

## Hunger Games

Matthew 5:6 MSG

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Life is one big hunger game. Everyone hungers, but it's how we *satisfy* that hunger that determines everything. The hungrier we get, the less and less everything else matters. Hunger and thirst drive us. It is a base level instinctual desire - a need to be filled, satisfied, satiated, and restored. Hunger is from God and is not just about the body, but about our souls. Our soul hungers for purpose, significance, love, connection, belonging, family, identity, assignment, joy, hope, and peace. How we satisfy hunger matters, and whatever we consume will consume us.

John 2:17 NIV

*"Zeal for your house will consume me."*

Matthew 5:6 NIV

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled."*

Matthew 5:6 MSG

*"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat."*

We are in control of God's blessing in our life which means we are in control of our hunger. Appetite is what develops over time as we choose how to respond to our God-given soul hunger. Hunger is natural - appetites are forged and malleable. We will hunger for what we feed on. Taste adapts, feelings adapt, and desires adapt. *God* will not adapt to us. The Bible calls us "clay" because we have no form on our own and we will be conformed to *something* depending on what or who we submit to.

2 Corinthians 5:5 MSG

*"The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less."*

Psalms 34:8 NIV

*"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."*

Food samples at Costco are designed to whet our appetite so we'll buy the product and make a whole meal out of it. This is what God does for us. We go to a church service or a Bible study and find in that moment that God is wetting our appetite. He's stirring our heart because that bit of heaven he's deposited in our soul recognizes Truth. It recognizes his presence and we begin to hunger just a little bit for it. But many of us stop with the sample rather than making the purchase which makes us a "Costco Christian" - like a sample-grubber, we come to church every week and have a little sample of *this* and a little sample of *that*. But we need to "buy it," not just eat the *samples*.

The human body is designed to run on water, proteins, fats, and all the good things that sustain and satiate us. The human spirit was designed to run on God alone, but so many of us are living the "Twinkie life" rather than allowing him to satisfy our *souls*. Maybe it's the Twinkie of success or the Twinkie of ambition - the things we want to accomplish. Or maybe it's the Twinkie of money - or sex, and we're like, *"I just need to get that thing going in my life and then I'm going to be good."* Or maybe it's the Twinkie of applause - people telling us how great we are, and recognizing our hard work and our worth.

Just like an actual Twinkie, it tastes great for a moment but can leave us feeling terrible in a little while. And the more of them we eat, the worse we feel. There's nothing wrong with a delicious Twinkie here and there - family, success, money - unless we love them more than God. They're *Twinkies*. They don't satisfy our soul, because our soul, the *human soul*, was designed to run on God alone. When we hunger and then feed on something, we're demonstrating where we're drawing our strength, nourishment, and life from it. Whatever our appetite hungers for the most, that's our strength, our nourishment, and our life.

If we're trying to substitute anything or anyone else for the Author of Life, himself, it won't satisfy. And we'll wonder why we're endlessly hungry in our soul and never *satiated* - because we're only designed to run on him. Zeal for his house has to consume us or we'll keep searching our whole life. Our appetite is whatever we go to daily over and over again. What is our automatic response to satisfy ourself? Is it him or is it so many *other* things? It's what we go to daily.

Psalm 81:8-14, 16 NLT

*"Listen to me, O my people, while I give you stern warnings. O Israel, if you would only listen to me!...Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it with good things. But no, my people wouldn't listen. Israel did not want me around. So I let them follow their own stubborn desires, living according to their own ideas. Oh, that my people would listen to me! Oh, that Israel would follow me, walking in my paths! How quickly I would then subdue their enemies! How soon my hands would be upon their foes! But I would feed you with the finest wheat. I would satisfy you with wild honey from the rock."*

God was lamenting because his people were refusing him. They didn't want to be around him, and yet, they hungered with a deep hunger they couldn't fill or satisfy, and God knew it. Jesus had an encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well who was coming to draw water, and as he met her at the well, he said, *"If you drink of that water, you'll be thirsty again. But I have water that you've never had before, and if you drink the water that I'll give you, you'll never be thirsty, because the supply never runs out of this living water."*

