

Our Hunger for God

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Date: 17 October 2021

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Elise, and I'm part of the Little Faith Group.

And today I'm reading from the book of Deuteronomy, verses 1 to 20. Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase, and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

[1 : 25] Your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not swell during these 40 years, knowing then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills, a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey, a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing, a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God failing to observe his commandments, his laws, and his decrees that I am giving you this day.

Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase, and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock.

[3 : 02] He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you, so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.

But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors as it is today.

If you ever forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and worship, and bow down to them, I testify against you today, that you will surely be destroyed.

Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

Thank you. Thank you. Well, what a wonderful celebration today, Christchurch.

[4 : 21] Happy birthday to you. Happy 15th birthday. This is your quinceanera. You can go get your learner's permit. You know, you can start to drive.

This is fantastic. As Andrew said, our real birthday is on Easter, and so we're going to have a sweet 16 birthday party here in about six months. So it should be really, really fun, and we'll party hard.

You know, some of us get a little tired of pretending to be excited about birthdays. You know, every year it's like we're doing this again. We're celebrating that you were born every year over and over.

The only thing you really did this past year was just not die for 12 months. So what are we doing? Some of us come to birthday parties, and we think about, you know, those parties growing up and the games we played as a kid.

Anybody play pin the tail on the donkey? This is a safe game for kids. You know, you get a bunch of kids together. You blindfold one of them, give them a sharp object, spin them around, and then set them loose in the group.

[5 : 24] What could go wrong, you know? There's puncture wounds. You know, you pin the tail on my neck. Somebody just pin the tail on my neck. Musical chairs was another great game.

Anybody play musical chairs? Anybody have anxiety attacks during musical chairs? It took me a while to discover there's not enough chairs for everyone, and every round one kid loses.

One kid has to make that walk of shame over to the corner. You know, you get home, and your parents are like, well, how was the party? You're like, it was horrible. I never got a chair, and I got a pin in my neck.

It was a terrible party. So we've not planned to play any of those games today. This is 15 years old. It's like that's a sophisticated birthday party.

That requires nachos. That requires cupcakes. So thanks to all of you who brought things, and we hope that all of you will stick around to party with us, especially if you're new with us today.

[6 : 21] We'd love to meet you and just get to know you and get connected with you. But we've been in this sermon series in the book of Deuteronomy, which we're going to continue today.

And this book itself is a series of sermons from Moses to the people of God in the last days of his life. And part of the reason we're looking at this book is because it's one of Jesus' favorite books in the Bible.

And we're taking time to go deeper on some of these chapters that we know Jesus had memorized and were some of his favorite parts of this favorite book. And really these sermons that Moses gives, they're given to people that are moving from the wilderness into the promised land, people that are moving from their adolescence spiritually into adulthood, people that are moving from being 15 to 16, 17, 18, with massive privileges as the people of God and therefore massive responsibilities.

And so I want to just dive in this morning to Deuteronomy 8. And I think God's word for us today is that our hunger requires wonder bread and a loving father.

Our hunger requires wonder bread and a loving father. I want to talk first of all about our hunger. Think about the last time you were really hungry.

- [7 : 50] Like you had gone for 24 hours or 48 or 72 hours or more without any food. You know, hunger is a serious crisis in the world today, but here we are and we're in the gourmet ghetto this morning.
- I doubt many of us have had to skip a meal out of necessity. Maybe a few grad students here, but that's the word that jumps off the page to me immediately is this word hunger. It says in verse 3, He humbled you, causing you to hunger.
- Why would God cause His people to hunger? What sort of God is this? Why would Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount tell His disciples to fast, to be hungry on purpose?
- Because hunger is the most basic universal form of human need. It's this visceral experience of being empty, of being hollow, of being vulnerable and faint and desperate.
- To hunger is to know that I need something outside of me to fill me. And we're hungry from the very first day we come into the world.
- [9 : 02] We're born hungry. Newborns spend, you know, most of their time crying for food, eating food, and sleeping off their food. Amen? I know some of you have newborns.
- We live hungry first for food, and then for the stuff that we think will satisfy all of those hungers we come to discover within ourselves.
- And hunger drives us, doesn't it? Hunger drives us not just to In-N-Out Burger, but hunger drives us to all that stuff that we think we can't live without.
- The Bible actually opens in the first two pages telling this creation story, presenting humans as hungry beings. Hungry for that fruit that's going to grow on the trees in the Garden of Eden, but not just hungry for the creation.
- We're beings that are hungry for our Creator. We're hungry to walk in the garden with God in the cool of the day. And so behind all of our hungers in life, there's this hunger for God.
- [10 : 06] All of our desires are ultimately a desire for Him. And that's why Moses says, God humbled you, causing you to hunger. Why does God do this?
- To teach His people that they're hungry for something more than bread. This universal spiritual hunger of humankind that is often just this inarticulate longing for something we know not what.
- We know we're hungry for justice. We're hungry for beauty. We're hungry for love. We're hungry for transcendent experience. And of course, the secular myth tells us that we can satisfy these hungers in this world.
- We can satisfy these hungers with material reality. And yet, if you've lived long enough, you go out and you pour yourself out in some cause of justice, some just cause, only to find that it's slipping through your fingers.
- It's eluding your grasp. You go out and search for beauty in the mountains and at the ocean. You search for beauty in the arts and in music, and you find that after a little while, it wears off.
- [11 : 22] And you have to keep going back. We go in search of love in the company of friends and in the arms of a partner, only to find ourselves wanting more and more.
- I've gone on quests for transcendent experience, and then I wake up, you know, at some point, and I say, you know, somehow I'm still just me.
- Anybody have these hungers in your heart, these longings in your soul? Have you considered that God is the one causing you to hunger?
- That's a humbling thought, isn't it? That God has given me these insatiable appetites, these insatiable desires that will never be satisfied unless something from the outside comes to fill my emptiness.

