some scriptural truths that Buhler has missed?

Reordering Priorities

One of the major weaknesses of this book is the shifting of focus from God to self. This is a reversal of priorities that cannot be supported by Scripture. Instead, we must note the words of our Lord in Matthew 6:25-34, where He explains so clearly that we are not to focus on even the basic necessities of life such as food and clothing. Our Heavenly Father knows that we need these things, and He does expect us to work diligently for our material needs. However, our priority must first and foremost be **Him**:

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
(Matthew 6:33)

The Christian walk is characterized by self-sacrifice and self-denial, not self-nourishment:

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Matthew 16:24-26)

This is hardly the picture of nourishing oneself first! However, a couple of important questions must be answered. Does God leave us in a state of spiritual, or even physical, malnourishment? If not, then where is the responsibility for our nourishment? Scripture answers these questions in abundance.

No, God does not leave us in spiritual malnourishment! A thousand times no! His promises are many. More will be offered when we thoroughly review the biblical concept of nourishment, but here are some prominent examples of His provision:

"The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry but He thwarts the craving of the wicked." (Proverbs 10:3)

"The righteous eat to their hearts' content, but the stomach of the wicked goes hungry." (Proverbs 13:25)

What we have here is a guarantee that the *righteous* will never go hungry. Spiritual nourishment has everything to do with our right standing before God. It doesn't mean that we are righteous of our own efforts, which are as "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), but we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and our hearts are seeking to be conformed to the image of Christ. Nourishment is a wonderful byproduct of turning away from self-focus, worshiping and honoring the Lord.

As Christians, we do have many serious and important responsibilities which God enables us to fulfill through His power working in us. In fact, working to earn our *physical nourishment* is among them:

"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule:
'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'
(2 Thessalonians 3:10)

Nevertheless, seeking one's own spiritual nourishment, especially ahead of God or others, is never listed as one of our responsibilities. This is particularly true when we realize that this book allows a rather broad definition of the term "nourishment." If it merely meant receiving salvation through Jesus Christ, or faithfully partaking of His Word, then "seeking our own nourishment" might be somewhat synonymous with seeking God's kingdom and righteousness. However, Buhler's many illustrative stories lead us to a much wider view of nourishment. The conclusion we must draw from Scripture is that God Himself take responsibility for our spiritual nourishment. Look at the familiar words of Psalm 23:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside the still waters,
He restores my soul.
He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake....
You prepare a table before me in the presence in my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." (Psalm 23:1-3, 5)

Notice that **He** makes me to lie down in green pastures, and **He** leads me beside the still waters, and **He** prepares a table before

me in the presence of my enemies. **He** is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). As mere sheep, we are not likely to even know what good nourishment is; He alone knows how to care for His sheep. When we trust completely in His care and seek to live lives that are pleasing to Him, we can be fully assured of abundant spiritual nourishment.

One Source or Many?

Buhler tells a rather humorous story of a man who literally turned orange from eating nothing but carrots for many days. Using that analogy, he claims that our nourishment must come from more than one source. He faults Christians who seek only "Christian" or "spiritual" types of nourishment. Are these claims valid? Note the instructions of our Lord regarding spiritual sustenance:

"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.'" (John 6:35)

"But He said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about. My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.'" (John 4:32, 34)

Our essential spiritual nourishment is Jesus Christ Himself, the bread of life. Properly connected with Him, rooted in His love, worshiping the Creator rather than created things, we have all that we really *need* for life and godliness. We are abundantly filled and fully equipped to serve the Lord, nourishing others who need His love. We may be pleased to enjoy other benefits that He graciously provides, or we may live under severe persecution yet experience godly contentment:

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."
(Philippians 4:12, 13)

It is true that Christians must not "cocoon" in a world of only church and other related spiritual activities. The reason, however, has nothing to do with nourishment. Instead, it has

everything to do with spreading the gospel as Jesus commanded us to do:

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing." (Philippians 2:14-16)

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16)

Our fundamental, vital nourishment does come from one source, and that source is Jesus Christ. The analogy with physical nourishment doesn't lead to the proper conclusions in this instance. We must be rooted and grounded in Christ in order to bear fruit for His kingdom.

