

Are you HUNGRY?

Welcome to **Week 2** of our new series called “**How Did I Get Here?**” We got the idea for this series from a book written by Christine Cain dealing with the concept of spiritual drift when it comes to our relationship with God. Over the course of this series we are highlighting 4 Signs to help you recognize when you are drifting spiritually and what to do about it to make sure you are properly connected to the true anchor of your soul - Jesus Christ

The passage that serves as our theme for this series is **Hebrews 2:1-4 (NIV)** **We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.** Drift away from what? **2 For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?** The answer: our salvation in Christ!

3 how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. **4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.** As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, we need to pay CAREFUL ATTENTION to our relationship connection with God so that we will finish our faith race well and not miss out on the benefits of our salvation. After all, Jesus died so that we may have life and have it more abundantly. He has removed the barrier between us and God so that we may have unhindered fellowship with Him. So why would we want to drift away from God by letting anything get in the way of what we have been given?

Last week we introduced the first sign of spiritual drift when we said that you are beginning to drift away from God when **YOU HAVE STOPPED TRUSTING JESUS!** When we stop trusting God in the everyday activity of our life we are beginning to drift. Rather than ask God how He is going to solve our current situation and trusting Him to handle it, we start taking matters into our own hands and looking to ourselves to find answers. We said, an anchor is only as strong as the rope that tethers us to it and if Jesus is our anchor then the rope that tethers us to Him is our FAITH in Jesus and His promises. Rather than let “WHAT IF” questions sever us from the anchor of our soul, we need to learn to counter our WHAT IFs with an attitude that says, “EVEN IF I will trust in the PROMISES of God.” If we want to prevent spiritual drift in our lives we can't afford to stop trusting Jesus.

And that brings us to this week and our second sign indicating we are drifting in our relationship with God and that is - **YOU HAVE STOPPED HUNGERING!** Let's PRAY together and then we will unpack this concept a little further.

I remember when I was a little kid my mom would not allow me to eat any cookies or chips before supper. I would usually be very hungry leading up to dinner time and would often beg her to let me have a little snack to satisfy my hunger. The problem with these snacks, especially when you are hungry, is that you usually have to eat a bunch of it to fill the void of hunger. Not only that, but the nutrition value of these snacks is zero. Mom knew that if she allowed me to eat junk food before dinner it would only spoil my appetite and hunger for the real food that was

better for me. Unfortunately, the same thing can happen in our relationship with God. Rather than hunger for God and be satisfied by Him (btw, He is the true BREAD of LIFE - The spiritual food that not only is better for us but will actually satisfy what we really hunger for) Rather than hunger for God and be satisfied by Him we sometimes gorge ourselves on the twinkies of this world. It might be a quick fix and satisfy our hunger temporarily, but it isn't good for us over the long run and ultimately it ends up spoiling our appetite for God. You see, when we stop hungering for God we start drifting away from Him.

In the Sermon on the mount Jesus instructs us as to what will really satisfy us when He said this in **Matthew 5:6 (NIV)** **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.** In other words, if we hunger for the right stuff (which Jesus says is RIGHTEOUSNESS), we will find something that will fill us completely.

Christine Cain says this, ***“Our appetites matter to God. He knows what will satisfy us the most, what is most nutritious, what will give us spiritual focus, energy, peace, and joy.”***

According to **Mathew 5:6** that which is most beneficial to us is RIGHTEOUSNESS. But what does this mean and how is it beneficial? First of all, let's define righteous. **RIGHTEOUS** defined by Webster's dictionary means ***acting in accord with divine or moral law : to be free from guilt or sin. One who is morally right or justifiable.*** According to God's word there is only ONE who is declared truly RIGHTEOUS and that is God Himself.

Psalm 119:137 -138 (NIV) **137** You are righteous, LORD, and your laws are right. **138** The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy.

Psalm 119:142-144 (NIV) **142** Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true. **143** Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands give me delight. **144** Your statutes are always righteous; give me understanding that I may live.

On the contrary I want you to notice what God's word says about us.

Romans 3:10-17 (NIV) **10** As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; **11** there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. **12** All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” **13** “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” **14** “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” **15** “Their feet are swift to shed blood; **16** ruin and misery mark their ways, **17** and the way of peace they do not know.”

