

TASTE & SEE
THE GOODNESS OF GOD'S WORD

THE 40-DAY

Feast



WENDY SPEAKE

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Feast

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Wendy Speake, *The 40-Day Feast*

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Dedicated to the Holy Spirit, who wrote the Word;
to the Father, who wrapped it in flesh and sent it to us;
and to Jesus, who is both the Message and the Messenger!
Be glorified, I pray.

The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.

A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

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Welcome to the Feast

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

Psalm 34:8

NO BOOK HAS EVER BEEN WRITTEN, nor ever will be, that holds the power to sway a human heart toward the Word of God more than the Bible itself. Yet here I am, setting a literary table and pulling up figurative chairs in an effort to whet your appetite for the written account of God's extravagant, demonstrative, unrelenting love. As I serve up this forty-course feast in the form of daily devotions, it is my hope that you taste the sweetness of God for yourself. Oh, He is good, and His Word is true. Yet many miss out entirely because not all Bible-believing men and women are Bible-reading men and women. As a result, we're a malnourished bunch.

The irony of being spiritually malnourished is that many of us are also overfed on cultural junk food. We are consumers who overeat and overdrink by bingeing shows and social media, online shopping and retail therapy, video gaming and YouTube watching. But none of those things have ever worked to fill our holes and make us whole—or holy. When we turn to food and drink, screens and shopping, to meet our deepest needs, we end up unsatisfied and hungrier than ever. **We are a generation of consumers who never learned to consume God's Word.** We scroll through our

phones and scour our cabinets, hungry for something to satisfy, but nothing we find there ever does. We were made for more. We were made for God. And our Bibles are where we find Him.

That is why I spent a year hunkered down over my keyboard, bent over that metaphorical stove, cooking up this feast—not in an effort to feed you for forty days, but to inspire and equip you to feed yourself directly from the bountiful buffet of God’s Word. This book will come to an end, but the Word of God never ends (Isa. 40:8). It is the only thing able to satisfy hungry hearts.

Only in our Bibles will we find the help, hope, and healing we’re desperate for. In our Bibles we find light for the path we’re on and bread for the day ahead. In the pages of God’s holy communication, we encounter not only conviction but transformation—and grace. In our Bibles we taste the sweetness of grace, the very goodness of God’s redemptive love. As we feast on His forgiveness, we find ourselves forgiven and forgiving. As we open up our Bibles, we discover not only the message but the Messenger—the book but also the Author.

As we read, believe what we read, and confess it with our lips as our own belief, the Holy Spirit, who wrote the Word and dwells in it, lifts off the page and then drops into our hearts like a deposit. He opens our minds to understand that our sins are forgiven, then gives us the strength to stop sinning. It’s all there, from Genesis to Revelation. All we have to do is consume it.

Whether or not you are already a Christian, my hope is that after you’ve spent forty days feasting with me, you’ll be hungry for more and confident enough to dig into God’s Word on your own. These bite-size devotions aren’t meant to satisfy. While I hope this book is good, it is not the Good Book. **This forty-day feast is not a comprehensive explanation of God’s Word, but an attempt to make it just a little more comprehensible.** The scope of God’s Word is too vast; my abilities to communicate too small; and the facets of God’s character revealed within its pages too multifaceted. I failed before I even began, for neither my heart nor my mind can grasp the beauty and majesty of God’s communication with humankind—the height is too high and the

depth too deep. Still, I did my best to entice you to the table, and now I welcome you to *The 40-Day Feast*.

Let's Get Hungry

The book you hold in your hands contains forty short chapters, one for each day. These readings are designed to whet your appetite for the Word of God. Each one begins with a short verse and ends with a prayer. Afterward, I serve up the *real feast*—a Bible passage for you to read on your own and a thought to chew on. My words are an appetizer; God's Word is the main course.

In the early days of our feast, we will focus our hungry hearts on the sweetness and goodness of God's Word. Together we will consider *what* the Bible is, *who* it is about, *why* we should read it, and *how* it applies to our lives. Many people are confused when they first attempt to read the Bible, but I'm hopeful you will discover that God is a clear and kind communicator. This ancient story is applicable to the story lines of our lives today, for the author is the King of all kings who rules over every generation. God's Word is enduring and endearing, eternal and most loving. Over the course of these forty days, you'll get to taste and see for yourself.