Nourishment of Others

After devoting the first half of his book to nourishment of self, which Buhler claims must take priority, some space is given to properly nourishing others. The inclusion of concern for others does distinguish this book from many that promote purely a nurture of self. Marriage, children, church, and friendship are covered in some detail. Buhler rightly expresses a concern that our help be given for the good of others, and in a manner that will encourage them to assume their rightful responsibilities. There are still problems, however, due to his basic assumption that self-nourishment comes first, and that each person is responsible for his own nourishment. Little is said about directing others to a dependence on the Lord. Instead, others are encouraged to become responsible for seeking self-nourishment. The section on marriage doesn't fully address the scriptural commandments to husband and wife to put the spouse's needs ahead of self, although Buhler does acknowledge the necessity of

nourishing the other person. Rather, he indicates that each spouse is "justifiably" crying out for nourishment. When we examine the matter of motives more carefully, we will question whether such "justifiable" crying out can really be justified, or whether one has become enslaved to the idols of the heart.

There are numerous important Scriptures which address our responsibilities in the nourishment of others. Here are a couple of key passages:

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load." (Galatians 6:1-5)

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'You know that I love You.' Jesus said, 'Feed My lambs.' Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love Me?' Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.' The third time He said to him, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' He said, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said, 'Feed My sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, 'Follow Me!'" (John 21:15-19)

Jesus forcefully instructs us that, if we truly love Him, then we must feed His sheep. Not one word is said of feeding ourselves first. That is **His** job, not our worry. The verses in Galatians speak of our responsibilities in restoring those who have fallen into sin, in order that they may assume their proper responsibilities and be restored to usefulness in the body of Christ. We are told here to consider our own vulnerability to sin, but not to seek our own nourishment first. These and other

Scriptures points us to a biblical view of nourishing others in response to our Lord and out of our love for Him.

Matters of the Heart

One of the most fundamental problems with this book, and others like it, is the failure to fully address its issues in terms of the heart of man. This in-depth perspective is essential in coming to conclusions that are scripturally sound.

First, it is necessary to define the word "heart" as it is used in the Bible. Popular usage equates the "heart" with emotions and sets it against the "head," or intellect. Scripture uses the term in an entirely different manner. The heart is contrasted with the lips, or mouth:

"These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."
(Matthew 15:8-9)

The heart is compared with the outward appearance of man:

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Jesus teaches us that sins like adultery and murder come forth out of the heart:

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." (Matthew 15:19)

The heart, in these passages and others, is not equivalent solely to the emotions. The definition is much broader, encompassing the whole inner man--his motives, intentions, thoughts, and emotions. Not only is the heart never set against the head (intellect), it actually includes it. This biblical view is essential to undertaking a critique of Buhler's book (or any other) in terms of how it addresses the motives of the heart.

Next, we need to digress momentarily and examine the modern "codependency" movement. Although Buhler only uses the term "codependent" quite briefly, this entire book relates to the issue as it is defined in modern culture. The definition of this term is fuzzy, but generally, the "codependent" is characterized by a

focus on others and a neglect of his own needs. He is "addicted" to another person who suffers from a life-dominating sin such as drunkenness, drug abuse, or gluttony. The concept originated as a term used to describe the spouse of a drunkard (euphemistically termed "alcoholic"). Since Buhler's book instructs us in how to nourish ourselves ahead of others, its application to the "codependent" movement ought to be clear.

Is the "codependent" problem one that is defined in Scripture as a real problem? What assumptions about the nature of man underlie this concept? Basically, this highly popular movement presupposes an "inner core" or "true self" that is inherently good. If this were correct, then there would be no harm done in teaching people to nourish themselves, even ahead of others. However, Scripture repeatedly informs us otherwise, including this key passage written by David following his fall into adultery:

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5)

David was undoubtedly pursuing his own nourishment when he called for Bathsheba, the wife of another man, and slept with her. While Buhler does include strong warnings about appropriate moral values as defined in Scripture, self-nourishment often deludes us into sacrificing those morals in preference for whatever "feels good."

Not only does "codependency" assume inherent goodness in the individual; it similarly presupposes that emotions are good and they are the "real you." There is a subtle (and sometimes blatant) exaltation of feelings. Although Buhler does not clearly proclaim this goodness of man or his emotions, he echoes the assumption of it. For example, in describing a man having an extramarital affair, he does not condone the adultery but states that his "hunger" is "normal." Is it really?

