

# Hungry To Know God

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Pastor Ethan Ezikian

## I. Introduction

Do you know your resting desire? You know how we all have a resting heart rate? Well, I would like to suggest that we also have desires that we settle into when our lives are at rest. When the noise of life is turned down low where do your desires go? A couple years ago there was a period of time when I would get to the end of the day - kids in bed, laptop closed, phone put away - and in the quiet I would lay in bed and spiral into anxiety. I was experiencing the shadow side of my desire to be in control, and productive, and at peace. It was a time when life was reminding me that I wasn't in control and I couldn't accomplish all I wanted and since I couldn't get what my heart wanted, I would feel this weight on my chest. There have been other seasons of life where my resting desire has been filled with hopes for the future, ambitions, discontent with my circumstances, or longing for justice, yearning for reconciliation. Where does your heart go when you are at rest?

What I would like to lay before you is that underneath all the layers of life, human beings are creatures of desire. And for most people, if we do the work of identifying what we really want, then life becomes an exercise of being ok with unmet desires because the cards we've been dealt don't give us the time, or the means, or the opportunity to achieve the things we really want. And then there are some people who have gotten the chance to feed the desires of their hearts in unfettered ways. But what did Michael Jordan find at the end of the best basketball career anyone could ask for? A hunger for more that couldn't be satisfied. John D. Rockefeller was once the wealthiest man on earth and when he was asked how much money is enough he answered, "Just a little bit more." King Solomon from the Old Testament writes in the book of Ecclesiastes about how he made an experiment out of his life. He indulged every appetite of his heart - he threw parties that would flabbergast you, he built great works, he amassed great power, he indulged in his every sexual whim. And after all of it he wrote, "whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. <sup>11</sup> Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind" (Ecc 2:10-11) Human beings are creatures of desire, but if even the most impressive among us are left feeling empty, how can we ever hope to be satisfied?

C.S. Lewis wrote: "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing."<sup>1</sup> Augustine famously wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."<sup>2</sup> Your longing, your ambition, your hope, even your worries - all of your desires are symptoms of your deeper hunger for God. Our deep hunger will only be satisfied in the One we were made for. This is the invitation of the gospel and the essence of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Christian discipleship is a life of recognizing our hunger for God and feasting on relationship with him.

We're on week two of a sermon series about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus that we're calling *Posture & Practice*. If you've attended church before, odds are that you've heard about "discipleship."

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S. "Mere Christianity" (136-137)

<sup>2</sup> Augustin, "Confessions"

But many Christians will use that term in a way that makes discipleship sound like it's what Christians do when they want to level up from JV to varsity in their faith. But the premise of this series is that in the vocabulary of the Bible discipleship is it. To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to have *postures* of heart, coupled with *practices* of your life.

In Livingston County we have a region full of people who have the opportunity to run a smaller scale version of Solomon's experiment with their lives and who are coming up with the same empty results. Among those people are some who reject Jesus Christ or are indifferent to him (those two groups make up about 60% of our population). And then there are those who take on the label "Christian" without understanding what true discipleship to Jesus looks like or there are those who attend churches as spiritual consumers of religious services. And our vision at Union Church is to lovingly say to all those different groups of people - the nonreligious, the Christian in name only, and even the spiritual consumer - there is more to following Jesus than what you think you know! There is a feast for your hunger and it is found in genuine discipleship to Jesus Christ.

So throughout this series we're going to look at three postures of heart that lead to practices of genuine discipleship. Last week Pastor Kyle established the gospel foundations of discipleship and **today our first posture of genuine discipleship is hunger to know God.** This is why we're in Matthew 22. Let's look at the Book together.

## II. Disordered & Reordered Loves

Throughout Jesus' ministry in the gospels there's a recurring pattern of the Pharisees and the Sadducees trying to entangle Jesus in his words by asking him questions. And here the Pharisees have gotten together and sent a lawyer - an expert in the Jewish Law - and he asks:<sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Now "the Law" here is the first five books of the bible - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. For Israel the Law was the foundation of their whole society. There was no part of existence as a faithful Israelite that was not touched by the Law. The Jews count over 600 commands contained in the Law and it was common to debate whether you could take those 600 commands and summarize the law or prioritize it. This was a controversial question and no matter what answer Jesus gave he was likely to be criticized.<sup>3</sup>

