



REAL: AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY IN A WORLD OF COUNTERFEITS

## Hunger: An Earnest Beggar for Grace

Psalm 63:1-11

March 4, 2012

Dr. Todd Wilson, *Senior Pastor*

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

<sup>2</sup> So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
beholding your power and glory.

<sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips will praise you.

<sup>4</sup> So I will bless you as long as I live;  
in your name I will lift up my hands.

<sup>5</sup> My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,  
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,

<sup>6</sup> when I remember you upon my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

<sup>7</sup> for you have been my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

<sup>8</sup> My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

<sup>9</sup> But those who seek to destroy my life  
shall go down into the depths of the earth;

<sup>10</sup> they shall be given over to the power of the sword;  
they shall be a portion for jackals.

<sup>11</sup> But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult,  
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

### Introduction

Don't you love the Psalms? They're so full of life. There's nothing manufactured or prepackaged; nothing sugar-coated or polished over. It's all there: grittiness and gladness, tears and triumph, sadness and celebration, brokenness and blessing.

Yet, I must confess I'm often intimidated by what I see in the Psalms. When I look closely into the hearts of the writers of these psalms and see the intensity of their hunger for God, it makes me wonder whether I even know God.

Listen to the sound of a hungry soul:

"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (63:1).

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and appear before God?” (42:1-2).

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!  
My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (84:1-2).

A. W. Tozer says: “David’s life was a torrent of spiritual desire, and his psalms ring with the cry of the seeker and the glad shout of the finder.”<sup>1</sup> I often feel like my life is but a trickle in comparison.

You see, there are several things that distinguish real Christians from counterfeit Christians: humility, meekness, contrition, Christ-likeness. And one of the distinguishing marks is what we see in the psalms: hunger. Real Christians have a real hunger for God. Hunger for God is thus a defining mark of real Christianity.

### **The Difference between Real and Not-Real Hunger**

But we need to understand that there’s a real difference between real hunger and not-real hunger; or, the kind of hunger you find in real Christians and the kind you find in not-real Christians. The hunger of a real Christian starts off slowly but *grows* over time, so that by the end of life a real Christian is *more* hungry for God than he’s ever been.

By contrast, the hunger of a not-real Christian starts off strong but *diminishes* over time, so that by the end of life, a not-real Christian is *less* hungry for God than he’s ever been. God is no longer as appealing as He once was. And so they no longer seek after God, but coast along with Him; no longer driven by desire, but by the force of habit or tradition or routine, and no longer motivated by an abiding passion for Christ, but by nostalgia or sentimentality.

Or, you could put it like this. Not-real Christians only hunger for God *until* they find Him. Once they receive from God what they’re looking for, they’re done seeking. On the other hand, real Christians only hunger for God *after* they find Him. They only truly begin to seek after God when they’ve tasted and seen that the Lord is indeed good.

There’s a man in our congregation who is two-and-a-half times my age; I had lunch with him recently, and I can tell you, he’s got a real hunger for God. He’s walked with God nearly his whole life, many decades now. Yet in light of his zeal for God and desire to know and serve him, you’d think he was a fresh convert in his early twenties. I’m convinced he’d try to convert telephone poles if he knew they had souls! I must tell you, I’m so encouraged and inspired by this guy! I just pray that half a century from now, I’ll have his same hunger for the Lord. O Lord, let me never retire from desire; don’t let my soul slow down, just because my body is; guard me from apathy toward Jesus, even if I feel apathetic about much else in life!

---

<sup>1</sup> Tozer, *Pursuit*, p. 16.

## How Does Hunger Show Itself?

You see, real hunger in your soul will reveal itself in your life. It can't hide. If your hunger for God is real, it will show up in your life. You'll see its effects. And so will others.

We always know when our three year old is hungry; he starts acting crazy and gets fussy. When we see that, we know it's either time for lunch or dinner! So, too, we know when our eleven year old is hungry; we'll find him standing on a bar stool rooting around in the cupboard where we keep the snacks. Our kids can't hide their hunger; in fact, they don't even try to.

Hunger for God is the same. It can't hide. If your hunger is real, it will reveal itself in your life; it won't hide. You'll see it, and so too will others.

But how does real hunger for God reveal itself in a person's life?

## Hunger for the Word of God

First of all, a real hunger for God is seen in a genuine hunger for *the word of God*. The person that truly loves God will long to hear God speak. In fact, if you were to look up in the Bible all the places where it talks about God's people longing or seeking after something, you'd find it most often talks about seeking after or longing for God's law or word.<sup>2</sup> In Psalm 19, for example, David celebrates God's perfect word or law and acknowledges, therefore, his hunger for it:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb (Psalms 19:7-10).

You see, if there's real hunger in your heart, you'll have a genuine appetite for the word of God. If your hunger for God is real, you won't be satisfied with what you know or have seen of the Bible. You'll be greedy to find out more, consume more of the Scripture, and taste more of the treasures that can be found in the word of God.