Later, in John chapter 7, he tells a group of people that are there listening to him, *"I am the living water, and if you come to me, I will bring give you water that wells up like a river on the inside of you, a river of living water flowing through you and you'll never thirst."* He was saying, *"I have the answer to the satisfaction of your souls that you've been always looking for and can't find. You may get little bits of relief here and there, but then it just comes right back. But, if you'll come to me, I'll give what satisfies once and for all."*

Acts 4:13 AMP

*"Now when the men of the Sanhedrin (Jewish High Court) saw the confidence and boldness of Peter and John, and grasped the fact that they were uneducated and untrained [ordinary] men, they were astounded, and began to recognize that they had been with Jesus."*

The disciples weren't educated and they didn't have the pedigree. But they were hungry for God, and he filled them up with Living Water and with the Bread of Life - the Holy Spirit. In many cases, the most passionate and effective times in Christians' lives are at the very beginning when they "don't know any better" but they are hungry - they have a newfound and uncomplicated appetite for God. They haven't had time to trade the hunger in for knowledge or familiarity. *"Been there, done that, sang that song, heard that sermon, read that passage."* Then the hunger dies and the pride and the knowledge rises and the satisfaction in their soul wanes.

We don't just eat one meal. We need to eat every day and we have to keep our hunger for him. *"Blessed are those who've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal we'll ever eat and eat and eat for the rest of our life."*

John 4:31-34 NLT

*"Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But Jesus replied, 'I have a kind of food you know nothing about.' 'Did someone bring him food while we were gone?' the disciples asked each other. Then Jesus explained: 'My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.'"*

Obedience to God is a source of nourishment for our soul. Every time we say "Yes" and we yield, he nourishes our soul and fills us with good things. Jesus said, *"I have my identity. I have my assignment. I have purpose. I know who I am. I know who I serve. And the one I serve and the one I obey has fed me with a food deeper than anything else you'll ever eat."* He was trying to teach them something here. He's not saying, *"Hey, don't have dinner."* He's saying, *"With your dinner, have this meal, too. I have food you know nothing about, but I want you to know about it."*

Every time we want more of God, start by saying "Yes" to God. Start yielding more to him, and making room for him more and watch him nourish our soul. For us not to obey God, not say Yes to him or yield to him, and yet to be in these environments over and over again, is like filling our pockets with food rather than our stomach where it actually belongs, which is on the inside of us. So many Christians are this way - dumping out spiritual food everywhere we go. We're leaving a trail of it behind us. We're trying to force feed it to *other* people and yet we haven't eaten ourselves - we're just carrying it around in our pockets.

John 6:35, 51, 53-57 NIV

*"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' ... 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' ... Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.'"*

The disciples were starting to get a little freaked out by what he was saying. *What in the world? Is Jesus advocating cannibalism here?* Certainly not. He's saying that the level to which we need him in our life is deeper than we ever imagined. It goes further than we ever thought. He says we don't need him on the *exterior* of our life. We need him on the interior - to be on the *inside* - at our *core* - to become our life. He says until and unless that happens, we don't have any life in us - no real life.

What's so sad is, John 6:66 says, *"From this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."* They were saying, *"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" This is getting intense. We liked your teaching, Jesus. We really liked when you multiplied the bread. That was a cool trick. We really like you loving on kids and encouraging us and blessing us and saving the woman who was caught in adultery - we love all that."* But now you're asking something deep, Jesus." Many of his disciples no longer followed him because they realized what it was really going to take. Their hunger had to change. Their appetite had to change. Their very *source* of everything in life had to change - *there was no choice*.

John 6:67 NIV

*“ ‘You do not want to leave too, do you?’ Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’ ”*

We don't get any nourishment from just being around food or watching *other* people eat food. We have to consume it ourself. How hungry we are for God is a barometer of how healthy our *soul* is, and there are three main types of people who lose their appetite. The first one is starving people. If a person is legitimately starving, at first the hunger on the inside of them is screaming for food. But as they enter into the starvation mode, that hunger stops screaming and it goes quiet. And then the whole inside of themselves begins to convert to another process where they literally begin to eat *themselves* from the inside out - and they're not hungry. They're *starving to death*, but they're not hungry.

