

Hungering and Thirsting for God

By Dave Butts

Hunger and thirst are natural expressions of the basic human desire and need for food and water. One of the clear indicators that something is wrong physically is when we lose our appetite. It is the same spiritually. To hunger and thirst for God is at the very root of our being. It's the way God made us. When there is no hunger for the presence of God, it is an indicator that something is wrong spiritually. Because that hunger is so basic to human nature, it often finds fulfillment in other areas rather than in seeking God. Much as eating unhealthy junk food can dull physical appetite, so that which is not of God can dull our spiritual appetite.

This happens to non-Christians as they look for happiness and fulfillment in any area except in their relationship with God. It may be in human relationships, quest for power or money, or escape to physical pleasure. The saddest examples, however, are of *Christians* who allow their appetite for God to be dulled by other things . . . even religious things. Our churches are filled with believers who are so satiated by activities, programs and projects that they no longer have a hunger for God.

So many Christians today snack their way through the day on "junk-food" activities and then find they have no time to "feast" with God. We complain about our "busyness" and tiredness, but that is typically a spiritual problem more than a problem of schedule. We desire everything except God. We take God in small doses throughout the day and week and somehow hope that on Sunday we can "catch up" on our time with

the Lord.

Let's look at the Scriptures which speak of developing this hunger and thirst for God:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

- ". . . whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).
- "Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).
- "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him'" (John 7:37-38).
- "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:1-2).
- "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).
- "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).

It is obvious that the imagery of hungering and thirsting after God is a scriptural concept. From the prophets of the Old Testament to Jesus and on through to the book of Revelation, the people of God are depicted as those who have developed a desire for God. Could it be that the missing

element in the Church today is that desire for God Himself?

Ben Patterson writes, "Since the best teacher of prayer is the Holy Spirit, the best way to learn to pray is by praying. Whether, and how much we pray is, I think, finally a matter of appetite, of hunger for God and all that He is and desires."

C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, "We are far too easily pleased. That, in the end, is the reason we do not pray more than we do. Nothing less than infinite joy is offered us in God's kingdom of light. He has promised that we will one day shine like the sun in that kingdom (Matthew 13:43)."

"We have become satisfied with mere church, mere religious exertion, mere numbers and buildings—the things we can do. There is nothing wrong with these things, but they are no more than foam left by the surf on the ocean of God's glory and goodness." [Ben Patterson, *Deepening Your Conversation With God*, 171.]

How then, can we begin to develop that hunger for God? If we find ourselves lacking in desire, can it be rekindled within us? Perhaps the best way to look at this is to again make a comparison to physical hunger and the way we handle it. When we get hungry, many of us begin to look for something to appease the hunger. Here in our country, if we are at work we may head to the snack machine in the hall, or if we are at home, we go to the cupboard or the refrigerator, looking for a snack that will take away the feeling of hunger. Hunger prompts us to seek something to fill us up, even if it is something that is not really good for us.

Spiritually speaking, there is a hunger for God that is often not recognized for what it is. It may be an empty feeling, a sense of longing, even loneliness in the midst of people. We start looking for ways to make the feeling go away...to fill up the emptiness. In a sense, we begin to look for the junk food that will mask the pangs of hunger within.

The danger of this type of behavior is that we dull our sense of hunger for God. In the same way that continued snacking through the day can dull our appetite and cause us to pass up a good, nutritious meal that our body needs, so we can fill up our schedules and desires to the point that we do not even realize that we no longer desire the presence of God.

It is no accident that one of the great spiritual disciplines of the Church is to fast. When we fast, we become acutely aware of our physical hunger. That physical hunger can lead to a spiritual hunger as well. Christians today are returning to fasting and prayer as a means of waking us up to our great need for the presence of God. It may be that we will need to fast from other things than food in order to restore our spiritual hunger. There may need to be a slowing of our hectic lifestyles that are crowding out our time with the Father. We may need to fast from some forms of entertainment to devote time to seeking the Lord. Those heavily involved in ministry may need to say "no" to that which is good, in order to seek that which is best. We may even need to reevaluate our family schedules.

Tommy Tenney, in his devotional, *Experiencing His Presence: Devotions for God Chasers*, prays a prayer that we all may need to use daily to build our hunger for God:

"Lord Jesus, my soul aches at the mere mention of Your name. My heart leaps for every rumor of Your coming, and each possibility that You will manifest Your presence. I'm not satisfied with mere spiritual dainties. I'm ravenously hungry for You in Your fullness. I'm desperate to feast on the bread of Your presence and quench my thirst with the wine of Your Spirit."

