

BREAD ENOUGH FOR ALL

A Day¹ Guide to Life

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CHURCH
PUBLISHING
INCORPORATED

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Day1, 2715 Peachtree Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30305

Church Publishing
19 East 34th Street
New York, NY 10016

www.churchpublishing.org

Cover design by Jennifer Kopec, 2Pug Design
Typeset by Denise Hoff

A record of this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN-13: 978-1-64065-319-1 (paperback)
ISBN-13: 978-1-64065-320-7 (ebook)

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1 | Life

Life—a rather big topic. It encompasses everything that makes us human beings, children of God, with the web of relationships and experiences that make us the individuals God created us to be.

There are two contradictory tensions about life that we often struggle to reconcile. On the one hand, some would say the world takes no interest in our well-being any more than it is concerned with any other creature's well-being. According to this understanding, our life is governed by natural forces over which we have no control, so the cold calculus that determines whether one individual, or even one species, lives can be brutal. As we have come to learn in recent decades, humans have little regard for taking care of the world in which they live and so compete viciously for scarce resources. The selfish and brutal nature of life means that the span of life for many, if not most, creatures is short.

On the other hand, biblical teachings promise an abundant life, filled with beauty and holy resources to ensure a life in which all needs, physical and spiritual, are met. The paradisiacal garden in Genesis and the heavenly city in Revelation give us images of the perfection and fullness of this abundant life. In the gospels, Jesus feeds those who are hungry, who are feeling firsthand the brutal nature of life.

To illustrate even more clearly that most people associate abundance with the satisfaction of physical needs, Jesus calls himself the “bread of life.” Some Christians have associated abundance with material prosperity and wealth, hoarding for themselves much of the food that could feed others, and thereby creating a life that is often nasty, brutal, and short for others.

Yet the Bible affirms there is bread enough for all, in every sense of that phrase. It exhorts us to live life abundantly, recognizing our inextricable roles in the web of life around us. At the same time, Christians recognize that God has created and breathed this life into them, which means that our life, in some sense, is really not our own. So it is imperative to take care of others and the world around us, for abundance can exist only in a world in which some are not diminished for the sake of others. The loss of one species, for instance, creates a world with fewer resources and less diversity. Such losses affect all the living, even if the consequences might be imperceptible to many creatures.

How, then, do we live our lives? What elements are required to live an abundant life? What is the relationship between our daily lives in this world and the eternal life that the Bible promises? What does Jesus mean when he calls himself the “bread of life”? How do baptism and communion symbolize our abundant life?

The *Day 1* preachers in this chapter provide inspiring reflections on life—and how to live it more abundantly.

“Bread Enough for All”

Diana Butler Bass • August 12, 2018 • John 6:35, 41–51

In 2016, Netflix produced a series called *Cooked*, based on food-writer Michael Pollan’s book about how basic ingredients are transformed into food through the four basic elements of fire, water, earth, and air. Although the series was full of surprises regarding the history of food, it is fairly easy to imagine how fire, water, and even earth create the food of myriad human cultures. But, air? Pollan admitted at the outset that “air” as transformation is the most mysterious, perhaps the most spiritual, of all the ways in which we cook. Despite the mystery of it, “air” has also given us the most basic of all food: *bread*.

Bread was a bit of an accident—about six thousand years ago in Egypt, “some observant Egyptian must have noticed that a bowl of

porridge, perhaps one off in a corner that had been neglected, was no longer quite so inert. In fact, it was hatching bubbles from its surface and slowly expanding, as if it were alive. The dull paste had somehow been inspired: the spark of life had been breathed into it. And when that strangely vibrant bowl of porridge—call it dough—was heated in an oven, it grew even larger, springing up as it trapped the expanding bubbles in an airy, yet stable, structure that resembled a sponge.”²

With bread, everything changed. We learned how to turn grasses into food human beings could eat, store, and transport. We learned how to cultivate grains and manage fields, how to harvest and mill and leaven and bake. We created agriculture. We developed entire communities—entire civilizations—devoted to the making of bread.

No wonder that in Arabic the words *bread* and *life* are the same word. And in cultures where the words are different, *bread* is so basic that the term is often used for food in general, and later, when modern economics were born, we even nicknamed money *bread*.

And Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”

Just the day before he said these words, Jesus and the disciples had fed the multitude with only five loaves of bread. The disciples had handed Jesus those few loaves, and after they quieted the crowd, “Jesus took the loaves, and gave thanks.” He probably prayed the ancient Jewish prayer traditionally used before a meal:

*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.*

The bread is broken and shared and, as the story goes, all were fed, fully fed, sated, satisfied. The disciples gathered up the leftovers, and there were twelve whole baskets of remains from the original five loaves.

Jesus’s words, “I am the bread of life,” fit into a larger story—Jesus has set a table on the hillside where there was little bread, and

² Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2013), 207.

abundant bread appeared. There were blessings and thanks, and all were fed. This is Jesus's miracle of abundance, the echo of the manna in the wilderness, where God's people were fed real food, a food that sustained them when lost in the desert.

This is God's long dream for humankind—that we all might live without lack, that our world might not be one of scarcity, but one of abundance.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." And then he added, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." When we modern people hear those words, we think that Jesus sounds narrow, exclusive—only those who believe in this bread and eat of this bread will be saved. But that isn't the point at all. Jesus is reminding his followers that bread is for everyone. That God is the source of abundance, the One who promises that in the age to come no ruler, no Caesar would control the bread. Instead, there will be bread—bread for all, bread that will not lead to death, but abundant bread, the bread of life. Jesus tells us to pray for our *daily bread*, a radical vision if ever there was one—that bread shall be at the table, every table, every day, the gift of God.

And then, Jesus says, that age, the Age of the Bread of Life, has arrived, "For the bread of God is the one descending out of heaven and imparting life to the cosmos" (John 6:33). Bread shall no longer be a tool of empire, a product of toil, the reminder of slavery and sin. Bread will be again as it was intended, the life of the cosmos.

Bread is real food, and bread is the spiritual food of the Age to Come. In the same way that actual bread is transformed by air, so Jesus's bread is transformed by the Spirit. The bread of life *descends* from heaven; it is cooked with spiritual leaven. In another gospel, Jesus says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough" (Matthew 13:33).

As an inert porridge becomes infused with life, its dough rising, so the cosmos, now sluggish in sin, are surely, slowly being yeasted. The bread of life has come, it sparks and bubbles among us, the table is set, and the blessing proclaimed. This is the wisdom of God, the miracle of

Jesus: that all will be fed, that the ills of a world based on scarcity are passing, and that the time of abundance is here.

“Life Is Short”

Brett Younger • August 7, 2004 • Luke 12:32–40

Christ calls us to amazing lives. Jesus tells the disciples to give up wanting more, share the wealth, be constantly awake for God’s presence. Jesus describes a life of loving one’s enemies, turning one’s cheek, serving others.

God invites us to live in Christ’s way, knowing that our sins are forgiven, knowing that despite what we might think of ourselves or what others might think about us, we are deeply loved by the one who created us. The value of our lives is not to be measured by our bank account, not by how we look, not by our standing in the community, not even by the amount of good we’ve done, but simply by this: that God values us highly enough to give us joy.

We live the good life out of gratitude. We live in the way of Christ, the way in which, by faith, forgiveness triumphs over revenge, hope over despair, joy over sorrow, generosity over stinginess, love over apathy.

God calls us to be watchful for the ways in which joy is breaking in around us. Christ is always coming. The clouds are always descending. Stay alert to how God draws near in the mighty injustice that grabs our attention and begs for our passion. God draws near in the spiritual awakening that puts us in touch with a heart that we had forgotten we had. God draws near in the thing of beauty that reminds us that the world is more than just its ugliness. Who knows what form it will take, this reign of God that is always drawing near us? Be watchful for it. Look for it in the midst of the routines.

Wake up to whatever your life is bringing you. Wake up to pain because we can’t be healed until we admit that we’re hurt. Wake up to the love we won’t let ourselves feel, because we’re afraid our hearts will break. Wake up to the job we’ve been given—watching for God’s presence.

“My Life Has Never Been the Same”

Scott Gunn • March 10, 2019 • Luke 4:1–13

A friend of mine told me how she came to be transformed by an encounter with God’s word. As a child, she grew up in a household that went to church, but she didn’t get any exposure to an actual Bible. Visiting a friend’s house—a home where the family was very involved in their Baptist church—my friend saw a Bible. She was curious, and she somehow turned to the first chapter of John’s gospel.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

It is, I think, the most beautiful chapter in the entire Bible. My friend was captivated. She copied down that poetic chapter onto a piece of paper and kept it with her for years. Through the words of scripture, the Word made flesh transformed her. Her life has never been the same.