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its **deceitful desires**; to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:22-24)

"...but each one is tempted when, by his own **evil desire**, he is dragged away and enticed." (James 1:14)

What appears to be "normal" may be a perceived "need" which is fueled by man's exchange of the worship of God for the worship of created things (idols):

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--Who is forever praised. Amen."

(Romans 1:22, 23, 25)

"'Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all? Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the Lord will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry. I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.'"

(Ezekiel 14:3-5)

In view of the "codependent" movement's false assumptions regarding the goodness of man and his emotions, the nourishment of self is a dangerous proposition which would be best left in the hands of our Creator, who knows our genuine needs infinitely better than we do and promises to meet them according to His riches. Biblically, assumptions are termed "doctrine." In 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, we learn that all Scripture, which is breathed out by God, is useful for doctrine, or instruction, as well as conviction, correction, and disciplined training in righteousness; the man of God is made complete, fully equipped for every good work. The word doctrine may seem to be a dry subject best relegated to the classrooms of seminary, but it is of vital importance to every Christian who desires to live a life that is pleasing to God. Basic doctrine is our foundation for drawing conclusions about how to live and how to solve the many problems of life relating to behavior, attitude, and relationships. False doctrine leads to unsound and dangerous conclusions, no matter how logical they may seem. That is why this lengthy discussion was so necessary, that we might understand the biblical doctrine of "heart" and the heretical worldview underlying the "codependent" movement. Without it, we could not thoughtfully and accurately discern some of the basic problems with Buhler's book.

In all fairness, there is a *partial* attempt here to identify proper motives. Buhler says that we nourish ourselves first in order to be able to nourish others. While that is dangerous in view of our sinful, self-centered nature and other scriptural teachings about putting the Lord first, this basic motive is worthwhile. Nevertheless, the consideration of man's heart is incomplete.

Buhler begins his book with the story of a woman who was frantically involved in service to others, and yet, she apparently never nourished herself. He writes, "To use a biblical metaphor, the 'outer man' looks very impressive and well nourished; the 'inner man,' however, is famished." In the case cited, the "outer man" did indeed look impressive. The "inner man," however, was acting in a frenzied search for self-nourishment. As the woman admitted, "much of her volunteer activity had been driven by her desire for other people's approval." Famished, yes, but driven by improper desires and motives of the heart. The teachings of both Ezekiel 14, about the idols of the heart, and Romans 1, showing man's worship of created things (idols) instead of the Lord, come back to properly explain the problem and point to a biblical solution. Buhler's solution is for the woman to seek satisfaction of her own needs and to deal with the ways in which others have abused her. God's solution is for her to turn her heart back to Him in total commitment and worship. The difference is critical.

An entire chapter of this book is devoted to supposed obstacles to nourishment of self. Three are examined: guilt, fear, and perfectionism. In each case, understanding of the heart is needed to reach a biblical view.

"Guilt" in this section has been psychologized. The Bible speaks consistently of real, objectively defined guilt. We rebel, disobey the Lord, and violate His commandments, His standards. We are delivered from punishment through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. But Buhler speaks of a much different "guilt." It is reduced to a feeling, a sense of "guilt," with no objective standards for judgment. Rather than growing out of a recognition of one's sin against a holy God, it is derived from a need for the approval of man. Once again, we are faced with an idol. An idol is indeed an obstacle to the nourishment that God promises to the *righteous* man, but the solution is in turning to Christ, not in overcoming the subjective feeling in order to successfully nourish oneself without perceived "guilt."

Fear is closely tied to a concept that Buhler terms "eligibility" and applies to those who have suffered childhood

abuse. Supposedly, the victim fears success because he believes himself to be "ineligible" for anything good. Logical though it sounds, Scripture simply does not support this doctrine regarding the nature of man. Our sinful nature is more inclined toward an angry, vengeful sense of injustice, a demanding of our "rights," which calls for repentance and trust in the promises of God. Much, much more could be written about the whole area of responding biblically to victimization, but this brief analysis points us to a basic confidence in the Lord and His ultimate justice.