May hungering and thirsting for God drive us to a passionate, relentless pursuit of Him.

—Dave Butts was the co-founder and President of Harvest

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Prayer And Care For Pastors and Their Families

Prayer And Care For Pastors And Their Families

By Kim Butts

In the midst of a season when they are needed most, pastors are burning out at an alarming rate! As Christians, we should feel deep agony over this fact, especially since the main reason for it appears to be . . . us! The very Christians who comprise the congregations of pastors who are rapidly dropping out of ministry are often the cause.

God has not called us to criticize or damage our pastors. He has called us to love them (1 Cor. 13:1-13), to be submissive to their leadership (Heb. 13:17), and to pray for them (1 Tim. 2:1-2). The Father has called our pastors, and has ordained them to be our shepherds (Acts 20:28).

How can you pray effectively for your pastors and their families?

- **Make a commitment to pray for them daily.** If your pastors knew that you, your family, and others were praying for them, and for their families, each day . . . can you imagine what an encouragement that would be?

Would their hearts be lifted if they knew that they could share a need or a concern with your family and you would take it to the Lord on their behalf? You know it would!

- **Pray that your congregation will allow them to minister in a loving and caring environment.** Many pastors and their families feel very alone in the midst of their churches. Often, they don't have close friends in the congregation to whom they can go with burdens. They may feel that they can't share needs because they, of all people, should have everything together. In truth, the pastor's family is just like yours. They struggle with similar issues and problems. They desperately need others to come alongside of them and commit to fervent, continuous prayer so that the enemy won't have the opportunity to do damage.
- **Your pastor's ministry will only be as effective as the prayer that fuels it.** If you want a joyful, Spirit-filled shepherd, who confidently leads their congregation into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, and demonstrates a passion for revival and for reaching the lost, then you must pray for them – and for their families!

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Here are some specific ways that your family can pray for your pastors and their families:

1. Pray that your pastors will always have a passion to know Christ more intimately.

Prayer: Father, help our pastor(s) to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Since we know of their faith in the

Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints, may we never stop giving thanks for them, always remembering them in our prayers. We will keep asking that You, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that they may know You better (Eph. 1:15-17).

2. Pray that your pastors will minister out of a humble spirit.

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, would You help our pastor(s) to humble themselves before You and under Your mighty hand, so that You will lift them up (Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6)? Guide them in what is right and teach them Your way (Psa. 25:9). May our congregation see that they are wise and understanding as shown by their good lives, and by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom (Jas. 3:13). Father, You have said that the ones You esteem are those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at Your Word (Isa. 66:2). May our pastor be such a person!

3. Pray that your pastors will minister from the Spirit's power.

Prayer: Gracious Father, may our pastor's messages and preaching come to us, not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that our faith might not rest on the wisdom of man, but upon Your power (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Help them never to depend upon their own might or power, but always upon Your Spirit, Lord Almighty (Zech. 4:6). May You, the God of hope, fill our pastor(s) with all joy and peace as they trusts in you, so that they may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

4. Pray that your pastors will be persons of prayer and of the Word (Acts 6:4) in order to live a holy and pure life.

Prayer: Glorious God, we pray that our pastor(s) will seek You with all of their hearts. Help them never to stray from Your commands. May they hide Your Word in their hearts so that they

will not sin against You (Psa. 119:10-11). Give them a deep desire to meditate on Your precepts and to consider Your ways. May they delight in Your decrees and never neglect Your Word (Psa. 119:15-16). Give them understanding so that they will keep your law and obey it with all of their hearts. Direct them in the path of Your commands where they will find delight. Turn their hearts toward Your statutes and not toward selfish gain, and turn their eyes away from worthless things. Preserve their lives according to Your Word (Psa. 119:34-37).

5. Pray for the families of your pastors.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, may our pastor(s) fear You so that they will have a secure fortress that will always be a refuge for their children (Prov. 14:26). May they consistently teach their children to revere Your commands by following their example (Psa. 34:11), so that they might be blessed (Psa. 112:1-2). Help them to manage their families well so that their children will obey them with proper respect (1 Tim. 3:4-5). May husbands love their wives just as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25). Help them to be considerate and respectful to their wives so that nothing will hinder their prayers (1 Pet. 3:7). May wives be respectful to their husbands, submitting to their authority as they would submit to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22). Faithful Lord, strengthen and protect our pastor(s) and their families against the attacks of the enemy (2 Thess. 3:3), and may their households always choose to serve You (Josh. 24:15).