Thankfully, Romans 3 is not the final word on the matter regarding our righteousness. If we are going to pursue righteousness we must pursue God Himself, the only ONE who is righteous. Here is the awesome part! In order to overcome sin that hinders us from God's presence, Jesus made us righteous. **2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)** **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** Like our salvation, it is free and not earned. It is in essence the standing we receive from God when we accept Jesus as our Savior. We exchange our sin for Christ's righteousness. This standing of righteousness allows us to

have and possess unhindered full access to God, who btw, is really the only One who can truly satisfy us and give us what we truly long for. I don't know about you but I long to be LOVED. No one loves me like Jesus. I long to be ACCEPTED. No one accepts me as I am like Jesus. I long for PURPOSE in life. No one gives me purpose like Jesus. I want a JOY that is free from guilt and shame. No one provides that kind of joy except Jesus. We benefit from righteousness because it allows us to have full fellowship with the ONE who gives us what our heart desires the most in life. Because He has made us righteous there is peace without guilt and shame. There is joy, for all that is the Father's is ours also. There is purpose as we exist to enjoy God and bring praise to His name no longer hindered by sin. All because of righteousness!

In the passages that follow Matthew 5:6 (Matthew Ch. 5-7) Jesus addresses what righteous living looks like: 1) It looks like carrying out the Law to the point of it impacting our mind and heart (For instance, Adultery is more than just abstaining from the physical act of sexual immorality but it should also impact that which takes place in our heart regarding lust. The same is true regarding murder and our hatred toward others that takes place in our heart.) 2) It shows us what real love looks like even to the point of how we treat our enemy. 3) It reflects in the promises we make to others. 4) It reflects how we view and use our material possessions. 5) It generates humility when we Pray and Fast 6) It causes us to first examine our own hearts before we call out sin in others. And so on. The rest of the Gospels as well as the NT continue with this same theme of what righteous living looks like. However, when we start trying to satisfy the hunger of our soul with the things of this world (things that will never truly satisfy us) we rob ourselves of an appetite for God and rather than hunger for righteousness we end up gorging ourselves on the twinkies of the flesh that temporarily curb our hunger for God and never really satisfy. It's like when you make the choice to eat good and wholesome food your body tends to be healthier and actually starts to crave the good food. But when you eat junk food it takes away a healthy appetite and leads you to start craving things that are not good for you physically. When our appetite for righteousness begins to wane we have a tendency to drift. When we start trying to satisfy the hunger of our soul with the things that will never truly satisfy us we rob ourselves of an appetite for God.

For those of us who have drifted that is exactly what we have done. Rather than hunger and thirst for righteousness we settled for something else. It looked tasty at the beginning, but it didn't really satisfy our soul. It was quick and easy, but it isn't good for us and it costs us relationship time in God's presence. Now we feel distant due to shame and guilt and unworthy of what God wants to give us. What happened? We spoiled our appetite by gorging ourselves on the junk food of this world. We have drifted away and we didn't realize it.

There may be some here today that have never trusted Jesus by faith thus your life has been an endless pursuit of trying to satisfy your soul only to still be searching. All your life you have been snacking on the junk food of this life when the King has set for you a banquet table and even given you an invitation to the feast, if you would only come and partake of His righteousness.

So, what does it look like to actually hunger and thirst for righteousness? I want to encourage you today that no matter where you happen to be you can always find your way back to God. Whether you have drifted over the years or whether you have never accepted his

invitation to the banquet table of His righteousness. It is not too late to pursue Him and start hungering and thirsting for RIGHTEOUSNESS.

What does it look like to actually hunger and thirst for righteousness? Well, let me start by telling you what it isn't. It isn't the pursuit of a legalistic list of do's and don'ts. Don't do this, don't go there, don't touch that, don't watch this, don't dress like that, etc. If the pursuit of righteousness was to adhere to a list of "thou shalt nots" then the 10 commandments would have been sufficient enough to make us righteous, right? But as we all have experienced, a list of "what to do" and "what not to do" isn't very helpful in producing righteousness in our lives. It only serves to highlight for us how we fall short of what God expects from us. For some of you this describes how you have tried to live your Christian life. By pursuing the ability to stop doing certain things and as a result you grew weary and you started drifting. For some of you it may be that you have rejected the Christian faith altogether because you feel you can't meet those criteria so you have walked away from Jesus because you know you can't live up to that standard. This is not what it looks like to hunger and thirst for righteousness. So what is it? **It is simply the pursuit of God and all that He is.** It is to hunger for God and all that He wants to do in and through your life. The emphasis is not on you, it is on Him. But you need a hunger for Him because if you hunger for Him you hunger for righteousness! When you think of a relationship in terms of do's and don'ts it becomes mechanical and lifeless. Relationships are about love and enjoyment. That brings a relationship to life and it becomes something you want to pursue. We need to approach God this way. We need to pursue Him and all that He is. When it come to pursuing a relationship with God we need to understand that there are really FOUR LEVELS to our relationship with HIM.

Level 1 - He draws us to Him! **John 6:44 (NIV)** "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. God has to initiate our relationship with Him. He has to invite us into His presence. He makes the first move. Once He has, then we move to LEVEL 2.

