

Message: Satisfying Our Spiritual Hunger

Have you ever heard David Crowder’s song “How He Loves”?

You can check it out on YouTube. One of the stanzas goes this way:

“...we are His portion and He is our prize,
Drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes,
If his grace is an ocean, we're all sinking.
And Heaven meets earth like an unforeseen kiss,
And my heart turns violently inside of my chest,
I don't have time to maintain these regrets,
When I think about the way... That He loves us...”¹

David and his band sing about faith in a real, heart-felt way.

But it wasn’t always that way. “In high school, David Crowder attended church on Sunday mornings and youth group on Wednesday nights. He scheduled quiet time with God every day. These were the specific times David shared his life with Christ.

‘I had put God in little time blocks where I'd experience him,’ David says in a Christianity Today article. ‘One day, God showed up in the middle of the day where I didn't expect him to poke his head up. In that moment, my view of God expanded.’

Believe it or not, this big moment happened in a food court at a mall. ‘When you think spirituality or experiences of God, you're thinking church and praise hymns,’ David says. ‘But it was over a fast-food sandwich. I took one bite and was like, “This is the best chicken sandwich *ever*.” I was feeling down, and this sandwich was like the re-discovery of joy. So here I am sitting in a mall food court with tears coming to my eyes.’

Right then, David realized that everything good in life comes from the one who gives good, God. God can pop up anytime, not just Sundays and quiet times. God's everywhere. ‘God's at work in places that we wouldn't suspect him to be at work,’ David says. ‘That's when I realized that every second is an opportunity for us to experience God. There's not a second God's not there and available to us.’”²

¹ www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/davidcrowderband/howheloves.html

² www.christianitytoday.com/tyf/truelifestories/ithappenedtome/7.28.html

That’s a great summary of our message on spiritual amnesia.

When we forget God or try to put God in a box, we’re limiting the joy and freedom we have in life. God isn’t limited by our view. We’re the ones who become limited. When we allow ourselves to be open to new experiences of God’s love and grace, we’ll find walls we may not have known falling down, guiding us to a deeper spirituality.

That sounds great, but it leads to a couple of questions:

“what is spirituality?” and “what does it mean to have spiritual hunger?”

Those are our topics for today. Let’s start with a few thoughts on the nature of spirituality, talk about satisfying our spiritual hunger, and then end with some reflections on spirituality.

For the modern person, spirituality is defined as spiritual life.

A deeper spirituality means living a more meaningful, authentic spiritual life. In essence, it’s a life of greater intimacy and freedom in relationship with God. It’s an awareness of the spiritual dimensions of life and all of creation. It’s the answer to a question God asked Isaiah, “*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*” (43:19a).

A conclusive definition of spirituality is elusive. That’s because of the nature of it’s source: God’s Spirit. That’s what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthian church with these words, “*We haven’t received the world’s spirit but God’s Spirit so that we can know the things given to us by God. These are the things we are talking about - not with words taught by human wisdom but with words taught by the Spirit - we are interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. But people who are unspiritual don’t accept the things from God’s Spirit. They are foolishness to them and can’t be understood, because they can only be comprehended in a spiritual way*” (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

The nature of our relationship with God is the key to spiritual life.

When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we’re given gifts. First, we’re washed clean and we’re given a new heart and mind. Once we’ve been prepared, we receive a special gift: God’s Spirit comes and lives

inside us. We begin to grow and mature spiritually. That's a reflection of the "increasing vitality and influence of God's Spirit within us."³

A simple analogy is this: we're giving the Spirit time and space to rearrange our interior furniture. The Holy Spirit's just moved in and needs a little time to reset our disordered priorities and move the love of God and our neighbor from the hall closet to the center of the room. Romans 12:2 says it well, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" The rearranging is important. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are made into the image of Christ, who is the "*image of the invisible God*" (Colossians 1:15). We're slowly, incrementally reshaped to the pattern and life we were meant to have. It takes a lifetime, so please be patient with yourselves and others.

The reshaping impacts us from the inside-out. Our attitudes change first, followed by our behavior. "We begin to understand God's way of relating to us and our way of responding to God."⁴ Over time, all of our relationships become grounded in the foundation of our greatest love and primary relationship, Jesus Christ. And that changes everything. The way we look at other people changes. The way we love other people changes. The way we look at the world, with all of its problems and challenges, changes. We find hope even when the future seems bleak. We know joy even when our heart is breaking. We live in peace even when everything around us is in chaos.