6. Pray for protection against the schemes of the devil.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help our pastor(s) to be strong in Your mighty power. May they continually remember to clothe themselves with Your armor so that they can take their stand against the devil's schemes. Help them to remember that their struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Help them

to stand their ground and to stand firm with the belt of truth buckled around their waists, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with their feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. In addition, help them to daily take up the shield of faith so that they can extinguish all of the flaming arrows of the evil one. May they put on the helmet of salvation and use the sword of the Spirit, Your Word. Give them the desire to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Help them to be continually alert, and to keep on praying for all the saints (Eph. 6:10-18). Don't let the devil establish a foothold in any area of their lives (Eph. 4:27). Help them to have a good reputation with outsiders, so that they will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap (1 Tim. 3:7). May they continually submit themselves to You, Father, and may they be self-controlled and alert in order to resist the devil, standing firm in the faith, so that the devil will flee (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9). Keep them from temptation and deliver them from the evil one, Lord (Matt. 6:13).

7. Pray blessing into the life of your pastor(s) and their families:

O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, may the words of our pastors' mouths and the meditations of their hearts be pleasing in Your sight (Psa. 19:14).

May You, O Lord, give our pastor(s) the desires of their hearts and make all of their plans succeed (Psa. 20:4).

Lord, our God, may Your favor rest upon our pastor(s) and establish the work of their hands (Psa. 90:17).

God of hope, may You fill our pastor(s) with all joy and peace as they trust in You, so that they may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

Lord of peace, may You give our pastor(s) and their families

peace at all times and in every way (2 Thess. 3:16).

May You, the God of peace, equip our pastor(s) with everything good for doing Your will, and may You work in them what is pleasing to You, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

Becoming the Answer

Now that you have prayed for and blessed your pastor(s) and their families, here are some practical ways to care for, encourage, and show your appreciation to them:

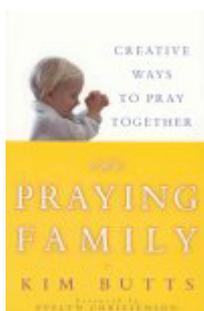
- Submit to the spiritual authority of your pastor(s) and encourage others to do the same...especially if there are any who are complaining or grumbling.
- Extend hospitality to your pastor(s) and their families by inviting them to your home for a meal or including them in family activities. Think of other creative ideas.
- Recognize that your pastor(s) and their families go through the same struggles as everyone else's families and be empathetic rather than critical.
- Give your pastor(s) and their spouses time together while you care for their children or hire someone to do so.
- Fix a meal and take it to them with an encouraging note.
- Take a basket of items you know would encourage them. Find out some things they like to snack on, or some of their favorite coffee, card games, etc.
- Find out if there are any needs in their home that need attention: leaky shower, car repairs, yard work, etc. and see that they are taken care of.
- Send notes of encouragement and appreciation from your whole family; have your children draw pictures or write their own notes.
- Recruit as many people as you can to pray regularly for your pastors and their families. Try to cover them in prayer seven days a week.

- Encourage your church leaders to send your pastor(s) on a spiritual retreat regularly so that they can be renewed and refreshed by the Holy Spirit.

Use your imagination. There are so many things you can do to show your love and appreciation.

Be determined to pray for and care for your pastors and their families, and allow the Lord to work in and through you by encouraging other families to do the same. Your simple efforts will do much to advance the cause of Christ in your church and community, as God does a mighty work in and through your pastor(s) lives. May your prayers and those of many others in your church, along with expressions of kindness, care and appreciation, keep pastors and their families safe, joyful and productive for many years to the glory and honor of Christ Jesus, our Lord!

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Praying for Our Enemies

By Kim Butts

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:43-45a).

“But I tell you who hear Me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28).

Choosing to love and pray for those who persecute or mistreat us mystifies unbelievers, and yet this is the lifestyle to which we are called by God. We are to love all people regardless of how they treat us. Although some may set themselves up as enemies against us, they are people in need of a saving relationship with Jesus and an understanding of His Lordship in their lives. The Word of God instructs us to love them, praying that they might enter into His kingdom! Before reading any further, bring someone to mind whom you would consider to be your enemy. Read, study, apply and pray the truths from God’s Word that your enemies might be drawn to Jesus’ kingdom.