And not just something, but someone, a person, a relationship, to come and fill that hunger to which all the other hungers are pointing.

[12 : 26] This is what God is saying to Israel in the desert. It's what he's saying to us in our own wilderness experiences, that you have needs that only I can satisfy.

Isn't that humbling? That I'm actually not a self-sufficient being, but I'm radically dependent on God. One of our great pastors in the fourth century in North Africa, St. Augustine, he said, O Lord, you've created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.

Our hearts are hungry. Our hearts are empty until they find their fullness and satisfaction in thee. One person in the 20th century said it like this.

He lived his life at Oxford and Cambridge. He wrote a book called Mere Christianity, and C.S. Lewis says it this way. He says, Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, they would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world.

There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. 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.

[13 : 56] That's what our hunger is all about. And what Deuteronomy 8 is telling us is that our hunger requires wonder bread. Our hunger requires wonder bread.

Anybody grow up eating wonder bread? Made by the company Hostess. Hostess also made Twinkies, Ho-Hos, and other sugary treats, things that actually aren't food.

And you might be surprised. They declared bankruptcy in 2011 because I think people prefer real food to chemically engineered, industrially produced food.

But I want to suggest to you this morning that manna is the original wonder bread. Manna, you can read about this story in its fullness in Exodus chapter 16, but manna was this daily supernatural miracle from God.

And listen to verse 3 again. It says, He humbled you, causing you to hunger, and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that people do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

[15 : 04] You see, God takes His people out of Egypt. And where does He take them? He takes them into desolation wilderness. And what does He do? He causes them to hunger. He causes them to feel this gnawing emptiness on the inside.

And then He begins to provide for them. And He provides not just one day or not just one week or one month or one year, but God gives them manna every morning for 40 years.

For over 14,000 days, God gives this revelation to His people that though your resources are inadequate, mine are totally adequate.

That though you cannot secure your well-being and your own strength, I can. And though you cannot give yourself life, I will.

Why does God provide this wonder bread for His people? The obvious answer is so that Israel could eat and live rather than starve and die. But the deeper answer is that the wonder bread reveals the wonder of God.

[16 : 12] It says, yes, we need bread, but more than that, we need the baker of the bread. Yes, we need the gift, but more than that, we need the giver of the gift.

So that every time you put this wonder bread in your mouth, every single day, I want to move you from knowledge about me to really knowing me, your creator, your sustainer, your deliverer, your provider, who's unlimited in His power to meet your needs.

Moses says, He did this to teach you that people do not live on bread, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. See, bread is important and essential, but what is more important and more essential?

God is. The one who creates and provides the bread by His word is the same one from whose mouth come these covenant-making, world-saving promises.

The one who speaks into the world these life-giving revelations about the purposes of creation and the purposes of humanity.

[17 : 30] We're being told here that yes, your body needs bread for biological life, but you have a soul and your soul needs the word of God to redeem your life.

Your soul needs the word of God that will allow you to share in His divine life, His eternal life. You see, Jesus loved the message of the manna.

Jesus absolutely loved the story. It's the story that He has in His heart when He's teaching the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6 when Jesus says, I don't want you to be anxious for bread because your Father in Heaven knows how to provide your bread.