During the middle section of our feast, you'll learn different ways to study God's Word on your own—*how* to open it up and eat it up without depending on pastors or Bible study leaders to spoon-feed you your faith. I am not suggesting that you forego those guides but consider what a personal time of study and meditation might look like the other six days of the week. Whether you read through one book of the Bible over and over again or start in Genesis and continue through Revelation, you'll discover how to get the most out of God's Word with the help of His Holy Spirit, a few probing questions, and a teachable heart.

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Then, as we near the end, when our hearts are finally full and yet hungrier than ever, we will commit to staying hungry. We will commit to staying faithful. We will commit to being unashamed of our biblical worldview in the midst of this dangerously postbiblical age. And above all, we will commit to loving God and loving others as we have been commanded to do. For we do not want to simply feast on the Word, but ultimately do what it says as well.

Perhaps during this feast you will come to cherish your Bible for the first time ever. Or maybe in the early days of your faith you were insatiable, a bona fide Jesus freak who was “on fire for the Lord.” Although you once spent great gobs of time in His Word, you’ve lost your fervor and forgotten its flavor over the years. Either way, I pray these forty days light a fire in your belly. Wherever you are in your faith journey, I invite you to fall head over heels in love with the One who wrote this amazingly applicable book for you as a love letter to communicate how precious you are to Him and how available He is to you.

Pray before You Eat

Perhaps you pray before you eat physical food. Let me encourage you to bow your head before you consume this spiritual feast as well. Make the prayer below your own. Ask God to increase your hunger. For nothing you have ever hungered for, apart from Christ, the One who is the “Word made flesh,” has ever worked to satisfy or save. No latte or loved one, no purchase or person, no number on the scale or number of followers online, can give you the sense of purpose or pleasure that Christ provides. And it’s all yours for the taking (and the tasting) in the pages of your Bible.

Welcome to the feast!

Oh God, I’m ready to feast. Increase my hunger for You and Your Word. Let me taste Your sweetness and discover for myself just how good You are. I ask this humbly and hungrily, in Jesus’s name, Amen.

day 1

AN INVITATION TO THE TABLE

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:6

FEASTING WAS GOD'S IDEA from the start.

It began in the garden of Eden. Before the Lord made the first man, He made food to sustain him. Fruits and vegetables, grains and legumes, each containing multiplying root systems or self-propagating seeds to keep the feast going and growing from one generation to the next. Fish spawned, swarming in seas; animals roamed the earth, giving birth to their young; and birds filled the sky, nesting and resting long enough to lay eggs and continue the creation cycle so that the feasting cycle might also continue.

God first created the feast and then invited His guests, Adam and Eve. Just as the fruit trees and the creatures were commanded

to flourish, God told the man and the woman to be fruitful and multiply so that He would have a continual flow of guests at His all-inclusive table. From the very start, God wanted a relationship with a population of people, the Creator wanted to break bread with the created—feasting in fellowship forever.

The Garden of Eden, I've come to see,
Was where God planted the very first feast.
In the fragrant form of fruit-bearing trees
Each one embedded with miracle seeds.

From that same garden He spoke this command:
“Birds fill the sky, and animals the land!”
The sea filled with fish at the wave of His hand;
Then God touched the clay and molded a man.

The next thing he did was give man a wife
And told them to feast for the rest of their life.

I wish this invitation to the table had gone off without a hitch. However, God planted one tree in that garden that was not good for feasting. In fact, He knew that it would absolutely ruin the feast, and that's why He told Adam, clearly and kindly, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die” (Gen. 2:16–17 NLT). Sometime later, unfortunately, Eve was swayed by a serpent, the deceiving devil himself, when he hissed, “You won't die! . . . God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil” (Gen. 3:4–5 NLT). Enticed by the fruit and the words of the serpent, the woman plucked the forbidden food and ate it. She gave some of the fruit to Adam, and he ate as well.

It was this feast that put an end to the feasting life for which God had created them. In an instant, they knew that they were separated from God's good purpose for them, naked and fully exposed. They felt immediate and great shame. Cowering in the leaves, they hid themselves from God.

I find it both bittersweet and beautiful that He came looking for

them right around dinnertime, “the time of the evening breeze” (Gen. 3:8 CJB). Inviting His friends to the table, the Lord called out, “Where are you?”

Adam replied timidly from the brush, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

Then the Lord asked a question to which He already knew the answer, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (Gen. 3:8–11).

Adam and Eve confessed the whole truth and God had to follow through with the consequences of their sin. Before He sent them out of the garden of Eden, however, He lovingly made clothes for His friends and dressed them. Then off they went, with the garden locked behind them and a future of labor before them. Eve would labor in childbirth, with great pain, and Adam would labor through toil in the soil, working for the feast that had been so generously provided for him in the garden.