So the Lawyer asked, <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. In his answer Jesus is quoting one of the most well known parts of Old Testament scripture to the Jewish people. They recited it every day in the morning and at night. It's called the "shema" and it's in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. It says, <sup>4</sup> "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Now here is something significant: Often when Jesus is being asked questions designed to entrap him, he shows himself to be trickier than the tricksters by answering their question with another question or by saying something that seems unrelated, but really gets to the heart of the issue. But here Jesus gives a straightforward answer to the question. He says the most important command in all of God's law has to do with *what* we love and *how* we love. What must you love? The Lord your God. How must you love him? With your heart, soul, and mind. In other words, you must love the Lord with your whole self; with every faculty of your being.

This means that the fundamental question of following Jesus is not *What do you know?* or *How well do you behave?* The fundamental question of discipleship is, What do you love? What do you desire? What are you hungry for?

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<sup>3</sup> Doriani, Daniel M., *ESV Expository Commentary: Matthew* (340)

You know, I don't think a single person would disagree with me that our world is full of chaos; that there is something fractured at nearly every level of society. I don't think you even need to be a Christian to nod your head to that! And one way to understand the roots of all that chaos according to the bible is that we have misdirected and disordered our loves. It's not that we shouldn't love our family, or our work, or a perfectly cooked steak, but is it in the mis-prioritizing of our love that we find chaos. When you love your work more than you love your family, your life will be fractured. The apostle James puts his finger on it when he writes, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You desire and do not have, so you murder." ( 4:1-2.) Disordered love leads to a disordered life. And the root of our disordered world is humanity's rebellion against loving God above all other things. Do you see that it's out of love and a desire for your flourishing that Jesus says the greatest command in all of God's law is that you shall love the Lord your God?

Christ has come that you might have life and life abundantly. And abundant life is found in a discipleship to him that looks like redirecting our desires and affections toward the God we were made to love

### III. Posture: Hungry to Know God

So how does the command to love God with our whole being translate into our lives? I'm glad you asked, because that gets me to the next point. Remember our aim in this series is not just to analytically define Christian discipleship to you, but to invite you into the postures of heart and the practices of life that make up genuine discipleship. So what posture of heart reveals a love for God? When we love God with our whole being we will be characterized by hunger to know God.

Now when I say **the first posture of genuine discipleship is hunger to know God** we have to get on the same page about what I mean when I say "know" God. We say "know" and we think of head knowledge. Intellectual assent. But that can't be what I'm talking about because even the demons have knowledge of God! It can't be less than that, but it has to be more! In the bible to know and be known by someone meant to have a depth of relational intimacy with them. This is why the Bible says Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived. To "know" was a euphemism for something more intimate and expansive. So what I mean when I tell you that true discipleship begins with a hunger to know God is that we want to be characterized by an eagerness to relationally engage with the Lord with our whole selves.

Maybe we can use the words of Jesus to paint a clearer picture here. Jesus said, <sup>37</sup> "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," right? Well I don't think Jesus was dividing humans into three categories of heart, soul, and mind, but we can still use these as headings to help us understand the kind of holistic knowledge that disciples should be hungry for.

- **A disciple who is hungry to know God with all their heart engages with God at an emotional level; at the level of your affections.** We want to be a people who follow Jesus like the grown men who cry at football games - with that kind of emotional investment. Do you have a category for emotional intimacy with the Lord? Are you hungry for your heart to be stirred with affection for him?
- **A disciple who is hungry to know God with all their soul engages God at a relational level.** It really caught my attention recently when I was talking with a mentor about being spread thin relationally as a pastor. Just kind of grieving the reality that as a pastor I could fill my calendar with meetings and still not be able to be there for every person or every situation.

And my friend, who is an older, wiser pastor said, “Some people in your church are going to learn to see Jesus as a real person who is there for them when you can’t be.”<sup>4</sup> Are we accustomed to seeing the Christian life as more than a set of philosophies and morals? Do you understand your discipleship to be a life of engaging with the Risen Jesus Christ who is alive today? I know I sometimes have to pray, “Jesus, you are real. You hear my prayer right now. You are my savior and my friend.” Just to remind my own heart that this life of following him is more than a tribe to be a part of or a tradition to follow. It’s a relationship with Jesus. Do you love Jesus Christ as a personal Savior, King, and friend? Are you hungry to know Jesus at a relational level?

