

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Exploring Spirituality: The Hungers of My Life

Meeting with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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The Hungers of My Life

This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus

Learning Objectives

1. Recognize that all humans have deep soul hungers, recognized or not
2. Take stock of one's own hungers and determine if they are misdirected
3. Learn that obstacles are worth overcoming if the hunger is true
4. Realize that hunger for wholeness means working for the wholeness of all

Content Outline

- A. What Are the Hungers of My Life?
- B. Two Universal Truths
- C. Two Universal Principles

Background Material for the Presenter

What are the hungers of my life and what am I doing about them? Gordon MacDonald tells about a conversation he had with an NFL athlete, a friend of his. The football player was an all-pro pass defender, the best in the business. On a Monday, six days before the team would play against the Dallas Cowboys, the two men were having lunch together.

Gordon asked him, "So how are you going to prepare yourself for the Cowboy pass offense? What's your schedule going to be this week?"

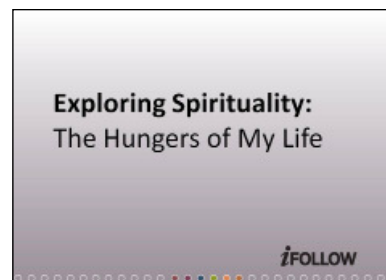
The player said, "Well, the mornings will all be practice at the stadium. And then I'll go home to my den and watch game films. I'll study the Cowboy receivers until I know all of them better than their wives do. I'll check every movement they make when they come out of the huddles to see if they reveal what sort of play it's going to be, what

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pattern they're going to run, or whether or not they're going to stay back and block."

"So what about your evenings?" Gordon asked.

"Oh, I'll keep watching those films straight through until midnight every night."

"Ten hours a day? All week? Nothing else?" Gordon was incredulous.

"Yep!" the player said. "Hey, I want to beat those guys. I want to hit them so hard if they come into my zone that when they're lying on the ground, they'll look up to the sky with glassy eyes and pray that there won't have to be another play in the game! I want to totally dominate their spirits!"

Now that's what you call passion. The guy is hungry! He wants to win so badly that he's willing to do whatever it takes to get there. One might deny the validity or value of the object of his hunger. But the spirit of it is undeniable; deep, passionate hunger.

The truth is, we all feel hungers inside us that motivate us and drive us to action. Passion is a powerful motivational force. It pushes us to excel in sports, business, academia, arts, relationships and most areas of life. It moves us to go beyond the ordinary and the status quo. Hunger.

When MacDonald saw his NFL friend's hunger and passion to win something as futile and fading as a simple football game, he was inwardly embarrassed to realize that there really was no part of his life where he could say he was paying a similar price. Not in his family life, not in his work, not even in the part of life that possessed the most significance and value for him.

It's ironic that so few people stop long enough to acknowledge some of their hungers other than the most pressing problem at the moment. And even when they do, what they do about it is not nearly as deep and all-consuming as that NFL player.

Henri Nouwen, considered by many to be one of the greatest spiritual writers, once described a deep inner hunger in our society that he called "restlessness." When he returned from an extended stay in Latin America, he observed: "What most strikes me, being back in the United States, is the full force of restlessness, the loneliness, and the tension that holds so many people. The conversations I had today were about spiritual survival. So many of my friends feel overwhelmed by the many demands made on them; few feel the inner peace and joy they so much desire. ... There seems to be a mountain of obstacles preventing people from being where their hearts want to be. It is so painful to watch and experience. The astonishing thing is that the battle for survival has become so 'normal' that few people really believe that it can be different." (Nouwen, 2002)

Two Universal Truths

Two things stand out from Nouwen's observations, two things that are endemic to the human condition. **Number one, we all have heart hungers**, deep longings that sometimes seem so hard to fill; dissatisfaction with the way things are, a restlessness that sometimes manifests itself in the form of an aching feeling inside.

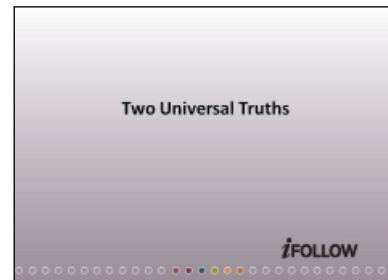
These are often the hungers that either aren't acknowledged or seem impossible to fulfill. Some people do not spend much time considering these hungers. Others use many strategies that prove ineffective. Yet these heart hungers are the most significant in terms of life fulfillment and meaning.

Number two, we all face "a mountain of obstacles," as Nouwen put it, that tend to prevent those heart hungers from being adequately fed. Just admitting or embracing our hungers isn't enough. Hungers automatically drive toward fulfillment. But all of us encounter obstacles needing to be overcome and dealt with in order for satisfaction to be realized. And that means work, more energy, focus, determination, tenacity; all those traits that take time to develop and insist upon extra energy to be applied.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, wife of the best known aviator in history, Charles Lindbergh, became a well-known author and often spoke to women's groups. Here's how she once described this human dilemma: "The problem is not merely one of woman and career, woman and the home, woman and independence. It is more basically how to remain whole in the midst of the distractions of life; how to remain balanced, no matter what centrifugal forces tend to pull one off center; how to remain strong, no matter what shocks come in at the periphery and tend to crack the hub of the wheel." (Lindbergh, p. 23)

Notice the heart hungers she describes: the hunger to be and to remain whole, to be and remain balanced, to be and remain strong. Those are powerful human longings. They manifest themselves in a variety of ways. And unless they are effectively addressed, those hungers not only go unfulfilled, but they create areas of brokenness, dysfunction, and disease. Consider the high level of addictions in our society, relational fragmentation like divorce, obsession and compulsions, busyness, the "workaholic" syndrome, narcissism, hedonism ... and the list goes on. Our inner hungers are powerful.