During these next forty days, I hope to serve up a different sort of meal. Not one at a banquet table, heavy-laden with literal food, but one found in nourishing Bible stories, such as this one about Adam and Eve. As you feast on the Word of God, I pray you discover that the One who created you to feast with Him has also provided a way back to the table.

The consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin was a physical separation from God. Unfortunately, we’ve all experienced the same wayward tendencies and the same sad consequence. But God, in His longing for us, refuses to leave us in our sin and separation. This is the reason Jesus came from heaven to earth, to chase us down and bring us back to the table. He lived the life Adam and Eve couldn’t manage to live—and neither can we. Then He took our punishment—the eternal separation our sins deserve—so that we could be forgiven and restored to our place at the table.

*This is why we
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love of God.*

This is why we feast on the Word of God, to understand the love of God, shown in the flesh-and-blood person of God, that we might find our way back to God.

The apostle Paul speaks directly of this invitation back to the table:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. . . . But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (Rom. 5:1-2, 15)

Sin entered the world through one man, and as a result, humankind was banished from the garden of God's presence and the table where He wanted to fellowship with us. But, praise God, it was also through one man, Jesus, that we have been invited back to that table, that we might enjoy His fellowship again.

That's why it's important to feast on the Bible. We feast on the Word of God in order to understand the way back to God. Jesus spoke this of Himself when He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). No one comes back to the table unless invited by the Son. He is the way, this is the truth, and it leads to a forever feasting life with the Father.

Kind Creator, thank You for preparing the original feast—in Your garden and at Your table. Just like Adam and Eve, I tend to push my seat away, willfully and continually. But here You are, wooing me back and showing me the way. Thank You. I pray in the name of Jesus, the One who is the Way, Amen.



THE FEAST

Genesis 1–3



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As you feasted on Genesis 1–3, in what ways did you taste the tenderness and experience the kindness of our Creator God? Spend some time savoring the sweetness of our Creator’s invitation back to the table!

day 2

PRECIOUS MOMENTS

Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.

Jeremiah 15:16 ESV

MY FATHER gave me a white, leather-bound Precious Moments Bible when I was young. If you weren't raised in the church in the eighties, you might not know that Precious Moments characters are cartoonlike drawings and porcelain figurines of little children in various poses, always with a Bible verse communicating the main theme of the scene. I had half a dozen of these statuettes atop my bedroom dresser. My Precious Moments Bible was filled with darling pictures, and I loved it with all my little-girl heart.

While the gift was from my dad, who took me to church on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, I don't actually have memories of opening that Bible with him. No one in my home taught

me to use a highlighter to underline passages that ministered to my heart. I don't recall either of my parents modeling daily Bible reading or serving up God's Word around our family table. Yet somehow I found His words and I ate them, and they became a joy to me and the delight of my young heart. Over the years, I spent many "precious moments" in that Bible.

By the time I was in high school, I had developed a sweet tooth for God's Word. I was drawn to the psalms especially. As a highly sensitive and emotional teen, the poetry of the psalms was a balm to my often-troubled soul. God reminded me through His Word that He was mighty to save, a very present help in my times of trouble, always near and abiding, inclining His ear to me when I cried out to Him. God's Word flooded into the broken places of my heart. I read and experienced that He delighted in me; that He made me, fearfully and wonderfully; and He invited me to take refuge in Him when I felt alone. **Each bitter season, God's Word proved sweet.** I tasted and saw His goodness daily. With what can only be described as childlike faith, I believed.

When it was time for me to head to college, my dad gave me a new Bible. It was a massive Life Application Bible with a red cover. Half of each page provided context and definitions to help me better understand the passages. I remember him joking that it was time for me to have a "big-girl Bible"—and this big-girl Bible was *big!* The day I moved into my dorm room, I sat that hunk of a book on my bedside table. *Thud.* Perhaps it was due to the sheer weight of it, but I grew some spiritual muscle while reading that Bible.

It was during my freshman year of college that I met Lillian Fischer, a campus missionary. Lill was the first person to teach me *how* to study the Word, and then she took it a step further and challenged me to share it. I guess you could say that she taught me how to eat the Word and how to serve it up for others.

I remember sitting with Lill in a café on campus with my great big study Bible on the bistro table between us. Her Bible was there too, but it was small and slender and fit easily into her purse. I noticed how her Bible accompanied her subtly wherever she went, while mine took a forklift to carry with me.

