

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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