

Are You Really Hungry for God?

God has prepared a banquet for us – a feast of His presence – But we won't have the appetite for it if we're satisfied with something else.

Long ago the psalmist wrote about hunger for God in what we now know as Psalm 42, verses 1 and 2: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (NKJV). The type of desire he describes is the type every one of us should have. It's not something unusual that is reserved for only a few impassioned souls; the normal state of a Christian is to be thirsty and hungry for God.

The Bible tells us that God "satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things" (Ps. 107:9). But we must meet the requirement of the Word in order to receive the promised reward: We must be thirsty and hungry.

Spiritual hunger seems to come naturally when we first give our lives to Christ. I know when I got saved, I was truly hungry for God. I was single at the time, and everything I did—going to prayer meetings, praying, listening to teaching and worship tapes, reading books on spiritual topics, attending conferences—was intended to bring me closer to Him. Every spare minute of my day was filled with pursuing God and feeding on Him.

I was so in love with Him! It was like being on a perpetual honeymoon. That's the way our relationships with God should be.

I wish I could say it stayed that way. But something happened: I fell in love and got married.

Ideally, that should have enriched my relationship with God. But so many things in my life changed in a short period of time that I became distracted by my circumstances. In addition, I did not have the same opportunities to pursue God that I'd had before—no charismatic church, no prayer meetings, no encouragement from spiritually minded friends, no time to myself to study and pray.

By the time my husband finished school—four years and two children later—I had completely lost my focus. My eyes were constantly at ground level, assessing my situation, instead of on Jesus. I was no longer hungry for God because I was feeding on my discontent—as well as on fear and anxiety.

IMPEDIMENTS TO HUNGER The condition I found myself in is not an uncommon one. All of us have been guilty of not being hungry when Jesus lays a banquet of His presence before us, and it's usually because either we're sick—or we've been snacking on something else.

We know how this works in the natural. Our bodies were designed to require nourishment, so it is normal for us to feel hungry when it is time to eat—unless our appetites have been suppressed by illness or satisfied by something we ate before we got up to the table.

It works the same way in the spiritual realm. We were created for fellowship with God, but if we don't desire it, then either we are in sin or we have allowed other things to take the place of God in our lives. The result in both cases is that our appetites become dulled, and we don't pursue God with the same passion we normally would.

Notice I didn't say that spiritual sickness is equated with sinning; I said it comes from being in sin. There's a difference.

If you commit a sin but are quick to acknowledge it and sincerely repent, receiving God's mercy and forgiveness can

actually draw you closer to Him. But if you are lacking truth about yourself in some area of your life, the habitual sin that is the result of it will take the edge off your hunger and keep you at a distance from God.

Two of the most common spiritual “sicknesses” are unbelief and unforgiveness. The Bible says that “without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Most of us believe that God exists, but if we don’t really believe that He will respond to our pursuit of Him with a greater portion of Himself, we are likely to be half-hearted in the chase.

Unforgiveness not only dampens our hunger but also puts us in a very precarious position with God. Jesus said, “‘If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses'” (Matt. 6:14-15). It is unlikely that you will even try to draw close to God when you know there is a debt of unforgiveness hanging over your head.

If you suspect that some form of spiritual sickness is taking the edge off your hunger for God, don’t feel condemned! Cry out with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try see if there is any wicked way in me” (Ps. 139:23). Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the sin and revive your desire for God.

What if you’re not sick, but you’ve been snacking? Allowing other things or people to come before God in your life will have the same effect as being in sin. You see, it is the nature of man to want to satisfy himself, to seek to assuage the insatiable hunger he was born with—but often we try to satisfy this hunger with the wrong things. We don’t understand that the emptiness in our souls can be filled only by God.

The truth is, God has a banquet prepared for us—a feast of His presence—but we won't have the appetite for it if we have been satisfied with something else.

Many of us make the mistake of filling up on junk food—immoral TV programs, movies and other forms of entertainment, for example. But even seemingly good things, such as certain spiritual activities or disciplines, can diminish our hunger for the best. We are to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33, emphasis added).

