

SPIRITUAL ANOREXIA NERVOSA

The physical disorder known as anorexia nervosa and a related disorder called bulimia cause thousands of women to starve themselves to death every year. An estimated 20 percent of the victims die of either starvation or contraction of other diseases as a result of their weakened condition.

As tragic as these problems are, an even more tragic problem exists today. It is less obvious and subtler, perhaps, but the end results are far worse. A spiritual anorexia nervosa, a self-induced starvation for wholesome spiritual food, rages.

The prophet Amos foresaw this condition: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

Our fast-paced lifestyles leave little room or time for more than an occasional nibble at spiritual food. Modern forms of entertainment, many of which require little or no mental exercise, dull our sense of duty, personal involvement, or responsibility. Soon, spiritual feeding takes second place to other “more important” involvements. Rather than eating and gaining nutrients from God’s wholesome provisions, we prefer to fill ourselves with the more tasty “fast foods” of this world or shallow Christianity.

Sadly, most people seem content with this condition. Rather than seeking out and rallying around teachers and authors who will feed them spiritually profitable food, they “heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3), preferring the valueless leeks, onions, garlic, and cucumbers of Egypt to the manna of heaven (see Num. 11:5).

Obviously, unbelievers are among the victims of this malady. More tragic are undedicated, untaught, or apathetic believers who are also its victims. Most tragic of all, however, are the dedicated church “workaholics” who have become too busy in the work of the Lord to take time to sup with the Lord of the work.

The prevention of and cure for spiritual anorexia nervosa is threefold: regular Bible study and prayer, regular church attendance, and obedience to the Lord in service—in that order of priority. One can serve effectively only when he is spiritually well fed.

Humorist Will Rogers noted, “I expect there is (sic) a lot of lessons in the Bible that we could learn and profit by . . . but we are just so busy doing nothing we haven’t got time to study ’em out.” Robert M. McCheyne advised, “Never see the face of man till you have seen His face Who is our Life, our All.”

Regular church attendance puts us under the ministry of God’s Word and in an atmosphere of mutual encouragement and accountability. In church, we worship and stir up one another by singing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” to the glory of God (Eph. 5:19). Merely viewing a church service on TV or listening to a preacher on Sermon Audio will not suffice. One’s physical presence in church with fellow believers is necessary for proper nourishment.

But we must obey what we read in God’s Word and hear taught and preached in the church. We must put into practice and ministry service the beliefs that we profess. The degree of our obedience is the yardstick of our spirituality. Christ said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Anorexia nervosa does not occur overnight. It happens so slowly that even its victims do not realize that they are starving. It is only gradually recognized, seldom diagnosed, and even less frequently cured. It has no “quick fix.” It requires perpetual vigilance and discernment. It requires that our lives remain focused on Christ. And, as Jay Adams stated, “Wherever the Spirit is at work, change is inevitable.”

Prayerful study of the Word and obedience to it will keep us from becoming victims of spiritual anorexia nervosa. Only then can we become channels to offer help to others, leading them to a knowledge of the Great Physician.