

PPSupersize Me, King Corn, Food Inc. There have been a steady stream of films over the few years that look closely at how we eat, what food is being promoted for us to eat and what it means for us. So here's what we know right now. We know that our eating habits are making us increasingly over weight, that 10% of all health care costs are connected with our obesity. We know that 1/3 of kids born after 2000 will have diabetes, something that is predicted to completely bankrupt our health care system. We know that the generation that is being born in the last 10 years is the first generation that will not outlive their parents because of the food they consume and other unhealthy habits. We know that by age 12 kids eating habits mean that 70% of them are showing the beginning stages of hardening of the arteries and we know that 200 years ago that a person took a year to consume 5 pounds of sugar, today we consume 5 pounds of sugar a week.

PPWe know all of this and we also know the solution to the problem.

Changing our diet. Eating meat portions that are about the size of a deck of cards rather than ¼ pound and ½ pound portions. Eating fruits and veggies as the main part of our meals. Drinking far less pop, getting rid of prefab snacks or simply put, eating a healthy diet. We know this. Indeed, today Americans have more information about how to eat and live healthy than any American generation has had. Yet we ignore the information, we eat as if it doesn't matter what we eat, we feed our kids as if it doesn't matter for their present and future well being what we put in their bodies. We have, if you will, received all of this information about what destroys us and what makes us healthy, we've received this information in vain.

In vain, it is empty, unimportant information to us. If were important information, if it really mattered to us we would be changing our lifestyles, we would reshape what we eat, what we feed kids, we'd fight for government policies that would subsidize food that made for a healthy diet, rather than subsidizing foods that are empty calories and end up hurting us rather than helping us.

PPBut for most of us this, we receive this information in vain. God is in the house... *2 Corinthians 6:1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 3 We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; 7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.* We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. When Paul tells the people that they are not to receive God's grace in vain we need to understand something, Paul is not talking about becoming a follower of Jesus when he

says this. We know that the people of Corinth have already received Paul's words of the gospel, accepted them as true, have repented of their sins and owned Jesus as their savior. In fact, Paul calls them saints. So when we talk about not receiving God's grace in vain it is not a call to come to Jesus, the people have already done this. Instead Paul wants the people of Corinth to understand and he wants us to understand that God's grace flowing our way is to be life shaping. Listen to what Paul says about himself and God's grace in **PP1** Corinthians 15.10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.* God's grace in Paul's life is not in vain, it causes him to work harder than all of the rest of the apostles, it produced results.

PP God's grace flowing our way should be a life changing, life shaping --and not life shaping some day, life shaping now. We are not to hang around and say, "You know some day I'll move from grace being in vain, to grace causing me to work hard, to produce results." No. Grace needs to be actively shaping us now. Back to the text: **PP 6:1** *Working together with him [God], then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* A fun note before we go to what Paul is saying in these words. The way that Paul writes here tells us something about the breadth of Paul's education and his willingness to use that education. We know for instance that Paul is well versed in the Greek literature of his day because he quotes it. We know that Paul uses rabbinic interpretation methods that come from the Pharisees. So already he is educated both in the ways of the rabbis and in the ways of the Greeks. But now he shows us another angle. He shows us that he is familiar with and willing to use an interpretation method used by the Essene community. The Essenes were another Jewish branch that existed during Jesus' day. They believed that the temple was corrupt so they withdrew from it and sought to live a pure and holy life, often in a monastic type setting. The Essene community used an interpretation method called "Peshar". The peshar always consists of two parts. First, it quotes an Old Testament passage—which Paul does in verse 2, he quotes Isaiah 49.8 and then it adds an interpretation that applies the text to the author's day. Which Paul does by adding the words "Behold, now", "*Behold, now is the favorable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.*" All of this to remember an important thing—Paul had some educational chops and truly loved God with his mind. At times people read the Bible and think that God doesn't care about people being educated or smart, sometimes people even believe that the less they are educated the more holy they are. They hear Paul say in 1 Corinthians "*not many of you were wise according to worldly standards*" and equate wisdom with being a person who is educated, not realizing that Paul is speaking about the proud wisdom of people who believed they understood how the gods had to act and how salvation is brought into the world. The cross and resurrection mess with their understanding of how God works. Paul's broad education and his use of it remind us that loving God with our mind is some-

thing that pleases God and so we should never check our brain at the door when it comes to being a follower of Christ instead our brains should be engaged fully, we need to have a faith that seeks understanding.

PPAnd the understanding that Paul wants the people in Corinth to get from his use of the Peshier is that God's grace flowing our ways should shape and mold us and not some day, somewhere down the line, but that it needs to shape us now. Now, because the words of Isaiah about the favorable time, about the day of salvation, these words have become reality with the coming of Jesus Christ. It's time right now to live the reality of Isaiah 49. A reality that reflects the wonder of the messianic age. Because that is what Isaiah 49 is all about, it is about the age when the Messiah comes into the world. Some of the words from Isaiah 49. *8 Thus says the Lord: in a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, 9 saying to the prisoners, 'Come out,' to those who are in darkness, 'Appear.' They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; 10 they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. 11 And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. 12 Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene." 13 Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.* **PP**This is a picture of the Messianic age that Paul says is now on us. But was we get from Paul's earlier words in 2 Corinthians 1 about God bringing comfort into his life so he can comfort others, what we get is that the way this age of the Messiah is experienced at this moment in time is when people live the values of the age, when rather than receiving God's grace in vain, they care for God's people who are in prison, that they bring light to those whose lives are filled with darkness, they feed the hungry, they bring comfort and show compassion. The kingdom of Christ that has come is extended into the world by people who like Paul take God's grace and work hard knowing that as they work the power of God's grace works in them. As Paul said, *I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*