- **A disciple who is hungry to know God with all their mind engages with God intellectually.** I hope you haven’t heard me saying discipleship is more than head knowledge and wrongly assumed that means you can scoff at or neglect learning about God’s deeds and character! What if I stood up here and took a quiz about my wife Dana in front of you and got every question about her history, her personality, her likes and dislikes wrong and then sheepishly told you, “But I really love her.” How many of you would believe me? And even if you kind of believed I loved her, you’d still say “But you’re not loving her right!”

Listen I know there are some of us who are more intellectual, who read for fun and make it a hobby to, like, do research. And then there are some of us who would say, “I’m not a learner. I’m not book smart.” Maybe the idea of study is actually intimidating to you. But friends, you’re lying to yourself. You learn what you love and you learn what you need. You may be intimidated or uninterested or too busy to read a book, but you know the stats of your team or you know the ins and outs of the system you have to maintain for work! When we scoff at or neglect engaging our minds in following Jesus, we are showing that we don’t love him or believe we need him.

A genuine disciple of Jesus, who loves God with their whole self, is hungry to know him with all their heart, soul, and mind. That’s the posture of heart we are aiming for, but what about the practices of your life?

#### **IV. Practice: Habits of Hunger**

Our habits and behaviors flow our desires. It’s also true that our habits cultivate and shape our appetites. Have any of you ever had the experience of reading your bible, or sitting in a sermon and feeling the conviction and resolve that now is the time to change your life, to stop that sin, to start that discipline... but then Tuesday comes and you’re back into the groove of your old habits? What happened? Did you forget the insight you’d learned? Was the way your heart was stirred with affection not real? No! What’s really going on is that human beings are more than brains on sticks or emotional souls. You have a body. You are made to embody your thoughts and feelings. This is why the practice of your life, the habits and rhythms you engage in are key to following Jesus. All of us know junk food is bad for you and exercise is good, but many of us struggle to put that knowledge into practice because junk food feels good and exercise feels bad. But those people who have made a practice of exercise will probably tell you that not only did the practice confirm what they already knew, but that the habit also grew a greater love for healthy living in them. In the same way, true hunger to know God has to translate into life practices that reflect our posture of hunger and cultivate more hunger to know the Lord.

So at this point, I’m just going to be direct with you. What are the habits of hunger, practices of life, that I want to call you into as disciples of Jesus? There are just two that I want to highlight today. In

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<sup>4</sup> Dave Bruskas

order to cultivate your hunger to know God you have to have (1) habits of meditation and study in the Bible and (2) habits of prayer.

So first, habits of meditation and study in the Bible. Some Christians who emphasize the authority and beauty of the Bible get told, "You guys are just worshiping the Father, Son, and Holy Bible." And if we were worshiping the Bible, then we should be corrected. But friends, we are glued to the bible not because it is our god, but because it is a window! All of creation is bursting with whispers and rumors and evidences of God, but this book is a window we can look through to clearly behold him! We have to be a people who faces are pressed up against the glass!

We need to cultivate habits of meditation - where we sit with God's word and turn it over in our heads and contemplate its meaning and marvel at its beauty and wrestle with its difficulty. And we need to cultivate habits of study, where we're learning the context and the genre and dissecting sentences and understanding the narrative flow. We need to meditate and study in community! You need the community of faith as you study the word, because you are very fallible and prone to misinterpretation and misapplication and so you need the community God has given you, your brothers and sisters in your local church and your brothers and sisters who have written across the ages to look through the window with you and behold with you and call out the shades of glory that you would have missed on your own. And secondarily, you need daily habits of individual meditation and study in the word.

And in the same way, we need to cultivate habits of prayer. Friends, if we were made to know him and the word of God is a window to see him, then prayer is a phone line to speak to him. How can we know him, if we don't pour out our hearts to him. Prayer is like breathing for the Christian and too many of us are suffocating ourselves! And just as we need the community of faith in our study, we will be malnourished in prayer if we hold back from praying with other believers.

These are the kinds of habits of hunger every believer needs. Now let me offer some more specific applications for how you might practice these habits of hunger.