One Friday night I went to a Campus Crusade for Christ event at a college across town. I took the subway, lugging my hefty Bible from stop to stop. Not long after I arrived and settled into my seat, the speaker got up and challenged us to ask God for things that were obviously in line with His character and will—things such as the salvation of our unsaved family members and friends, as well as opportunities to serve others. He then gave us a long stretch of quiet to come boldly and prayerfully before the Lord with our requests. In the silence that night, I asked God for a small Bible, one I could keep close to me wherever I went, so that I could share

*A Bible that's
falling apart
represents a life
that's been put
back together.*

my faith with others around campus. Since I had just been given a new Bible from my dad and had only a small budget to get me through the school year, I knew it would have to be the Lord providing me with yet another one. So I prayed and I asked.

The very next day, I went to the campus post office and found a small package in my student mailbox. Wrapped in brown paper with no return address was a petite leather-bound Bible. More than fifteen years would pass before I learned that my uncle Bob had sent it to me.

That was the Bible I carried everywhere during my college years. The Life Application Bible still instructed me each morning, but it was the small, leather-bound mystery Bible that I carried with me throughout my days. Once I graduated, I spent more time with that little Bible. In the hardest season of my young adult life, I took to sleeping with it under my pillow, literally resting my head on the dependability of God's promises and the comfort of His nearness.

Today all three of those Bibles—the Precious Moments Bible, the Life Application Bible, and the petite leather-bound one—are displayed on my bookshelf. Of course, this is not a competition. **The goal isn't to have a Bible collection on your shelf, but a collection of the Bible stored up in yourself.** I merely keep them in plain site as a visual reminder of God's past faithfulness.

Though they are tattered and worn, with bindings falling apart and notes poking out from between thin pages, they are beautiful to me. Throughout my young life, I tended to feel weary and worn myself, which is why I clung to my Bible until it was well-worn. My heart was tender and tattered, so I turned to God's promises with such regularity that those Bible pages became tattered too. God's Word bound me up, and now I have three Bibles coming unbound as a result. The pages are literally falling out of each Bible after falling into my heart over the years.

Nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't." I agree, though I might phrase it this way: A Bible that's falling apart represents a life that's been put back together. Have you come to know this for yourself? Whether you need a new binding on your tattered and torn life or a new binding on your well-worn Bible, I am so glad that you are opening the Word with me today. It is my hope that we have many precious moments together in the days ahead. As you ingest His Word, I pray that it becomes a joy to you and the delight of your heart.

Dear Lord, help me to find Your words and eat them. Let them become the joy of my heart. I pray this in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.



THE FEAST

Psalm 19



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As you gobble up Psalm 19, notice all the wonderful attributes of God's Word listed in verses 7–11. I pray that you come to taste and see that it's all wonderfully true.

day 3

A CONSPIRACY TO BLESS

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Revelation 1:3 ESV

REVELATION IS REGARDED by many as the most confusing book of the Bible, and yet, within its opening verses we're told that those who read it, hear it, and keep it are blessed. It's the only book in the whole Bible that begins with the guarantee that if we invest time reading it, and allowing it to influence how we live, we will experience blessing. That blows my mind. Why this book? Why not the Gospels? Why not the Epistles? Why not the Old Testament stories that chronicle the lives of God's people, Israel, and paint a picture of our own wayward tendencies in light of God's unrelenting love? And why not the whole Bible, for goodness' sake? Why just this confusing last book?

My question, I'm afraid, will remain rhetorical for the time being. While I'll circle back to consider the book of Revelation at

the end of the chapter, at this point, let's simply believe by faith that God wants to bless our lives through the reading of His Word. Throughout history, many have misunderstood God to be miserly, yet He is generously extravagant when it comes to blessing us. The psalmist declares that "pleasures forever" are found at His right hand (16:11 NASB). God isn't looking to catch us doing wrong so He can punish us. On the contrary, He set us free from the punishment we deserve so He might bless us forever. Everything God does is a generous conspiracy to bless us! And His Word unlocks those blessings.

This begs the question, if God's Word is intended to radically bless us, then what stops us from opening it up and receiving the blessing? I believe there are many reasons why Bible-believing men and women don't actually read their Bibles. Laziness and busyness might make the top of the list, but distractedness and hopelessness are up there too. A lack of tenaciousness and eagerness threaten our faithfulness, leaving us passionless. But the reason I hear most often is that people don't open up their Bibles because of ineptness. They simply don't understand what the Bible is about or how to read it. If you feel helpless, I'd like to offer some help.