During Lent, I encourage you to decide how you might use this season to turn to Jesus, to reject those things that draw you away from him. If you already have a plan, wonderful. But if you don’t yet have a plan, perhaps you will take a suggestion. Find a Bible. Or find a Bible app or a Bible website. Every day of Lent, read a few words of scripture. Read a gospel. Read the Bible from the beginning. Read the psalms. Read the invigorating story of the early church and the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. Find an index and read about a topic that interests or concerns you. Whatever you do, read. Read God’s word.

We do not live by bread alone. We live—we truly, fully live—when we are nourished by the bread of life and our thirst is quenched by the living water. Jesus shows us the way in all things. And today he shows us that the scriptures can be our companion when we are tempted, when we are most in need.

Our life’s journey is full of challenges, full of relentless temptations. How can we resist the temptations to turn away from Jesus? How can we

make sure we hear the still, small voice of God amidst a din of competing noises? We can turn to the Bible. We can open our hearts. We can bask in the glory of God's love for us as it is revealed in the scriptures.

We might find ourselves saying, "My life has never been the same."

"The Seasons of Life"

Thomas Lane Butts • April 14, 1996 • 1 Corinthians 15:50–58

Each season of life has in it certain inherent tasks that must be accomplished if we are to grow into the next, unimpeded and unimpaired. And if by circumstance or neglect we do not resolve the issues of one season of life, these unattended issues attach themselves to us and plague us from one season to the next until they are resolved in some manner.

Admittedly, there are those for whom life has been such an unhappy experience that the whole idea of eternal life of any sort seems to be more of a wicked threat than a happy promise.

But in spite of this anomaly, we want life, more life than we now see. The very nature of God suggests life after death. The justice and love of God, the nature of humankind, and the nature of life itself, the heart of the teachings of Jesus and of the whole New Testament, call us to believe in life after death.

I do not ultimately believe in life after death because of any mindboggling philosophical arguments, as convincing as they may be. Any rational arguments, taken individually or collectively, leave enough unanswered questions about life after death to seriously impair a confident approach to the grave. I believe in life after death because Jesus said, "Because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19). I trust the word and the promise of Jesus. I do not understand the mechanics of how this will be.

My heart frames questions for which the mind has no ready answers. I do not know the way, but I trust both the person and the living direction of the one who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I believe what Jesus said about life and death, and life after death, comes

from God. He knows the answers to questions that I cannot answer. He not only *knows* the way, he *is* the way—and I will follow him to and through and beyond the grave.

For the Christian, belief in life after death hangs, finally, not upon any rational arguments that the mind can frame, but upon faith in the veracity of one solitary person, whom we believe to be the divine Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived and died and indeed rose from the dead, giving final substance to his most radical promise and claim.

Jesus, in his teachings, assumes the everlasting quality of life. He admits no possibility that a person may escape from life by dying. What we have become in this life, for better or worse, we take with us into a new setting, the exact nature of which we do not know or understand. When we die, we leave behind all that we have and take with us all that we are. It is a sobering thought to realize that with death we are not done with life.

“Tattooed for Life”

Debra von Fischer Samuelson • January 8, 2017 • Matthew 3:13–17

Life can hold with it joy and laughter and wonderful conversations and friendships, some close enough even to be our chosen families. And right alongside it, life can bring with it loss and disappointment and sleepless nights and an inner certainty that no matter what we do or no matter how hard we try, we’re just not measuring up.

Which is why we need to tell this baptism story over and over again—to counter the story of the inner critic, to counter the story the world often tells that to be truly beloved you have to possess something: money, house, good looks, power. We tell this baptism story over and over to counter the story that we don’t measure up or that we don’t belong. The story of baptism is not only a story that we belong to God and are beloved by God, it is a story that we belong to each other, that we are a part of a larger story of God’s presence in the world.

Several years ago the theme for Lent at my church was baptism. We wanted our people to remember their baptisms and the difference

that being baptized makes in their day-to-day lives. Months earlier, in conversation with a couple of our talented artists in the congregation, the idea came up about creating a baptismal font for Lent that would somehow also be interactive. I loved the idea and they ran with it—but it ended up a little bigger than the original plan.