Knowing Your True Enemy

Scripture states that our chief enemy is Satan. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, we should recognize that behind our flesh and blood enemies ultimately Satan is at work. The Apostle Paul probably understood this

concept more fully than any of the disciples or other believers. At one time, he persecuted the followers of Jesus, even casting his vote to have many put to death while he watched in approval. A case could certainly be made that Paul considered all believers to be his enemies and vice versa. But when God got Paul's attention on the road to Damascus, which ultimately led to his salvation through Jesus, he grasped for the first time, the mercy of the Lord. He understood that the followers of Jesus were not his enemies, as God gave him tremendous insight about his real enemy—Satan. Paul went from being an enemy of God to a child of God through a personal encounter with Jesus. He described the difference, from personal experience, to the Philippian church: "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:18-20a). It is also important to remember that, like Paul, each of us was at one time an enemy of God: "Since we now have been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled shall we be saved through His life? Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:9-11). Because we have experienced the mercy of God, should we not also extend it to others?

- Examine your heart to be sure that you are not allowing the devil to have a foothold in your life where you have acted against others in a manner unworthy of Christ. With repentance and godly sorrow, ask for His forgiveness and seek the forgiveness of those you may have damaged by your words or actions. We are either serving the cause of Christ, or doing the work of the enemy of our

souls.

- Perhaps there are people who have hurt or persecuted you or your family in some way. If so, God calls you to forgive them. Pray that the Father will help you to see these enemies through His eyes. Ask Him to give you a forgiving heart. It may mean that you will need to go to someone to extend forgiveness so that your relationship may be healed and restored.

Jesus Prayed for His Enemies

Jesus had enemies . . . and they crucified Him. Yet, as we know, He had the ultimate victory in the end. But because God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to die, His Son did not leave the earth without praying for those who were responsible for His death. Jesus, who told us to love and pray for our enemies, demonstrated the ultimate gift of love while hanging on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34a). Jesus prayed for His enemies . . . how can we do less? One of the most amazing commands of Christ is to love our enemies. In our flesh, we naturally want to retaliate or fight back when we are treated unkindly or persecuted. Jesus preached forgiveness and mercy: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). His lifestyle demonstrated grace, that ours might also. He took His command one step further, adding another level of difficulty: “Pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44b). May this article give you a firm foundation upon which to train your children to love their enemies so that they might be determined to pray for them to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Jude also spoke about the importance of mercy: “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them” (Jude 1:22). Because of God’s mercy, we were saved. We must extend His mercy to those who are still enemies of God, so that they might also receive what we have been given.

Overcome Evil with Good

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21). How will the unsaved most likely come into God’s kingdom—through your revenge, or by your loving acts and your prayer for them? This is an extremely important concept to teach children, as their first response is often to hit back, think up revenge, cease friendship, etc., rather than praying, continuing to be kind, etc. Sometimes I say unkind things to my husband that I would normally not say to him. Precious man that he is, he always responds kindly to me and is never harsh. He doesn’t try to get back at me or say something hurtful in response. What does this do in me? It drives me to God in repentance and then to my husband to apologize! How many arguments or hurtful situations in our families could be avoided by simply responding kindly instead of fighting back—submitting to God instead of to our natural human sinful flesh! It really works! I feel terrible for hurting my husband’s feelings or lashing out at him because he is kind! If he responded back to me in anger, I doubt I would feel very repentant. But because he responds in love, it brings me back into right relationship with him, and with God.

How to Pray for Your Enemies

Our Lord is the “God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were” (Romans 4:17b). Sometimes it is hard to imagine that our enemies could ever turn away from evil and come to Christ, but He has called us to pray for them. What seems impossible to us is possible with

God (Mark 10:27). What greater love could there be than to pray for God to draw them into His kingdom? Remember the people you and each family member considered as enemies? Here are some passages from Colossians that you can pray on their behalf:

- Pray that God will rescue them from the dominion of darkness and bring them “into the kingdom of the Son He [the Father] loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).
- Pray God will make known to them His glorious riches through the mystery of Christ (Colossians 1:27). Pray that they may “know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3).
- Pray that they will “put to death whatever belongs to [their] earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).
- Pray that they will rid themselves of “anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from [their] lips” (Colossians 3:8).
- Pray that they will become one of God’s children, holy and dearly loved, clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).
- Pray they will come to know and possess the love of the Lord (Colossians 3:14).
- Pray that they will come to know the peace of Christ and that it will rule in their hearts (Colossians 3:15).

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