Are you greedy for the word of God? Of course, you can't expect to have a hunger for the word of God if you never read the word of God. Nor can you if you only read it with your eyes, but not with your heart. Words may go from the page of Scripture into your mind, but if they don't settle upon your soul, then you won't hunger for the word of God. That's why you must pray as you read the word of God, for the Holy Spirit to give you light to see what's in the word. "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Ps. 119:18).

---

<sup>2</sup> So Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 383.

## Hunger for the Will of God

Real Christians, who really know Christ, will also, secondly, have a real hunger for *the will of God*. Doing the will of God is what satisfies their soul; that's what animates their lives; that's what motivates their decisions and guides their lives.

When Jesus passed through the region of Samaria, he sat beside a well and spoke with a woman about the state of her heart and soul. His disciples left him there and went into town to get some food; they were quite hungry from the day's long journey. Upon returning, however, they find their Lord still chatting with this woman at the well, and they marveled because of it. But they also urged him to eat, assuming he must be starving by now. "Rabbi, eat," they said to him. "I have food to eat that you do not know about," Jesus says in reply. This, however, only set them to wondering all the more, asking themselves whether he'd called for carryout or someone had delivered him a pizza or something. Jesus again knows they're baffled, and so clears up their confusion by clarifying where his true hunger lies: "My food is *to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work*" (John 4:34).

You see, if you have a real hunger for God, you will, like Jesus, hunger to do the will of God. This will mean, practically speaking, that you will *hunger for holiness*. For if you boil it all down, a life of holiness *is* the will of God for you.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness (1 Thess. 4:2-7).

But a real hunger for holiness will mean an *intense dislike of sin*. You might even call it *hatred* of sin. For those who've tasted and seen that the Lord is good, they'll want to do get rid of anything that hinders their ability to feed more upon God. In fact, they'll go to war against the sin in their lives, so that they can better satisfy their hunger for God. This is why Jonathan Edwards says: "A godly man is a mortal enemy to his sin. Nothing will satisfy him, but his life is, as it were, bloodthirsty towards sin."<sup>3</sup>

Is your hunger for the will of God and holiness real enough that you have a hatred of your own sin? Are you bloodthirsty for the destruction of sin in your life? Or are you content to shoot a few spitballs at your sin from time to time, hoping one day they'll just go or leave you alone?

## Hunger for the Work of God

There's a third way in which hunger for God reveals itself, and that's by a hunger for *the work of God*. Genuine longing for God will express itself in a life lived for God—to accomplish

---

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, "Striving After Perfection," p. 688.

the work God has given you to do. But perhaps you wonder: what is the work God's given you to do?

After feeding a large crowd, Jesus told them that they pursued him because they were hungry, not because they wanted to know Jesus, but because "you ate your fill of loaves," he says (John 6:26). Therefore, he says to them: "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (v. 27). Those in the crowd then asked an all-important question: "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (v. 28). Jesus answered this way: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (v. 29).

This is the work of God: *to know Jesus Christ and to make Him known in the world*. To live your life in humble reliance upon Jesus Christ—his provision on the cross and his promises of eternal life. But this also means to make Jesus Christ known. Real hunger for God is thus a *hunger to witness*. If you truly desire God, you'll want more and more people to join you in your hunger for God. You won't be satisfied in keeping God to yourself. You'll want others to join you. In fact, you'll realize that as others join you in your hungering for God, your own joy in God is actually multiplied and intensified.

And remember: Real hunger for God is the best starting point for evangelism. If you're struggling to know how to share your faith with someone, perhaps the best place to start is by simply sharing with them your hunger for God. The world may not listen to arguments, but they will take note of a person who simply cannot get enough of God. Christians who are just as content as the rest of the world with the world's half-baked goods get little notice in the world. But a soul on fire for Jesus Christ, who yearns for more and more of God—this is a compelling witness to a starving world.

## **Hunger for the Worship of God**

Real hunger for God will, fourthly, reveal itself as a hunger for *the worship of God*. A soul that hungers for God sounds like this: "As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:1-2). But when you're burdened with desire for God, you'll naturally ask the question the psalmist goes on to ask: "When shall I come and appear before God?" (v. 2).

The heart that truly hungers for God knows there's only one way to truly satisfy that hunger—with worship. "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God" (Ps. 84:1-2). Hunger for God will cause you to confess: "For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10).

If you hunger for God, you'll approach the gathering of the saints on the Lord's day not as a familiar routine, but as a great feast. And you'll come to the table of worship each week eager to have your hunger not only satisfied, but intensified. For you'll realize that by sharing your hunger with others, you'll multiply your hunger. Not only will you go away having fed yourself on Christ, but you'll leave hungering for more and more of Him.

But, of course, if you hunger for the worship of God, you will hunger for *Heaven*. For what is Heaven but a world of worship—a world of worship where the saints will be entirely free from

the burden of sin and able to breath freely the clean air of holiness. You'll be envious of the scenes described in the book of Revelation, of the saints gathered around the throne of God, together with a myriad of angels, all worshiping the Lamb.

