

Samuel Rodriguez Reveals How to Cultivate a Hunger for God

If you're like me, one of the things you missed most during the nation's shutdown was eating at your favorite restaurant. Even though you weren't there in person, you could recall the smells and the special flavors that made your mouth water. And I suspect not being at liberty to enjoy the food you love whenever you wanted intensified your cravings. From infancy, most people develop positive, pleasurable sensations around eating. Full bellies—especially when they are full with our favorite foods—bring contentment. Empty stomachs cause distress. Hunger becomes a physical cue, often prompted by a variety of factors, that our bodies need fuel.

Our souls need fuel to survive as well. Some people find peace and solitude in nature, works of art, favorite pieces of music or time spent with a close loved one. But in order to thrive, our souls must feed on the only fuel source that can completely nourish, satisfy, empower and sustain us: relationship with the living God.

Holy Hunger

You have to skip only a few meals to experience hunger. Spiritual hunger can be trickier to identify. But the parallel to physical hunger gives us a good comparison to aid in our understanding.

A significant aspect of hunger is the way it recurs regularly. Our bodies require nourishment and energy on a regular, ongoing basis. Just because you were hungry yesterday and ate a sumptuous meal that satisfied your appetite doesn't mean that you'll never hunger again. Your body digests the food you eat, transforms it into fuel for your body, eliminates what it does not need and begins the cycle again. The marvel of our

biological and physiological design yet again reflects the intricate brilliance of our Creator.

This repetitive cycle of hunger and satiation indeed seems intentional. When God provided manna for His people on their journey to the promised land, He gave them just enough for each day. When Jesus taught His followers how to pray, He instructed us to ask our Father to “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). Christ Himself provided such a meal when He blessed the loaves and fish from a boy’s lunch and multiplied them to feed more than five thousand people who came to hear His teaching (Matt. 14:13-21).

Most of us no longer hunt and gather our food each day. Our work provides for more than just our daily bread. In developed nations in our modern world, many of us have full kitchen cupboards, pantries, fridges and freezers filled with food that’s been preserved to extend its freshness. Some items such as dried beans, nuts, grains and rice as well as canned goods are even considered to be “nonperishable” because they can be kept for months and years.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people stocked up because they feared stores and food producers might not have enough. Nonperishables were at a premium since no one knew how long the food supply might be interrupted. Unable to run to the store for desired ingredients or dine in our favorite restaurants, we made do with what we had on hand. Once again, many of us realized yet another luxury we had become accustomed to overlooking.

When we consider our spiritual hunger, we recognize that our souls require nourishment on a regular basis as well. No matter how often we pray, how many Bible passages we study and memorize, how frequently we attend church events or serve those in need, there’s always room to grow closer to God. We could spend all day, every day, praising and worshipping the Lord, and it would not be enough to fill our need for God’s

presence in our lives.

As eternal spiritual beings in temporal mortal bodies, we are designed to worship. Created in God's image, we long to be connected to the one who made us and knows us best just as children long to be connected to their parents. We want to belong and be part of something meaningful and significant, a cause that transcends our own ego, status, wealth, and fame. We want to fulfill the purpose for which God created us, giving ourselves in service so that others may experience His grace, mercy, peace, joy and abundant blessings.

Seeking this kind of sustenance for our souls does not mean that our lives will be easy, comfortable or free of suffering. On the contrary, the more aware we become of our desire to love, serve and obey God, the more we often suffer the consequences of living in a fallen world of sinful people. In fact, Jesus included these people in His list of blessings that we usually call the Beatitudes, part of His Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

Rather than waiting, suffering and trusting in the Lord, it's often tempting to take matters into our own hands when we're feeling empty inside. Instead of following Jesus and drawing close to God for soul food, we yield to temptation and seek instant gratification. I suspect that many of our emotional struggles result from our attempts to find spiritual nourishment in a worldly diet. We chase after goals, relationships, possessions and achievements we believe will make us happy and content, only to get them and discover that the ache inside us remains. The prophet Isaiah expressed simply and poetically our spiritual longing and our frustration when our own attempts to satisfy us fail:

"Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which

is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance” (Isa. 55:1-2).

As the prophet points out, nothing we can purchase satisfies us the way God fills our hearts and nourishes our souls. This is the kind of meal that touches all our senses as we “delight in the richest of fare,” knowing that only God’s goodness truly satisfies. It’s the difference between gorging on the empty calories of junk food you barely taste and a multiple-course meal that fills your senses with exquisite smells, flavors, presentations and textures.

I believe we’re not ourselves, not our true selves, when we settle for less than God’s best. We remain frustrated, angry, self-serving people with insatiable appetites despite all we consume. But as we are fed spiritual food and experience intimacy with God, we discover a depth of satisfaction nothing else can touch. {eo}

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