I was thinking of a nice little fountain with some water that would be running and maybe would splash around and draw some attention to it. But when the congregation entered the church that first Wednesday evening in Lent, they discovered a huge ten-by-ten-foot box with two-and-a-half-foot- high cement walls, with three pipes sticking up about five feet from the bottom. Around the foyer were chunks or pieces of limestone on flats, left over from landscaping jobs because they weren't the right size or the right color or the right shape for their original purpose, each one with a round hole drilled through the middle of it.

Following the worship service, the community was instructed to line up and take pieces of the limestone, pass each one down the line, and put them on the pipes until each pipe was covered to the top with limestone pieces. What people hadn't realized was that those pipes were water pipes. When they turned the water on, water started trickling out of those pipes and over the stones. And these leftover stones that had been rejected from various landscaping jobs—all different shapes and sizes and colors, now stacked together and with water sprinkling over them—became a beautiful fountain.

Those stones were *us*, we who sometimes feel rejected because we just don't measure up and yet are chosen to be part of something big and beautiful, just as God had chosen us in our baptism to be a part of God's kingdom, a member of God's family. And as we watched the water run over the stones, we could imagine God's love, shown to us in the waters of baptism, washing over our lives, bathing us in love.

We come together in worship because we need to hear over and over again that God loves us and has claimed us as beloved children, cherished and treasured. And we come together in worship because our wells sometimes have run dry and we need to feel those refreshing waters of baptism trickling over us again. Because sometimes life is just

so hard that we have no words to pray or no songs to sing; we are just that empty. Sometimes it's the community of the baptized that sings those hymns we can't always sing, and sometimes it's the community that prays the prayers we can't always pray, and sometimes it's the community that speaks the words of faith that we can have trouble speaking ourselves or even believing ourselves. And we just let those words and songs and prayers wash over us, reminding us of God's love, reminding us that in the waters of baptism, God has called us and claimed us as God's own—beloved and delightful. Cherished.

That's the story of our baptisms. That's a story worth telling, over and over again. That's a story worth living in.

“Sharing in the Life of Jesus”

Juan Carlos Huertas • August 12, 2012 • John 6:35, 41–51

When we eat and drink together, we recognize that Jesus, the “bread of life,” is showing us the way to one who is available and yet mysterious, showing us that we too have access to the divine life, that we too can come into God's presence.

Maybe if we spent more time and attention in becoming a “feeding people,” if we put our attention in becoming a community of the “bread of life,” if we took more seriously the reality of God's own presence in our meal, we would spend less time and attention on things that separate us, that exclude others, that close our doors, and that question God's image in others.

Do we gather week after week and sit in the pew and say “yes” and eat of the meal and go on with life as usual, or do we ignore it altogether as something that has nothing to do with us, as something that we might think about later at another time, ignoring the plight of those around us, continuing to push people out of the community?

Part of the challenge is to recognize that there are many around us who go each day, every day, without the sustenance needed. As we gather for feasting day after day, week after week, there are many who have no such sustenance. As we go about our political posturing and ideologies, there

are many who go without. As we fight about who has worked enough, who has had enough initiative, as we argue with one another about what it takes to be “successful,” as we battle as congregations across America wanting to draw the line as to who’s in and who is out, we miss the point, we miss the invitation. We, like those who came back on that day, are still unsure who it is that we have encountered.

“I am the living bread,” says Jesus. Open your eyes. See the light.

Maybe now we can recognize that we, too, have been beneficiaries of an amazing life. We have found our sustenance, and instead of using it to propel us into the neediness and hunger of the world, instead of having it energize us into speaking on behalf of those that have no voice, instead of having it call us to task again and again into the ways that our own life is part of the problem, we have continued eating our fill, acting as if we’ve earned it, ignoring the plight of those who need this sustenance the most.

The community called the church is at its core a community of people who hunger. A community of people called together around table, whose own identity is rooted in what it means to be sustained by the presence of Christ’s self each and every time we gather together.

From the very beginning of the story of faith, God has been giving us of Godself, inviting us to take this sustenance and use it as a source of being the light of the world on behalf of God’s kingdom. So part of our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving is our recognition that, when we leave our gatherings of prayer and praise, we are to walk out the door and work tirelessly for the sustenance and feeding of a hungry world.