Perfectionism, according to Buhler, is a belief that everything must be finished perfectly before a person can nourish himself. He suggests, instead, that we can nourish ourselves along the way. Perfectionism is one more form of idolatry, a worship of something other than God, and a trust in the flesh instead of the Lord. It is He who will nourish us along the road of sanctification, as we focus on Him and not on ourselves.

Motives of the heart are a key issue in our Christian walk, and are all too frequently misunderstood and/or ignored by those who would instruct us on how to change. In the story Buhler cites at the beginning of his book, we see a woman serving others out of improper, self-focused motives. It is insufficient to merely suggest that she curtail some of that service and look at the pain in her life caused by others, along with learning to nourish herself. It may very well be necessary to examine the type and extent of her service, in light of the genuine needs of others. It may also be necessary for her to allow her body more rest, in order that she does not sin against what God says is the temple of His Holy Spirit. But primarily, she must examine her heart before God and her commitment to living a life that pleases **Him**, not herself. Herein lies the *heart* of making godly changes that will honor God and guarantee our own nourishment as a wonderful fringe benefit that accompanies righteousness.

The Biblical View of Nourishment

It is not enough to stop with a discernment of the errors promoted by modern psychology in the area of spiritual nourishment. We have a Heavenly Father who loves us and has made abundant provision to meet our legitimate needs for nourishment. The biblical principles of nourishment can be summarized as follows, and will be supported by plentiful Scripture references:

1. Jesus Christ is the Bread of life. He is our one essential source of nourishment. This must include regular partaking of His Word, and fellowship with Him through prayer.

2. We are never commanded to seek our own nourishment, but rather are instructed to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, then to feed His sheep. It is already part of our inherently sinful nature to nurture ourselves; we do not require further instruction to do so.

3. It is God's responsibility to provide our nourishment, and He promises to do so when our focus is properly on worshiping and serving Him.

4. As we nourish others, it is important to remember that God looks at the motives of our hearts. We are to serve others for their benefit, and in obedience to Christ, not to meet our own perceived "need to be needed" or other selfish ambitions.

Buhler's last two chapters concern purely spiritual nourishment. Some of the writing is very good and biblical. He describes our need for salvation from sin. He states clearly that only Jesus Christ is the "living water" that quenches our ever present spiritual thirst. He correctly notes that the Bible is the proper standard for defining good nourishment. The disciplines of solitude, prayer, fellowship, and Bible study are all discussed as steps to spiritual nourishment. He observes that not all churches are truly serving spiritual food. Basically, this portion of the book is to be commended, with a couple of exceptions that we would be wise to notice. Also, it is unfortunate that this spiritual viewpoint, with its emphasis on Jesus Christ and His Word, is not the primary foundation of the book.

Buhler claims that many who are atheists have had bad experiences with religion, resulting in their present attitudes toward God. Much as this appears to make sense, and bad experiences do take place, the Bible claims otherwise in terms of what causes unbelief:

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
(2 Corinthians 4:4)

It is Satan who blinds the unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel, and it is the Lord who draws them and sets them free from their spiritual prisons:

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."
(John 6:44, spoken by Jesus)

A second problem is that repentance and godly sorrow are not emphasized in the discussion of how one receives Christ and becomes a Christian. These are vital ingredients in salvation; otherwise, one may wrongly view faith as God's service to us instead of our service to Him.

A third and rather serious problem occurs in his discussion of Bible reading. He notes that some individuals read Scripture because they "should" rather than because it is nourishing. Terms like "should" and "ought" and "must" have become highly unpopular in modern terms, even among Christians. Ironically, an even bigger "should" has developed: We *should* not have *shoulds*. In God's view, however, such words are never outdated. He does indeed give commands, and study of His Word is among them. There is a real concern needed for those who have difficulty in studying their Bibles, but eliminating the "should" is no solution. Instead, we need a stronger concept of discipleship, giving personal guidance to those who struggle with how to understand and apply God's Word. Buhler comments that the Bible has told us *some* of the things God wants us to know, but Scripture makes an absolute claim that His divine power has given us *everything* we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Jesus Christ, which we receive through His Word (2 Peter 1:3, 4). The difference between *some* and *everything* is significant, particularly as we sort through writings such as this book and seek to discern truth from error. Finally, it seems overall that nourishment is stressed above salvation. A talk given by Buhler on this same subject began with Ephesians 1:7, 8 as support for his conclusions:

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

This Scripture has nothing whatsoever to do with the type of nourishment that Buhler recommends. It is instead a statement of the abundance of God's **grace** in delivering us from the

consequences of our sin. He has lavished that grace upon us, and that is no small matter. The glory and greatness of our salvation cannot be overlooked, and remembering that enables the believer to maintain an eternal perspective and even to endure persecution, regardless of what the world considers to be nourishing.