PPGod's grace flowing our way should be a life changing, life shaping. But as Paul is pointing out to the people at Corinth, it doesn't always turn out that way. People can receive the grace of God in vain. Hearing that might remind us of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3. *10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be*

saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. TNIV Some people spend their lives receiving God's grace in vain. Rather than living out and blessing others with the ways of the Messianic kingdom, they have muddled their way through life. In their encounter with God at the judgment they will make it into his eternal kingdom, but there will be no reward. One can only imagine what that encounter will be like.

PPGod's grace flowing our way is to be life changing, we are not to receive the grace of God in vain. Time for a little imagination. One of the things that I can't do is sit down with every one of you and do a check in on how your spiritual life is going. If I committed my entire work week to that I figure if we had a good conversation it would take around 40 weeks of fulltime work to meet with each person. But what I can do is to keep a promise I made a few months ago, that from time to time during the worship service I'd stop and ask you how your life with God is going. So time for a little imagination. Imagine we are sitting at a coffee shop, just you and me. And I look at you and ask "So are you receiving the grace of God in vain"? What would your answer be, where would that conversation go?

PPGod's grace flowing our way is to be a life changing, life shaping deal. Paul longs for it to be such, but Paul also knows that there are things that move people toward receiving God's grace in vain. Think about our eating habits and the destruction they are wreaking on our bodies and our need to no longer take what we know in vain. But some people will want to argue that such dire warnings come from health nuts, the granola crowd, the fringe people and organizations that you can't trust, so there is no need to really listen to them or change our habits. Since the source is not good, we can take their message in vain. No problem. But what if instead of that being true the information we are getting comes from the CDC, from the surgeon general, from nutritionists, the vast majority who say you should not eat fast food more than once a month, what if the sources are not unreliable, but not only reliable, but people across disciplines are agreeing with each other? Then to dismiss, to take the information as vain would seem particularly fool hardy.

PPPPaul knows that one of the things that will move people toward taking God's grace in vain is if they don't trust the source that's calling them to live the life of Isaiah 49, calling them to walk in the ways of God. Paul knows it so he reminds all who hear this letter that he, the one who is calling them not to receive the grace of God in vain, has put no obstacle in anyone's way, rather they have commended themselves and God's message in every way. In everything they do, in everything they endure they show that they are legitimate servants of God and so their message needs to be listened to.

PPThe first thing that Paul says that shows they are truly servants of God is that they live a life of great endurance. Which means that as they deal with all of those things he talks about like afflictions, hardships, riots, beatings, imprisonments that they reveal a life that continues to trust in God, a life where as they go through all of these struggles that they keep living the ways of the faith. Remember the words of the text we heard during our time of praise in song, *I believe that I*

*shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!*¹⁴ *Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!* Adam reminded us that waiting for God is not a passive thing, but an active waiting where we live as God calls us to live even as we wait for his rescue. That's the kind of life that Paul lived as he brought the gospel to people, in the midst of outrageous struggles and attacks, he waited for the Lord and so showed himself to be one of God's true servants.

PPBut Paul wants the people to see that it is not just that he responds rightly to suffering and struggle, it is that he is shaping his life so he commends himself as God's servant in every possible way. This is not just about how he responds to what others have done to him, it is how he is shaping his own life. He talks about shaping a life where he is willing to go hungry rather than be a burden to those who he is bringing the gospel to for the first time, that he is willing to go without sleep to devote more time to his work. He shapes a life where he increases in knowledge—we talked a bit ago about Paul being a person of great knowledge, someone who loved God with his mind—he wants to increase this knowledge and use it in such a way that God is pleased and people are led down the right path both in head knowledge in living rightly before God. He shapes a life of patience, kindness, love. He shapes a life where he speaks the truth and where God's word is his primary weapon in bring the gospel and faith is the way he keeps going when he is under attack—that what the weapons of righteousness are, the sword in the right hand, the shield in the left. He shapes a life where he holds on to hope and the truth of who he come what may.

This is the kind of life that when lived shows that the message is trustworthy, the kind of life that can call people to make sure they don't receive God's grace in vain. And when that call is made people take it and respond to it because they trust the messenger.

But here we know that this is not just Paul's responsibility. It is a responsibility of each of us. Our lives have to be a living picture of what it means to faithfully follow Christ so that those who are receiving God's grace in vain have not excuses for continuing that path. Our lives must be ones where we commend ourselves in every way. We need to work and have grace work in us so that we shape the kind of life Paul speaks of, so we can call others not to receive God's grace in vain.

PPDon't receive God's grace in vain. As it turns out it is both a call to us to respond to God's grace and like Paul work hard, but it is also a call to live and shape the kind of life so that others will not receive God's grace in vain. So if we were sitting in a coffee shop, eating only healthy food of course, and I asked you if you've responded to God's grace, if you are shaping a life so others can respond, where would that conversation go?