

September 6, 2009 – What is worth being hungry for?

The past few weeks we have been talking about being hungry for God, asking God to stir spiritual passion in our hearts for Him and for His purposes. In the midst of preparing a message in this series, I received an email newsletter from Francis Frangipane, the pastor of a church we used to go to in Cedar Rapids. The lead article was titled, "Pray for hunger." I'm pretty dense sometimes, but that peeked my attention, so I figured I should take a read. In the article, Francis told this fun little story that I thought I'd share. Francis writes: [We have a little a little dog named Sophie. Sophie loves people food. To her, eating people food is the culinary equivalent of entering the Kingdom of God. She loves our food. When my wife and I share a meal, Sophie will sit at our feet, squint her eyes, and stare at us \(she thinks squinting makes her cuter\). Any food that falls to the floor instantly vanishes into her mouth. \(We haven't had to sweep the kitchen floor in eight years.\) Frankly, she is always hungry for our food.](#)

[We also have a small fenced-in yard outside our porch where Sophie plays. The fence surrounds the area, but there are gaps where the wood pickets don't quite reach to the ground. If Sophie wanted, she actually could squeeze under the fence and get out, but she normally has no reason to try. Occasionally she will get curious and go as far as the gate, but she doesn't leave the yard.](#)

[One day, though, my wife decided to feed a few slices of stale bread to the birds, which happen to nest on a tree on the other side of the fence. When Sophie went out an hour later, she immediately noticed a human food smell in the air, which she tracked to the bread. In less than a heartbeat she found a little gap under the picket fence, squeezed herself to the ground, and then shimmied through the fence to the bread on the other side. It was gone in less than a minute.](#)

[My point is this: hunger will take you where mere curiosity would never go.](#)

What do you think of that? Hunger will take you where mere curiosity would never go... While you have that in your mind, let's read our main Scripture passage for today. It's from the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. Here's what Paul writes in Chapter 3, starting in verse 1. (3:1-14)

1 Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

2 Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. 3 For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, 4 though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Here's the question I want to pose to us today: if Pastor Francis is correct - that spiritual hunger will take us places that mere curiosity never will... what is worth being hungry for? What is worth being hungry for?

In Philippians 3, we get a vivid view into the life and background of the Apostle Paul. Before becoming a follower of Jesus, Paul was one of the most vehement enemies of Christians. The book of Acts tells how Paul (at that time his name was Saul) was breathing murderous threats against believers in Jesus, tracking them down so he could arrest them and take them to Jerusalem.

Paul also took great pride in his his ability to live up to the tiniest detail of the law of God. If there was ever a true Pharisee, Paul was it. Early in Paul's life, what he thought was worth pursuing was a confidence in his religiosity. He thought that was worth hungering for... that that would satisfy.

Of course, we discover that Paul came to a different conclusion later in life. Let me re-read verses 7-9. Paul says: *7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him.*

The imagery in verse 8 is one of the most interesting in the whole Bible. This is an instance where the New Living Translation of the Bible is too soft in its wording... When Paul says in verse 8 that "for Christ's sake he has discarded everything else, counting it all as a garbage..." the literal translation of that last word is "dung." Paul is saying that compared to the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord, everything else is a big pile of "you know what"!!! To help you capture that thought – here's a visual.

I can just hear the conversations in the next day or so, when someone asks you, what did they talk about in church on Sunday? And you answer... horse manure?!?!?

On a bit more serious note, let me ask you this: what are things in your life that you have seen as valuable at one time, but in reality were or area just a big pile of dung compared to what you could be hungering for?

Again, for Paul his main deal was prideful religiosity. I know I can relate to that. I began following Jesus when I was about 12 years old. And while there was a absolutely genuine activation of faith in my life at that point... there was also a whole bunch about my spiritual pursuit that was about confidence in my religiosity. One of the key things that God started working on in my life during that time (and continuing until today) is that my worth, my righteousness is not based on all the good things I can do – either for God or in the pursuit of being religious.

The bottom line truth is that I desperately need the grace that Jesus offers, and that my only worthy response is to ask Him for that grace.

So, there's the dung heap of religiosity. How about the dung heap of achievements. This is present in so many arenas of society: in academics, in business, in sports... The dung heap of achievement includes any of the things that we look to accomplish in hopes that we'll feel good about ourselves. Speaking of sports... I was thinking this week about the number of professional athletes that feel like failures because they didn't win "that championship." Even though they are in the top 1/10 of 1% of all the people who have ever played their sport and have made millions of dollars in the process... it's still not enough. They're stuck in the pursuit of achievement as the thing they are hungering after.

Here's another dung heap: the dung heap of pursuing people's approval. That could come up multiple forms... could be grasping for the approval of your family; it could be your boss or another influential person in your life that you're trying to impress, or even a hypothetical group of people that you're trying to earn their approval. That quest for people's approval seems like it's so important, but it ends up lacking. It doesn't satisfy.