What God offers is the gift of life itself. It's not a promise there won't be problems. God's gift transforms us and restores in us the vision of what it means to be made in God's own image. There's nothing more valuable. After all, how many of us, individually or as a group, live responsibly and respectfully with one another and our neighbors? Here are some questions to consider: do you know your neighbors? How about where they work? Do you know their parents' names and the names of their children? Do you know where (or if) they go to church? Have you invited them? As a community of faith within a

³ Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, p7

⁴ *Ibid*

community and a nation, we’re far from loving our neighbor as ourselves, much less loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us at home or abroad. Yet that’s exactly what Jesus asks us to do (Matthew 5:43-44).

The only way to be better is to trust God and follow where God’s Spirit leads us. That’s what waits for those who “*love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul and strength*” (Mark 12:30). Accepting God’s gift of grace in Jesus is the first step. Learning and following spiritual practices is needed for us to grow and mature spiritually. I’m talking about practical steps. “Good spiritual practices cut across theological, denominational and even faith boundaries. There are forms of prayer, methods of reflecting and patterns of commitment that tangibly impact our emotional and spiritual maturity.”⁵ We’ll explore them over the next few weeks.

I must warn you: if you don’t follow good spiritual practices, there’s a downside. It would be like walking around, dressed for a dinner party, but with no place to go. After a while, all you’d be aware of is the grumbling of your empty stomach. You’d be hungry but there would be no food in sight. That’s the way it is for many people in the world today, inside and outside the church.

For some people, spiritual hunger is unnamed. It lurks just below the surface of their consciousness. Free-floating anxiety, the concern about uncertainty in all of life, is a good example. Those who experience spiritual hunger in this way feel like something is missing from their lives. Things are out of balance. They’re sailing through life, but don’t seem to have any way to steer the boat.

Other people recognize their need as spiritual hunger. We know we need direction from a power beyond the world and life as we know it. Maybe we’ve realized that thrills, stuff and success won’t fill the void. Maybe we have questions about suffering we can’t answer, questions for which there are no easy answers, or perhaps answers at all. We’ve come to believe that only a power transcending this life can give meaning to our choices and circumstances.

⁵ *Op cit.*, p. xxii

Spiritual hunger is a real, social phenomenon. People from all walks of life and faiths are searching for a spiritual center. For some, suffering and tragedy are the catalysts. Other people are restless and dissatisfied with church as they've experienced it. Yet other people have had a vivid experience of God but aren't sure where, and how, they fit into church traditions. In all these cases, people know the language of religion and faith. What they're seeking is a personal basis for that faith, not a "second-hand faith."⁶ Unless we, clergy and laity, take these concerns and experiences seriously, we'll leave other people with little way to learn how to integrate their experience with faith or church life.

Where do these questions and reflections lead us?

I believe they lead us back to God. Human beings are filled with a desire for a meaning and purpose that transcends the mundane, the problems and the hard questions of life. There are those who attribute our desire to psychological needs, but, in my opinion, that just leads to an even greater emphasis on ourselves. Even if we become a nation of narcissists, the hunger will continue to grow.

People of faith believe we're made for a relationship with God.

Until we seek and find that relationship, we'll always have a emptiness at the core of our being. Jesus Christ fills the void. He fills it with a love so deep, strong and true even death cannot stand against it. The love of God in Christ is the love that forever changes the world.

It's the love that inspired St. Augustine to write,

"You called, you cried, you shattered my deafness. You sparkled, you blazed, you drove away my blindness. You shed your fragrance, and I drew in my breath, and I pant for you. I tasted and now I hunger and thirst. You touched me, and now I burn with longing for your peace."⁷

The love of God transforms our emptiness and need. Our spiritual hunger grows and sharpens, because our spirit, having tasted true love, knows what it wants and needs. Our spirit wants to communicate and commune with God's Spirit. We need to talk to God and to listen to God. We need moments and means of grace where we are nourished

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6

and fed spiritually. We can find those together as a community who, gathering in faith, is willing to follow wherever God’s Spirit leads us.

Are you ready to follow Jesus?

I pray for God’s Spirit to work inside us, giving us the confidence and boldness to go to God in prayer this week. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Psalm 19:1-4a (NRSV)

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Luke 11:5-13 (NRSV)

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”