What I want you to do is seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all of this bread, everything else you need will be given to you as well. Well, just before Jesus preaches that amazing sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 4, we're told that Jesus is led out into the desert for 40 days.

Not 40 years, but 40 days, but there's an obvious parallel with the story of Israel. The people of God came out into the wilderness and they completely failed God.

[18 : 47] And now here comes the Messiah to represent God's son Israel. And the question is, will He fail or will He keep the commands of God? And so Jesus also goes through this humbling experience, this testing in the wilderness.

Jesus is denied bread. Jesus is full of emptiness. And in His hunger, this dark power comes to Jesus and says, turn these stones into bread.

Don't trust in God to be your provider. Use your power to get what you need right now. Jesus had said in John chapter 4, He said, my food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.

And that's the question is here at the beginning of His work, is this what's going to satisfy the soul of Jesus? Will costly obedience to His Father be His food in this dark hour or not?

And Jesus is facing this attractive offer that would make Him absolutely and wildly popular. Can you imagine being able to turn stones into bread?

[19 : 59] If you could turn stones into bread, you could abolish famine, you could abolish sickness and injustice and misery. To turn stones into bread means that you can turn what you don't want into what you do want.

That you could take all the boulders and all the problems of your life and make them go away and you could have everything you want. You could provide everything you and everybody around you really wants.

And so what does Jesus say in this moment? What does He say to this evil one who's questioning His identity as the beloved of God? This evil power that's causing Jesus to be lured away from trusting in His Father as His provider.

Jesus says, human beings, do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And when Jesus says that, He chooses not self-sufficiency but radical God dependency. Jesus deliberately comes out here into this place, into the wilderness, into this place of temptation to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

[21 : 17] Because if you're honest with yourself, we choose, I choose myself over God. I choose self-sufficient autonomy over total trust in God.

I choose self-serving power over desperate dependence on God. I choose self-interest over costly obedience to the Word of God.

And that's why the Son of God had to come down from heaven and become one of us. That's why God the Father sent His Son to come and live the one true human life that each one of us were created to live.

It's why Jesus was filled with the Spirit to make these daily choices that we all should be making to live every day of His life in total trust and desperate dependence upon every inspired and authoritative and life-giving word that's flowing out of the mouth of His Father.

But Jesus went further than that. The Gospels tell us that one day Jesus fed over 5,000 people. That Jesus, just as the Lord had provided manna and quail in the wilderness for His hungry people, Jesus provided bread and meat in the wilderness for more hungry people.

[22 : 40] And as people ate and were satisfied a conversation ensued after that great feast and we read about it in John chapter 6 where Jesus says this, He says, It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

The bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Sir, they said, always give us this bread.

And Jesus said, He declared, I am the bread. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.

Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world.

You hear what Jesus is saying. Jesus says, I am the manna. I am the wonder bread. I am the source of all life.

[23 : 42] Life abundant. Life eternal. And I can provide what you most deeply need. My crucifixion is going to become for you manna which will nourish you in the forgiveness of sins and the freedom of your soul and the righteousness of your life.

My resurrection is going to become for you manna which will strengthen you with victory over death and life that never ends. I am going to make a way through my flesh and through my bones sacrifice for you to give you the one thing that will ultimately satisfy all of your hunger.

And what is that? Jesus says in Luke 22 that you may eat and that you may drink at my table in my kingdom.

That's what we all want and that's what Jesus provided for us. And I want to invite you today to put your trust in Jesus maybe for the first time but all of us to renew our trust in Jesus as God's eternal word who was made flesh for us as God's wonder bread that he provided to give life to the world because that's what our hunger requires.

Our hunger requires wonder bread. A bread that only God can give. And our hunger requires not just wonder bread but also a loving father.

[25 : 19] A loving father. And I want to end with this. I want you to think back to when you were a child. And I want you to think back to that moment if you can remember it when your mom forced you to swim for the first time without floaties.

Remember that moment? Maybe it's a subconscious maybe it's a repressed memory. Or I want you to remember that moment where your dad forced you to ride your bike for the first time without training wheels.

Was anybody scared? Was that kind of painful for us? I want you to think back like why did your parents make you do that? They did it because they wanted you to enjoy the water.

They wanted you to enjoy the road. They wanted you to enjoy your freedom ultimately. Or think back to when you were 15 years old getting your learner's permit. 16 year old getting your driver's license.

Anybody else's parents teach them how to drive? Was that anxiety provoking for you at all? Was it just me or were you also yelling at your parents while they were yelling at you, hit the brakes!