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped."  
(Revelation 5:1-14).

The Christian life is one in which this flame of hunger for God continues to grow and grow: beginning at new birth with a small flicker, your hunger for God grows over time into a viable campfire, which generates enough heat to warm you and others. But as you continue to throw logs on the fire, your campfire turns into a bonfire; then it's hot enough to warm a whole city block. But eventually you will see the Grand Object of your desire—you'll see Beautiful Jesus face to face—and the bonfire in your soul will rage completely out of control, to become an all-consuming forest fire, setting your entire life ablaze with white-hot, God-centered longing and satisfaction, forever and ever!

## **How to Develop a Hunger for God**

But what do you do if you don't have any real hunger for God?

The first step is to be honest with yourself. It's good simply to acknowledge that you don't desire God as you ought. There's no sense in pretending. Nor is there any need to try and convince yourself that you're really better off than you are. Why not let God be merciful to you, rather than pretend you don't need his mercy?

We need to recognize that none of us naturally hungers for God. This is one of the devastating effects of the Fall and Original Sin: it has destroyed our appetite for God. Of course, sinful, unredeemed human beings still hunger for *the things of God*—what God can do for you or give to you: health, wealth, peace, security, well-being, rest, even eternal life. That's why some people come to church; they're looking for the things of God—personal healing, help with life, a fix to their problems.

But the question you need to ask yourself is: Are you hungry *for God*? Because a hunger for God's gifts isn't the same as a hunger for God himself. To want what God can do for you is altogether different than to want God because of who he is—the beauty of his holiness, the goodness of his character.

Real hunger for God only comes with new birth. Only then is a person given a taste for the goodness of God, the sweetness of his character, the beauty of his holiness. For some of you, then, you need to be born again before you will have any real hunger for God. New birth is the

beginning of real hunger. Until you're born again, you won't have any real appetite for God. And so you need to turn to Christ in repentance and faith, and ask him to give you the gift of new birth and a new hunger for God.

But perhaps your hunger for God is real, how do you increase it?

Here's the key: *to realize that real hunger grows when fed*. This is the paradoxical thing about a real Christian's hunger for God: when you have what you want, your hunger isn't simply satisfied, it's intensified. Unlike when you feed upon something to satisfy a physical hunger, which then satisfies and for at least a little while eliminates the sense of hunger, when you feed upon God, your hunger for God does go away, but actually intensifies.

Real hunger is like a fire that burns in your soul. The more you feed it, the bigger it gets; and the more it's stoked, the hotter it burns. You feed it with the Word of God; you stoke it with acts of faith and obedience. The word of God is the wood that feeds the flame of hunger for God; but without stoking it with acts of faith and obedience, you will only have a big pile of logs in your head—without any flame or heat in your soul. But if you will feed upon the word of God and respond to it with the obedience of faith, you will find the flame of hunger for God turn into a blaze.

First, put away any easy sins. Every one of us, no doubt, has some easy sins in our lives that sully our desire for God. Put it away! It could be prayerlessness, or it could be pornography. Both are sins, and both will kill your appetite for God.

Second, try going without one physical pleasure. Do it, not as a means of scoring points with God, but as a way of increasing your hunger for Him. If you want to increase your hunger for God, try fasting. Going without food quickens hunger for God. In fact, most forms of self-denial, when undertaken as expressions of faith in the sufficiency of Jesus, have a way of increasing your appetite for God.

## **Glut Yourself On God!**

For those of you who do have real hunger for God, let me encourage you to go ahead and glut yourself on God. Don't hold back! Feel free to indulge yourself as much as humanly possible! Throw off any and all constraint. Give yourself entirely over to satisfying your hunger for God with God himself.

You don't need to worry, then, about rationing God—only enjoying a little now so you'll have some for later. God is an infinite ocean of delights and can never run dry or be used up. "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalms 16:11).

And don't fret about over-indulging in too much of God so that you get sick of God. Hunger for God doesn't work like that. In fact, what you'll find is the more you feed upon God, the sweeter and sweeter He becomes. Therefore, make it your ambition in life to consume as much of God as you possibly can.

## **Conclusion**

Real Christians are never content with what they have experienced of Christ. Like the Apostle Paul, they're always "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies

ahead” (Phil. 3:13). And thus there is a holy dissatisfaction and hunger for more of God that marks their lives. They understand how much more there is to taste and see of Christ. They also realize how far they fall short of what they want to be for Christ—and they desperately desire more and more of Him.

But they’ve also tasted the sweetness of God’s glory and seen the beauty of his holiness—and the desperately want more and more.

Let us pray.

O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, that so I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.<sup>4</sup>

© March 5, 2012, by Dr. Todd A. Wilson

---

<sup>4</sup> This prayer is taken from the close of the first chapter of Tozer, *Pursuit of God*, p. 20.