Level 2 - We accept Him! **Romans 10:9 (NIV)** If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. God does not force Himself on anyone. He extends an invitation but you have to accept Him. But we can't stop there especially if we are talking about a relationship. There is a THIRD LEVEL.

Level 3 - We pursue Him! **Matthew 6:33 (NIV)** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Pursuing is being intentional with your relationship. Think about it in terms of marriage. I asked my wife to marry me. She said yes in accepting my invitation. Now if we want our relationship to grow and become vibrant we must pursue each other. The same is true with Jesus. Why? Because other things are trying to grab our attention and interfere with our relationship. We must be intentional in bringing our attention back to Him. But we can't stop there. There is a FOURTH LEVEL.

Level 4 - We continue to pursue Him! **Hebrew 3:14 (NIV)** We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. All throughout the Bible we are

challenged to be steadfast in continuing on in the things we have learned and believed as it relates to our relationship with God. We must not cease to keep pursuing. And here is why?

We continue to pursue Him because there is more of Him to know and discover. We hunger and thirst for righteousness and we keep going for more because we desire more to fill our life. The idea is we are not fixed on behavior modification, we are fixed on Jesus and knowing Him more. As we gain more of Him and as we run after Him, His righteousness changes us instead of us trying to change ourselves. The pursuit in essence anchors us to Jesus so that we will not drift with the currents of the culture or the life circumstances around us.

How do we create a deeper hunger for Jesus?

First, start by **asking for more of Him!** Too many times we get satisfied with what we have and forget that there is so much more! If you feel like you are complacent in your pursuit of God because you believe you have all that there is to have you need to ask Him to show you more! Listen to this prayer Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus, **Ephesians 3:14-19 (NIV) 14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.** We will never get to the end of all that Jesus is! We will spend eternity getting to know Him more intimately and there will still be more of Him to learn about and experience. I dare you to ask God for more! You will never exhaust all that He is!

Secondly, take time to **feast on Him!** When you realize how awesome He is you will only want more. Listen to what the psalmist says in **Psalms 34:8 (NIV) Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.**

Psalms 119:103 (NIV) How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

Feast on God's word. Feast in His presence through worship. Feast and marinate your soul in His presence through prayer. But feast on Him for He is GOOD and you will not be wasting your time! Btw, in order to grow your hunger for Him you need to do something with what He has been feeding you with in His word. If you feast without exercising after you eat you will just become bloated and fat making you lethargic and stuffed to where you will not be hungry for more. It's like THANKSGIVING. If all you do is sit down in your recliner after feasting you are probably not going to be hungry for more anytime soon. However, if you take a walk and burn off some of what you have stored up in your body you will create a healthy appetite for more. Be DOERS of the word not HEARERS only!

Lastly, make sure to **fast from the things that cause you to drift from Him!** **2 Timothy 2:20-22 (NIV) 20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood**

and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. **21** Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. **22** Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Just because something is lawful for you to do doesn't mean it is beneficial for you. There are some things (they may even be good things) that can become a distraction to your relationship with Jesus. We need to be aware of anything that may spoil our appetite for God. We need to ask God for a spirit of discernment as to what that might be and we need to limit these things in our life. Make sure when you intentionally remove something from your life that you replace it with something better that will draw you closer to God. (note **verse 22** - Paul encouraged Timothy not only to remove evil desires from his life, but he also encouraged him to replace them with a pursuit of good things in their place. Things such as righteousness, faith, love and peace) If you remove without replacing, usually that which you removed comes back even stronger than before. (Give an example from your personal life)

Removing the poisonous stuff from your life is about heart change not behavior modification. (note the later part of verse 22 where Paul says, "**along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.**") If what you are doing doesn't impact the heart you are wasting your time and just going through religious motions. It has to be driven by a motivation for a pure heart fueled by your love for Jesus.

Are you hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for more of Jesus? Are you feasting on Him and fasting from what causes you to drift? Or is it the other way around, fasting from Him and feasting on what causes you to drift?

Worship Comes Back Up

Invitation:

Have you stopped HUNGERING for GOD?

Rather than hunger and thirst for righteousness have you settled for something else? Do you feel distant due to shame and guilt and unworthy of what God wants to give you? Have you spoiled your appetite by gorging yourself on the junk food of this world? Have you drifted away and didn't realize it? It's not too late for you to come back to God! What are some things in your life right now that are robbing you of your hunger for God? Will you confess those and turn from them and begin pursuing Jesus once again?

There may be some here today that have never trusted Jesus by faith thus your life has been an endless pursuit of trying to satisfy your soul only to still be searching. All your life you have been snacking on the junk food of this life when the King has set for you a banquet table and even

given you an invitation to the feast. He wants to exchange your sin for His righteousness. Will you accept His invitation TODAY?