

I have to make a confession. I like red jelly belly jelly beans from Fresh Market. No I love wild cherry jelly beans. I love the little Kit Kat bars that we give out to sick members of Open Bible, in a hum bag. Don't tell Ruth Ann Niermeyer that I have eaten some of them again. And pretzels. We can't even keep them in the house. I will eat two bowels of pretzels without thinking twice about it. That's not the only guilty pleasure I have. I also love Red vine red liquorice. It has to be Red vines. Not Twizzlers. My wife is from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. If I get a chance, when I visit that state, I will eat fresh cheese curds or string cheese, a whole bag at one sitting.

Mmmmm. Junk food. There's nothing like it. It's so delicious. It melts in the mouth. It's comfort food. But there is one big problem. Junk food is really, really bad for you! It clogs your arteries. It throws off your blood sugar. It gives you the bad kind of energy. It sits and rots in your stomach. It makes you gain lots of weight and makes you very unhealthy. Junk food tastes *so* good but yet it is *so* bad. What's bad too is that you start eating it, you tend to want more and more. And if you eat enough junk food or only junk food, eventually it will lead to death.

There's also junk food in this life that doesn't just taste good, but it feels good, too. It feels good to indulge in the occasional bad word at times. You have bottled up anger and frustration and finally—BLAM—a swear word seems appropriate for the situation. And it feels so good to get it out!

It feels good to indulge in what you see and hear. You shouldn't be seeing that movie. You shouldn't be on that website. You shouldn't be reading that book. You shouldn't be listening to music with those kinds of words. But it feels so good to indulge!

It feels good to indulge in laziness. Skipping out on what's important, not taking time to help others, ignoring opportunities for being loving. These are the easy way out. Those aren't the only guilty pleasures. There are more. There are other foods that we love to indulge in. They don't lead to life-long or eternal health, but they just taste so good at the time.

We crave the success of our children and grandchildren. We want them to succeed and be smart and be happy. It doesn't matter the cost or the time commitment. Parents will spend thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars on leagues and traveling teams and private coaching. It doesn't matter if we spend our life savings or skip everything spiritual that is important. We hold out the hope that maybe, just maybe, we might have that one in a million child like 22 year old golfer, Jordan Spieth or Packer Quarterback Aaron Rogers.

And we love to indulge in things. A nicer car here. A bigger house. A new couch. A bigger TV. We complain about not having money at times. We struggle to pay bills. We don't have much to give to God or to charity. But somehow there's plenty of money when we want to go on a Caribbean or European vacation or purchase that new set of wheels. But oh, it just tastes so good at the time! For the last month we have been hearing one continuous story from John chapter 6. Jesus miraculously fed over 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and some fish. The next day the people sailed all the way across the Sea of Galilee until they found him again. They wanted more instant gratification from Jesus—more miracles, more food, more healings.

When they finally found Jesus he counseled them not to eat food that spoils and rots and perishes. That's junk food. Instead he counseled them to eat bread that

lasts. That's when Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." But they didn't get it. So Jesus continued, **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."**

It wasn't that difficult of a concept. Jesus was using a metaphor. Jesus called himself bread, so whoever ate of this bread would have life. He was talking about believing in him. Yet they still didn't get it. They were so focused on the thought of filling their stomachs and eating something that they started to argue about how one could eat Jesus' flesh. They were so consumed with the physical that they didn't understand Jesus meant something spiritual. We are the same way as those Jews. Like a pregnant woman craving peanut butter, like the chocolate lover craving M&Ms, like the Wisconsinite craving deep fried cheese curds—we crave junk food. We crave indulgent behavior. We crave things that benefit "me." We crave possessions and money.

But you can't have it both ways. You can't eat salad for lunch every day but have sausage, bacon, and eggs for every breakfast, Snickers for every snack, and McDonald's for every supper. Sure, you have a little health food in there, but all the other junk food will eventually lead to death.

In the same way, the more we indulge in the junk foods of sinful actions and sinful choices, the more spiritually unhealthy we become. Sure, you may get a little church time in now and then. Sure, you might read the Bible once in a while. But eventually, if you indulge in only sinful junk food, it can lead to death. **"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.'"** Without eating, or believing in, the Son of Man, you will have an unhappy life here and no life in heaven.

Think about how that sounds 2000 years later. They are stunning, hard words. When the people following Jesus first heard those words, they were offended, they walked away. They couldn't deal with such a remarkable claim from Jesus. He was saying that he was the one and only source of true sustenance, and the only way that a person could ever hope to live and thrive in this life and the next. Jesus was saying that he was the one essential thing that every person must have to survive and to live and to grow. Jesus is as vital and necessary as physical bread. Instead of feeding ourselves and satisfying ourselves on a diet directed by our own perverse and self-gratifying desires, we must feed on the bread that God gives. We must feed on Jesus. You need to take and eat not the bread of your cravings, but the living bread of Jesus who gives life.

Sometimes we don't even realize how much better other food can be. We think we like junk food because we maybe grew up eating chicken nuggets, mac 'n' cheese, and happy meals. But when you eat fresh fruits and veggies and whole grain breads, suddenly you realize how good healthy food can be. Not only is it delicious, but it is good for you too!

Let me tell you about something else delicious. It isn't junk food. It doesn't give you a sugar rush that leads to the comatose after-affect. It doesn't clog your arteries. It doesn't spoil. It doesn't fade. No this is health food—delicious health food. This is food that lasts and endures. This is food that makes you healthier. This is food that will extend your life—to eternity even. This is *The Best Meal You'll Ever Eat*.

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the

world.” The most divine restaurant in all the world has the most simple menu with only one item on it: Bread. It is bread that came down from heaven to live among sinful humans. It is bread that was given to death to bring life to the world. Whoever eats this bread will have life. Verse 54: **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”** Whoever eats the bread of life will be raised by Jesus and will live forever.

This isn't some mythical bread or made up promise. This is real and true. Jesus isn't talking about cannibalism and literally eating body and blood. He also isn't talking about the Lord's Supper (He hadn't even instituted it yet). He's talking about believing in him. Taking Jesus in completely through faith is something real and true for us to do. We take him in by faith so completely that's like we are consuming him. So he says in verse 56, **“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.”**

You may think that the best food served in the Villages is at the Nancy Lopez Country Club restaurant, the Palmer course, or Bonefish grill. But there is a much higher quality meal out there, and the tab has been picked up for you. My friends, you never knew before how delicious a meal could be. I am speaking about the Culinary Institute of the heavens. Nothing is as sweet as Jesus' words of forgiveness. Nothing is as filling and tasty as the good news of salvation. Nothing is as succulent and exquisite as the sure hope of eternal life. Nothing sounds better than that Jesus will work all things together for our long range good. Nothing is so comforting than to know, I walk this journey with Jesus by my side. Once we taste the Bread of Life, we realize the foolishness of junk food. Once we taste the Bread of Life, we realize how bad for us junk food is. Once we taste the Bread of Life, we realize it is ***The Best Meal We'll Ever Eat***

Bread that is healthy *and* delicious! Now you really want more. You want some all the time. So you come back to worship every week, starving to feast on more. With mouth drooling and dripping, you pop out of bed in the morning to crack open the Word and devour some more. You run to Bible study ready to stuff your face with the Bread that gives life. The more you eat, the more you want it. The more you eat, the more you love it. Yes, this is Jesus, the Bread of Life—***The Best Meal You'll Ever Eat.***
AMEN