May our congregations, may our gatherings, may our conversations become the active center of creating this future, of creating eschatological reality. May we together begin to make a way to the Father in our eating. May we become a people that begin to extend life eternal, a people who live out the meaning of sharing in the life of Jesus to a hungry world.

“Life Is Gift”

John Claypool • June 13, 2004 • Luke 7:36–8:3

The insight on which Jesus built his life in ministry is in fact the loveliest truth in all the world. To put it quite simply, life is gift. Birth is windfall. None of us earned our way into this world by what we did or did not do. It was given to us out of pure generosity and out of everlasting mercy. This truth in the depth of all being is the secret of all secrets in the Christian vision of reality.

As the ancient hymn in Philippians puts it, “Jesus made himself of no reputation.” And he was able to do that because he had already been given a name that was greater than anything else in the world. In other words, Jesus understood that life is given to us as a gracious gift. Our worth is not something we have to earn or to deserve, and it was this sense of life as gift that not only enabled Jesus to minister as Jesus did, but it’s how he was able to open other people’s eyes to the great generosity that lies at the heart of God that is, in fact, the greatest saving truth.

Jesus, at the time of his baptism, realized that he was by the grace of God the beloved child of God, and what was true of Jesus at that moment is true of every one of us as well. This is exactly what this woman and Zacchaeus had discovered and accounts for the incredible change that came over their lives.

I had a friend once who had struggled for years with feelings of inadequacy. He had tried so hard to earn a sense of worth by out-achieving and out-competing other people. But every time, he told me, it turned out to be just like cotton candy. Achievements lasted for just a moment and then turned into nothing but air in the depth of his being.

After years of seeking to earn his own salvation, one day in a hotel room he finally cried out in sheer anguish just like the Philippian jailer, “O God, what must I do, what must I do to be saved?” And he told me that to his great amazement, as he uttered his words, it was as if a hand began to write something on the wall across from his bed. And what the hand wrote was, “Nothing, nothing at all. It comes with the territory.” And it dawned on him that what he had so tried to earn

was, in fact, a gift freely given if he would simply accept it. He said he had what Thomas Merton calls a breakthrough to the already, an old image he had read years before came back to his mind—that of an individual riding on an ox looking for an ox. Here was somebody anxiously surveying the whole terrain to try to find something when all along what that one most wanted was right present underneath him.

This is the great truth of being saved by grace. We do not earn our worth by what we do. It was given to us by the great generosity of God at the moment of our conception. And, therefore, in this passage, it's clear to me that Jesus opened up the way for this “notorious sinner” to learn the wonder of what it means that life is gift and birth is windfall. She came that day to give thanks to the one who had opened her eyes to the deepest of all truths.

I invite you in this moment to ponder the fact that God loves you in exactly the same way that God loves every human being that God has called out of nothing into being. You already are the beloved child of God, not by virtue of what you have made of yourself, but by virtue of what God has made of you out of pure and amazing grace. I invite you, in fact, I plead with you, let God's grace be the basis of how you feel about yourself.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. What does it mean to live life abundantly in today's world?
Does it involve gathering material possessions around yourself? Or something else entirely?
2. In Genesis 1, God creates all life, including human life.
Reading that chapter alone, reflect on the meaning of life in God's world. What is the relation in Genesis 1 of human life to other forms of life?
3. Jesus says that he has come to give life and to give it more abundantly. What does Jesus mean? In what ways is this possible?

4. Jesus is called “the bread of life.” What implications does this phrase have for us, especially when we partake of the bread in the sacrament of communion?
5. Consider your baptism. How did that sacrament mark your life? Are you living according to the baptismal vows you made or were made on your behalf? Find a Book of Common Prayer and renew them (see pages 301–303).
6. Many Christians focus on their lives as a kind of station along the way to eternal life. What are the challenges and rewards of this view of life?
7. What do you think Jesus means when he declares, “I am the way, the truth, and the life”? What does he mean when he says, “I am the bread of life”?
8. **GROUP ACTIVITY:** When does life begin? As a group or in pairs or trios, find biblical passages that offer descriptions of the beginning of life, then share your findings. How do those passages describe the beginning of life? How do they describe life itself? What does living involve? How are you living your lives in these days? Do you feel that you are living life abundantly? Share your conclusions with the whole group.