[26 : 25] Hit the brakes! Left! No, the other left! Why were our parents forcing us into this? Because they wanted us to travel in safety.

They wanted us to have the gift of mobility but to be protected and to be injury free in our mobility. Did anybody else's mom and dad ever say hey, you know you're going to thank me for this later?

Anybody hear those words? You're going to thank me for this one day. We all know I think that good parents put us through difficult and even painful experiences because they love us and because they want the best for us.

And that's what Deuteronomy tells us is that God is a good and loving father to us. Deuteronomy 131 you might remember it said that the Lord your God carried you through the wilderness as a father carries his son.

God is pictured as this tender compassionate father who supports his young child who needs help who needs carrying. And here that same theme comes up in verse 5 where it says know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son so the Lord your God disciplines you.

[27 : 40] We have a father who is fond yet firm. A father who is tender yet tough. And he comes to us in our spiritual adolescence in our spiritual 15 and 16 year oldness.

And he challenges us because he wants us to learn a very important life lesson. Why does our father bring his teenage son Israel out here into the wilderness?

Why does he put us in these places that are parched and hard and lifeless and hot? Because the desert is a crucible of transformation.

The desert is a crucible of the transformation that all of us myself included needs. The desert is this place where gold is refined and purged of all of its dross.

The desert is this place where steel is tempered by intense heat. It's out here in the desert places that God removes all of our props and our father strips us of all of our false securities.

[28 : 51] He takes off our floaties and he takes off our training wheels and he causes us to come to the end of ourselves. He causes us to feel that scary thing of being powerless and not in control.

And why does he do that? Because our father wants us to teach us how to trust in him and rely on him alone. Our father wants us to learn how to love him with all of our heart in the midst of our hunger in the midst of our emptiness so that we can love him with all of our heart in the midst of our abundance in the midst of our fullness.

Our father brings his people into the desert so he can prepare us to move into the promised land. Listen to this description of the promised land in verse 7.

The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land. A land with streams and pools of water with springs flowing in the valleys and hills. A land with wheat and barley vines and fig trees pomegranates olive oil and honey.

A land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack no thing. And a land where the rocks are ironed and you can dig copper out of the hills. The promised land is going to be an all you can eat buffet.

[30 : 08] You're never going to be hungry there. But God says be careful in verse 12 because when you eat and are satisfied when you build fine houses and settle down when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery your heart can so easily become puffed up puffed up with pride which is our fatal flaw which is that malignant cancer inside of us that our Father knows needs to be cut out of us if we're going to have any hope of living.

Listen to verse 17 you may say to yourself my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. Listen to your self-talk. Listen to that self-sufficient voice that pride inside of you that says my ability my strength my hard work my cleverness my professional skills as if I'm this self-made self-sufficient as we're this self-made self-sufficient community as if everything we have is not a gift of God's free grace to us.

That is why our Father brings us out into these desert places that are parched and hot and hard and lifeless because he's saying to us when you're no longer in the desert when you are swimming in bread when you have plenty of resources when you're in the promised land and it's like the garden of Eden when all of your needs are met and you're no longer hungry and you're free of that gnawing ache of emptiness on the inside will you remember me?

Will you remember that I'm the source of all your bread and I'm the source of your very life? Will you have learned this life's most important lesson of moving from self-sufficiency to God dependency?

Christ Church as I close I just want to ask the question is it possible that our Father our good and loving Heavenly Father has brought us through these last two years of desert fire of a pandemic of relentless change of really difficult losses of crazy challenges in order to do just this to deal with our pride to deal with that self-sufficiency in us to deal with that me myself and I inner monologue and to humble us to purify us to temper us and to strengthen us to prepare us for the good things that lie ahead of us to prepare us for Lord willing the next 15 years at Christ Church I think it's highly likely that that's what God's been up to

[33 : 26] I know that's what he's been doing in me and I wonder if that's what he's doing in you I love this verse verse 10 it says when you have eaten and are satisfied praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you and it became Jewish custom out of this verse to say grace by blessing the Lord after meals as well as before meals because Israel became aware that fullness can lead to forgetfulness and plenty can generate pride and so they prayed two times before the meal and then after the meal to remind their hearts that these gifts are meant to drive us into the arms of our generous giver that this daily bread is meant to move us into total trust and desperate dependency on our loving father this is the life that

Jesus lived for us and this is the life that he wants to give to us and I pray that by the power of the spirit God would do this in me and God would do it in you as well in the name of the father the son and the holy spirit amen in you can know going in you to