Often we fail to do this because we get our eyes on something else, something that seems more pressing—or more appealing—than the meal set before us. But the ideal is for our hearts to burn with unquenchable desire for God in all circumstances.

Is this the kind of believer you are—one who is hungry for God no matter what? Or have you allowed something other than Him to become the focal point of your desire?

DESPERATION DETERMINES DESTINATION You may be asking, If perpetual hunger for God is the goal, how do we achieve it? How do we remain continually hungry for Him? I believe there are two things we must do.

First, we must realize that only God can satisfy us. No matter what else we try to substitute for Him, it will bring only passing pleasure. This is why the Bible says, “Do not love the world or the things in the all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).

And what is the will of God? That we “‘love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, and with all [our] mind'” (Matt. 22:37).

In *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, pastor and theologian John Piper puts it this way: “God the human heart with longing. But we know not what we long for until we see the breathtaking God. This is the cause of universal restlessness. Hence the famous prayer of Saint Augustine: ‘You made us for Yourself and our hearts find no peace till they rest in You.’”

This is the way it is supposed to be. We were made for God, and it is the endless longing Piper describes that motivates us to continue pursuing Him.

Second, if we want to remain hungry, we must learn to “taste and see that the Lord is good,” as Psalm 34:8 encourages us to do. But what does it mean to “taste” in the Spirit?

In the natural, tasting food means that we put it in our mouths to experience the nature of it—the flavor, texture and composition. In the Spirit, “tasting” means something similar: to experience the nature of God. And just as with a delicious meal, every “taste” in the Spirit makes you want more.

By “experiencing God” I’m not necessarily talking about quaking and shaking, rolling on the floor or laughing—though these can be outward manifestations of an encounter with Him. I’m talking about being aware of His presence in your life in whatever way He chooses to make Himself known. This could be through the whisper of His still, small voice; through visions, dreams or visitations; through the weight of glory we sometimes feel or the fragrance we smell of His perfume; through His healing touch; through being slain in the Spirit; through coming face to face with Him in worship. Whatever the experience is, you know you have tasted Him, and the encounter becomes a catalyst for even more passionate pursuit.

I mentioned earlier that during the first several years of my marriage, after having been saved and filled with the Spirit, I lost my passion for God because I began to focus on my circumstances. Thankfully, God didn’t leave me in that

condition.

One weekend in 1994 I went to a women's retreat. When the minister prayed for me, I was slain in the Spirit, and the Lord spoke the verse to me that I just quoted: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." It was an encouragement for me to get to know Him and allow Him to prove what my negative situation made it difficult for me to believe—that He is good and that He alone satisfies. At that moment, "tasting" became the motivating force in my life—and has been ever since.

How do we "taste"? In the natural, we sit down at the table and put food in our mouths. In the spiritual realm, we get to know God through prayer—not only talking to Him but also listening to, worshiping and enjoying Him—as well as through reading and studying the Word, receiving the revelation of the Holy Spirit, and practicing His presence throughout the day.

In other words, we pursue God. We sit down at the banqueting table every chance we get and partake of the choice food He has prepared for us. We feast on Him.

I said at the beginning that God promises to satisfy the thirsty and fill the hungry with good things. But I also said we are to remain both thirsty and hungry.

How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

Here's what happens. We recognize our need for God and begin to desire Him. Our yearning motivates us to pursue Him. As we get to know Him and experience His presence to a greater degree, our desire is satisfied (God "fills" us)—but only momentarily, because the more we come to know Him, the more fascinated we are, and the more we realize there is to know.

You could say that our "honeymoon" with God never has to end. As we get to know Him better, we see more of His goodness, more of His infinite beauty and perfection and holiness, and we desire to know and love Him even more. The ongoing

revelation of God's nature increases our hunger for Him, and we begin to understand why the psalmist declared, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:25-26).

Can you identify with the psalmist's sentiments? Are you one who desires nothing on Earth besides God, who will not be satisfied with just a taste of Him?

We must press in to know God, to experience Him. It's not enough to have just one touch or visitation. That would be like surviving the rest of our lives on only one meal! We need to develop a lifestyle of "tasting and seeing that He is good."