And then there are the 3 P's: pleasure, possessions and power. Our culture is immersed with seeking after these, right? And we get wrapped up that endless maze, too...

Have you ever thought about why we do that? Have you ever stopped to think about that? Ultimately, the reason is rooted in a lie: believing a lie that if we just get this possession, experience this pleasure, or attain this power, that we'll be fulfilled.

Now, that doesn't mean that we can never have any material things, or never experience pleasure, or never be in places of real influence.

The point is this... when those are the ultimate things we seek, it brings us death, not life. So much of our culture is built on the pursuit of acquiring more possessions, more pleasure, more power. But, in the end the reality is: it doesn't satisfy. We're only left wanting more.

I'm sure there are dozens and dozens other "dung heaps" we could talk about, but I think you get my point. Instead of those heaps - we need something else worth hungering for. Let's spend the rest of our time looking at a couple keys Paul sets out for us – on how we can hunger for the most valuable of things.

Here's the first key: the resolute goal of being identified with Jesus Christ. Listen again to what Paul writes in verses 10-11. He says: *I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, **11** so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!*

Paul's resolute goal was to be identified with Jesus Christ... to know Him, even to suffer with Him... whatever it took to have his life wrapped up in who Jesus was and what He was doing. You see, Paul had an encounter with Jesus that changed his life. In Acts 9, we read that while on the road to Damascus, Paul was knocked off his horse as he was met by the resurrected Jesus.

That encounter changed everything for Paul. And from that date on, he knew that nothing measured up to the power and presence of Jesus he experienced that day on the road to Damascus.

Now maybe Paul's experience is more dramatic than most of us have or will experience... I think it's still worth asking the question - have you had a Damascus road experience... where you are "knocked off your horse" and all the things that you thought were so important now pale in comparison of what you see in Jesus Christ.

I know there are many of you have those stories: some of you lived a good chunk of your life outside of relationship with God, going at your own pursuits to fill up your life. And then somewhere along the line, Jesus stepped into your path and showed you who He was. Others here met Jesus at an early age... where even at 3-4-5-6 years old or when you were a teenager. But still it's the same story... Jesus stepped in and showed you who He was, and you discovered that He was what was worth hungering for.

I also believe that God wants to give others of you those kinds of stories, maybe for the first time. To be more specific, I think some of you, right now, are in a spot where you know the things you're pursuing aren't ultimately satisfying. The ingredients that you're trying to fill your life up with are not fulfilling the deepest parts of your soul.

Here's what God may be doing in your life today: He is giving you a hunger for Him. You know that the other "dung heaps" (whatever they are for you) don't satisfy. Jesus wants to reveal Himself to you. He wants to fill you with the hope of eternal life and the power of His resurrection. Is there anything else worth hungering for like that? Does anything else match up to being welcomed into the very family of God, to being loved at the core of who were are? I think we all long for that kind of experience.

Here's the second key we get from Paul about how we can hunger for the most valuable of things. Press on until the end. Paul starts the final section of this Scripture passage by acknowledging that he wasn't going to get it all right this side of heaven. He wasn't going to achieve perfection in this life.

Some of you need to hear that and let yourself off the hook... Sometimes we get into this perpetual self-improvement mode... and we fall into the trap of thinking that is the point. The truth is that we're never going to be enough...that's why we need Jesus.

Paul goes on to say that he was going to forget the things of the past and press on towards the future. Paul's view of "pressing on" is not living in denial about the past.... it's not some blanket thing of "I'm just going to forget everything that's every happened to me and only live in the future." No, if you look at the totality of what Paul is saying here... it's all about deciding what to hunger for. As he compared the early pursuits of his life, they don't hold a candle to his later goal of knowing Jesus Christ.

One final thing about pressing on: In verse 12, Paul says that he wants to lay hold of that which Christ has laid hold of him. It's God that initiates this process with us. We don't hunger for Him on our own... He puts that hunger in us. Not only that, He has done everything to make the truly valuable things we hunger for possible.

It wasn't us that went looking for God. God came looking for us. That's why Jesus came to this earth. He is God in the flesh, the very Son of God. He came to live a perfect life that we could never live. He came to initiate the coming of God's kingdom on earth.

He came to die on our behalf, so we could experience the forgiveness of our sins. He came, so that all who would ever believe in Him would not perish, but experience eternal life.

As we close here... I believe God is offering us opportunities this morning to choose what we're hungry for.

Can we see our dung heaps for what they are and turn to God, asking Him for a greater and deeper hunger for Him? Can we let go of the attachment we've had to these other things, and instead identify ourselves with Jesus Christ. Can we ask God to fill us with perseverance, so we can press on until the end, running the race of faith in Him and with Him?

Folks, I believe God is drawing us to those things... let's pray and respond to him right now.