1. First Practice: Prioritize The Gathering in Your Church - In the gathering we worship, pray, and open up God's word in community. In the same way that an addict needs their recovery group, you need the gathering. You have an appointment with God and his people every Sunday and too many of us neglect the gathering. Sociologists count "regular, committed" church attendance nowadays as going to church once a month. That is biblically unacceptable. It's no wonder that the church is in decline in the west and 40 million Americans have left the church over the last 25 years, when their habits have trained them to see it as supplementary and secondary.  
And I'll just add here, as you come to the gathering, for the sake of your discipleship, don't neglect the sermon! I know we have a lot of young children in our midst. Parents I know it is sometimes necessary to take your babies into the hall. But please, not for my ego or Kyle's ego, but for the sake of you hearing the word preached, don't use your children as an excuse to enable your short attention spans. Prioritize the gathering every week, and so much as it depends on you, don't skip the sermon.
2. Second Practice: Study Scripture in Community by Joining a Bible Study. Do you struggle to get in the word on your own? I do. Take advantage of a weekly opportunity for accountability in meditating and studying God through the scriptures.
3. Third Practice: Meditate Dailey - find a bible reading plan. There are many to choose from of varying lengths. If you struggle to read, there are many audio options. If you need help finding one, I will gladly help you find one.
4. Fourth Practice: Encase every habit of hunger in prayer. Use your car ride on the way to church and on the way home to pour your heart out to God. Pray with your brothers and sisters at church and at bible study. Before you open up your bible or click on your bible app, tell the

Lord what is distracting you, what is worrying you, what you are angry about, what you are joyful about, what you want him to do in the world. As you read the word and see his character, pray and worship him. As you read and see his commands for your life, ask him to help you in holiness. Encase every habit of hunger in prayer.

This is genuine discipleship. To have a hunger to know God that is reflected in the practices of your life.

#### **IV. Hunger to Know God Because You Have Been Known By Go**

As we get near the end of the message I want to return to Matthew 22. Jesus said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” I’ve tried to show you today that this means genuine discipleship begins with a hunger to know God. But maybe as you consider Christ’s command and the posture and practices that I’ve called you to, more than feeling resolve, you feel defeated because you know your life. How every attempt at reform is marked by failure. How the idea of habits turns to ashes in your heart because the word is a synonym for defeat in your life. How even the victories are opportunities for pride instead of holiness. How all this talk about desire is fine, but often the desire is just not there. Hear me, those are biographical sentences. Those are about me.

We are creatures of desire, our desires fail us and leave us empty, and we have twisted the postures and practices of our own hearts by pursuing our disordered loves. We cannot love God with our whole being perfectly. Our desire to know him waxes and wanes with our fickle hearts. Our failure is inevitable. And if we mistake Christianity and the life of discipleship as a life of postures and practices fueled by our love for God, we will despair because our love is deeply flawed.

But the fuel for Christian discipleship to Jesus is not our love for God, but his love for us. 1 John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” Friends, God was there at the beginning. He has known you from the foundation of the world. He sees your hopes, your fears, your weakest moments, your wicked hearts and he loves you. He doesn’t tolerate you. He knows you and he loves you.

How do you know he loves you? This is how we know: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. We have not loved him. We have run from him, ignored him, been too busy for him, been ashamed of him, scoffed at him, rejected him. But while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

The New Testament says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before him (Heb 12:2). In other words the cross was horrible, excruciating, worse than we could imagine. But there was a joy in front of Jesus that was greater than the terror. In the garden Jesus prayed to the Father, “if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). The greater joy that was set before Jesus was to do the will of his Father. You see at the cross, Jesus Christ is the one who loves God with his whole being, so that his joy is to do the will of his Father. And in loving God with his whole being he loves us. Jesus is the one who loves God perfectly for us.

“The gospel is that we are more sinful and flawed than we might ever dare believe, yet at the same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”<sup>5</sup> “God is not waiting for a future version of you to love... he already loves you”<sup>6</sup> And he loves us enough not to leave us in our sin. He already loves you and he is calling you into the postures and practices of life as he designed it to be. If we think that God loves us because we love him we will never find peace. But if we rest in the reality that we can know him because we have been known by him, that we can come toward him because he has come toward us in Christ, then we’re invited into freedom of the gospel. A freedom that fuels a life of hunger to know and follow hard after him.

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<sup>5</sup> Keller

<sup>6</sup> King, Mason. “Spiritual Disciplines: How to Become A Healthy Christian” (2)