*Everything God
does is a generous
conspiracy to
bless us!*

What you are about to read is a simplified summary of this most extravagant biblical narrative. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a rescue story. As with any good story, there must be a main theme, a setting, and characters. In this case, the main theme is our redemption. The heavens and the earth are our setting, though most of the action takes place on earth. And the main characters are God, His people (Israel), His Son (Jesus), and ultimately all of humanity. It's the story of a Hero-Savior and those in need of saving.

Of course, even the simplest story must also have a plot that includes exposition (backstory), rising action, conflict, a climax, falling action, and a resolution. Within the sixty-six books of the Bible, we find it all. Our backstory begins at the beginning, with

the opening line: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

Genesis is our exposition. Translated from Hebrew, the word *genesis* means “beginning,” and it’s where we learn that God existed before all else. It communicates the creation story—how God made the heavens and the earth, created light and darkness from nothingness, separated land from sea and sky from the firmament of earth, then filled it with animals and vegetation. Next, God created a man and a woman in His own image. Two days ago you read the story and learned that God planted the garden of Eden and then planted us in it because He loves us and wants to live with us.

Remember what happened next? The woman ate the one forbidden fruit and then offered it to the man, who ate it too. Adam and Eve were the first to sin, and the consequence of their sin was being thrown out of the garden of Eden. From that point in the story, we begin our rising action toward redemption and reconciliation, for God loved us too much to leave us out of His presence, even when we chose that for ourselves.

The rest of the Bible chronicles God’s passionate pursuit. The rising action continues throughout the Old Testament. As long as sin threatens, God woos. He tirelessly provides ways for His people to come back to the table of a restored relationship with Him. Communicated through the voices of the prophets and the words of the law—story after story, chapter after chapter—humankind is given the opportunity to receive or reject the blessing of His rescue. When we choose to reject Him, there are sad consequences, but when we choose to receive Him and repent from our sins, there is immediate forgiveness and restored relationship. All of this is a foreshadowing of the ultimate forgiveness that is coming our way.

When Jesus hits the scene in Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, the pace picks up. As Jesus begins His messianic ministry, a few begin to follow Him, but most of God’s people deny Him. Here in the Gospels, we are thrust into the great conflict facing all of humanity—to believe Him or to deny Him. And that propels us powerfully into the greatest climax of all—a climax so transcendent it altered human history and has the power to alter

every human heart to this day. Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross and victorious resurrection over sin and separation is the rescue within this rescue story! He snatches us from the pit we deserve and plants our feet on the spacious turf of a right and restored relationship with the Father. What a climax. What a victory.

While it seems as if the story might end there, we each have to accept Christ's invitation to believe and then learn to live differently. Just as the early church believed in Jesus, received His Holy Spirit, and became ambassadors of His message, we have the same call on our lives. We must believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and confess with our lips that God raised Him from the dead if we are to experience the Savior's salvation (Rom. 10:9). This is where we receive or refuse the rescue! Once we accept it, the story continues. We must read the letters that were written for our edification and sanctification and then share the message with others. All of this is found in the falling action of our story, throughout the New Testament.

As for the resolution, we find ourselves back at the blessing recorded in the final book of the Bible: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3 ESV). The resolution happens when we resolve to live our lives joyfully expectant that our Rescuer will come again for a final victory lap. Though the battle was won on the cross at Calvary, we live in eager anticipation of Christ's triumphant return to earth, when He will establish His kingdom here.

What a rescue. What a story. What a radical conspiracy to bless us by rescuing us from sin and giving us the intimacy and fellowship God intended from the start. Those who believe it's true and, to the very end, live as if His return is imminent are most blessed!

Your Bible may seem elusive at first, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, you will find a clear story, logical instructions for life, and straightforward encouragement that cuts through historical context and meets you in this present moment. God's rescue story is your story. One sweeping epic, one dramatic conspiracy to bless!

Lord God, You are the Rescuer, and I am the rescued. You are the Savior, and I am the saved. Israel's story is my story, and Israel's God my God! Thank You for Your relentless love. In the name of Jesus, the hero of this story, Amen.



THE FEAST

Psalm 18



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Have you allowed yourself to be rescued? The Bible story is your story! Read it as the ultimate picture of rescue and accept it as your own. If you haven't yet allowed the Lord to reach down from on high and take hold of you, ask Him now to pull you from deep waters, save you, and set you in a spacious place, rescued and redeemed, because He delights in you (Ps. 18:16–19).