The conclusion of this critique is a thorough review of Scripture relating to nourishment. First, we will look at some strong warnings about improper motivation. Second, we will see verses about contentment and the limitations of earthly nourishment. Third, the Bible gives us instruction on the nourishment of others. Finally, God has supplied us with an abundance of glorious promises (in addition to those we have already reviewed) that He will supply our need for spiritual nourishment.

In nourishing others, or in praying for the Lord to meet some of our own needs, godly motivation is a crucial factor:

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (James 4:3)

"These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted--twice dead." (Jude 12)

"Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by gods that are not gods. **I supplied all their needs**, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are **well-fed**, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife." (Jeremiah 5:7, 8)

"Their destiny is destruction, **their god is their stomach**, and the glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:19, 20)

"When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony. Do not crave his delicacies, for that food is deceptive." (Proverbs 23:1-3)

"Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel." (Proverbs 20:17)

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." (Daniel 1:8)

Earthly nourishment is limited in value, and we are instructed to be content with what is necessary to sustain life:

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17)

"But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do."
(1 Corinthians 8:8)

"But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." (1 Timothy 6:8)

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."
(Philippians 4:12, 13)

Christians are called to a life of giving service and nourishment to others for the sake of Christ, even to the extent of offering food and drink to one's **enemies**:

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." (Proverbs 25:21; see also Romans 12:20)

True fasting..."is it not to share your food with the hungry...then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help and He will say: Here am I."
(Isaiah 58:7, 9)

"The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment." (Proverbs 10:21)

Descriptions of the righteous man: "He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked." (Ezekiel 18:7, also verse 16)

The man who is right before God need never fear spiritual starvation. God's promises to nourish are **many**, and included here are but a few:

"Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food.' And it was so."
(Genesis 1:29, 30)

This is one of God's first promises of nourishment, and it illustrates His role as the one true source of all nourishment.

"Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare." (Proverbs 20:13)

"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." (Proverbs 3:7, 8)

"In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has. He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity, and honor." (Proverbs 21:20, 21)

"A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor." (Proverbs 22:9)

"What the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted. When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever." (Proverbs 10:24, 25)

"He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty."
(Proverbs 28:19)

"The wicked man craves evil; his neighbor gets no mercy from him." (Proverbs 21:10)

"The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." (Proverbs 13:4)

"They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the Lord..." (Hosea 4:10)

"Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love, and His wonderful deeds for men, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."
(Psalm 107:8, 9)

"Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and near the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He sent forth **His Word** and healed them; He rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of His works with songs of joy."
(Psalm 107:17-22)

"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing."
(Psalm 145:15, 16)

"Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them--the Lord, who remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry."
(Psalm 146:5-7)

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." (Isaiah 55:1, 2)

"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."
(Hebrews 5:14)

"Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'" (John 4:13, 14)

"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life." (John 6:27)

"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'" (John 6:32, 33)

"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'" (John 6:35)

"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.'" (John 6:53-58)

Jesus says that He is our Shepherd, laying down His life for the sheep, and coming into the world that we might have life abundantly. Referring to His sheep, Jesus says, "He will come in and go out, and find pasture." (John 10:9)

As Christians, we have the wonderful hope of eternal nourishment when God's kingdom is established forever:

"Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to

springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:16, 17)

From beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, God has promised to supply His children with abundant spiritual nourishment. We must stand on His Word and give Him the total commitment that He requires, and we will never be disappointed:

"Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst** for righteousness, for they will be filled!" (Matthew 5:6)

© 1993, Christian Discernment Publications Ministry, Inc.
www.christiandiscernment.com

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Critique of *New Choices, New Boundaries*, by Rich Buhler

Introduction.....1

Does Nourishment Begin With Self?.....2

Reordering Priorities.....4

One Source or Many?.....6

Nourishment of Others.....7

Matters of the Heart.....8

The Biblical View of
Nourishment.....12