The second type of person who loses their appetite is a sick person. Psalm 102:4 says, *“My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. In my distress I groan aloud and am reduced to skin and bones.”*

Scripture tells us that Jesus even said he didn't come for the healthy but for the *sick*. We're born with a sin-sick soul. As long as that sickness remains unaddressed by the Savior himself, it's impossible for us to hunger for the things of God. Step one is to come to Jesus and say, *“Jesus, I'm sick. I need you to be the Great Physician for me. I need you to heal my soul so I can hunger for what's good because I've lost my appetite. Jesus, my soul is sick.”*

The third type of person who's lost their appetite is somebody who is full. Luke 6:2 says, *“Woe to you who are well-fed now because you will go hungry.”* Woe to you who show up in his presence but are already so full of the world and everything else and all the other things that you have no room left for him. Jesus says, *“You may be full right now, but it won't last, and by the time you realize it, it might be too late. Woe to you who are well-fed now, because you will go hungry.”*

Proverbs 27:7 says, *“When you've stuffed yourself, you refuse dessert. And when you're starving and hungry, you could eat a horse.”* There's a difference between being full and being filled - between being bloated with the cares of this world and blessed by a hunger for God. There's a difference between being nauseous because we're so overfed with the cares of life versus being nurtured in our spirit by the living God - *and maybe we're just too full*. We have no room for him. Or maybe, what we have is the equivalent of an eating disorder like bulimia in our soul. When somebody is bulimic is they'll gorge themselves on a bunch of food, but then regurgitate it before they can digest it, because they have a distorted view of themselves and reality.

Many believers regurgitate Jesus so that they can leave room for the world. God will not allow us to mix him with the compromise of a lukewarm life that's consumed by appetites that are in opposition to him. We can't develop an appetite for God while also developing competing appetites, and expect that we're not going to get very nauseous, and then regurgitate the whole mess. Our hunger reveals who our master is, who our God is, and who we serve. Jeremiah 15:16 says, *"I found your word and I ate it and it became the joy and the rejoicing of my soul."* The more he fed on God and his word and his ways, it literally became joy and rejoicing. It became his appetite and his life.

Psalms 42:1-2 NIV

*"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."*

When the psalmist wrote that, he was writing it in agony and distress as his enemies were closing in on him. He was in the worst situation and conditions of his life. And out of that situation, he said, *"My answer to all of my trouble is, my soul thirsts for God. I'm hungry for him. He is the only answer to everything going on in my life, and I know the only thing that can help me now is him. My soul thirsts for him."*

Psalm 107:9 says, *"For he satisfies the thirsty and he fills the hungry with good things."* He fills the hungry. He can't do anything for you if you're not hungry. Open your mouth. Come to him. He has living water for you. Galatians 5:24 says, *"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified, killed the sinful nature together with its passions and its appetites."* Psalm 37:3-4 says, *"Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and feed on his faithfulness."* The way to begin to develop an appetite for God is to begin to meditate on how faithful and how good he is. Lamentations 3:22 says, *"Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed. Great is your faithfulness."* When we feed on his faithfulness, this world won't consume us ...because we'll already be consumed by him.

## Prayer

*Father, thank You for Your Word. God, I need to stir up my appetite and my hunger for You. Everything else I've been hungering for, and every other appetite I have, I'm putting on the altar. I'm putting it before Your cross. And I'm saying, to the best of my ability, I'm killing it. And Lord, I'm asking you to help me kill it because I want my hunger to only be for You. My soul was only designed to run on You, the Living God. Lord, You are faithful and You are good. We trust You in all of Your thoughts, all of Your intentions, all of Your plans, and all of Your actions towards us, and great is Thy faithfulness towards us - You will never leave us nor forsake us! We love and honor You! In Jesus' name. Amen*