Notice also how Lindbergh describes the mountain of obstacles that often keep people from feeding those hungers in meaningful ways: the distractions of life, the centrifugal forces that tend to pull us off center, the shocks that come in at the periphery and crack the hub of the wheel. She knew what she was talking about. In 1932, three years after she and Charles were married, their son was kidnapped and murdered. Talk about something that would pull a person off center and knock them off balance. Crisis is often one



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of those forces that reveal how centered we are, how balanced, how much ballast or inner weight we really have.

But it doesn't need to be something that big to pull us off center. As Henri Nouwen observed, it can be busyness, loneliness, the many demands of living and trying to survive, like competition at work or in the family, the pressures of deadlines at school, work, or home, finances, physical and emotional exhaustion, screaming and demanding children, teenagers, retirement, our personal need for self-esteem and a sense of value that get battered each day, our sense of personal identity, our drive to be loved or admired and respected.

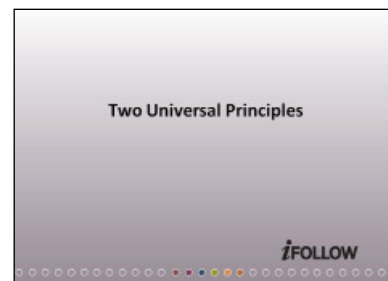
The point is, we all have these deep needs and hungers. We all face obstacles to getting them sufficiently satisfied, included misdirected and ineffective strategies. So we all experience varying degrees of dissatisfaction, lack of fulfillment and brokenness. It is the human condition.

So what do we do about it? How do we go about dealing meaningfully with our deepest hungers? Do we deny them or feed them? Is life only about survival or also about potential?

Jesus once spoke a simple but profound spiritual reality. He up-ended the traditional religious paradigm with a new perspective: "Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6)

Two Universal Principles

Notice two principles here. First, Jesus commends appetite, hunger. Affirmation is offered not to those who have already arrived, not to those who think they have it all together, not to those who are satisfied and content, but rather to those who have a longing, a desire, a passion, a hunger, a thirst. Jesus is describing the significance of possessing a divine discontent, a divine dissatisfaction. In other words, this hunger comes from God.



You and I were created with the inner need to live beyond the status quo, beyond mere maintenance existence. We were designed for the best that there is. Scripture refers to human beings as being created in the image of God. The fact that there is this deep, inner hunger for something better, a drive to reach our highest potential, a passion for the best reveals our divinity, the image of God in us. We have an inherent longing to experience more than there is. Jesus commends appetite and hunger because that acknowledges the image of God in us.

Imagine how this must have shocked Jesus' listeners. In their view (the typical religious paradigm of that day), the powerful and religious leaders, who obviously appeared and

claimed to have it all together and who ruthlessly admonished everyone else to get it together by following hundreds of rules and regulations; those were the ones who were blessed. They were on the pinnacle of the religious pyramid and enjoyed special favor from God.

But Jesus said God's blessing and favor went instead to those who were hungering and thirsting, those who were dissatisfied with the status quo in ways the leaders of society were not manifesting, those who were willing to go against the traditional flow and push through both religious and cultural obstacles to satisfy their hunger. This included people like the Roman centurion who pressed through the Jewish crowd to beg Jesus to come heal his dying servant. Jesus commended his passionate faith. And people like the Samaritan woman (a heathen to the Jews) who persisted in spite of ethnic and religious prejudice to seek healing for her daughter. Jesus commended her desire. And people like the hemorrhaging woman (considered to be a sinner under God's judgment because of her health problems) who followed Jesus in the teeming crowd, persisting until she succeeded in reaching out and touching his garment. Jesus commended her persistent faith.

Over and over again, Jesus commended people not only for their deep, passionate hunger, but also for their tenacity in doing something about it. Hunger reveals something about a person. It shows the depth of a person's heart and soul. It shows what a person values. Hunger uncovers priorities. A person is willing to go after what they truly value deep down inside and believe to be of utmost importance.

Bart Starr, former quarterback of the world champion Green Bay Packers football team, says of one of the most passionate men ever associated with professional football, the legendary coach Vince Lombardi, "I wasn't mentally tough before I met Coach Lombardi. I hadn't reached the point where I refused to accept second best. To win, you have to have a certain amount of mental toughness. Coach Lombardi gave me that. He taught me that you must have a flaming desire to win. It's got to dominate all your waking hours. It can't ever wane. It's got to glow in you all the time."

He's talking about passion, hunger, appetite, thirst. Not just for a part of something, but for the whole thing. In fact, the wording Jesus used in the text above to describe this passion literally means "being hungry for the whole loaf, being thirsty for the whole pitcher." In other words, it means refusing to be satisfied with only a cupcake or a cupful. It's a consuming passion for wholeness. And the paradigm of wholeness is given a very specific word.

Notice that Jesus isn't simply commending appetite in general. "Happy are those who hunger and thirst for **righteousness**, for they shall be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6) This is the pivotal point around which the whole saying revolves. As inspiring as it is to see people's consuming passion for a gold medal or a winning game or academic achievements, these are not the objects of passion and hunger that produce a sense of blessing, durable meaning and lasting fulfillment.

It's hard to forget the image of the Canadian snowboarder a decade ago who won a gold

medal. Standing in front of the media, when they asked to see his gold medal, he reached back and pulled it out of the back pocket of his pants, all crumpled up. He was no longer proudly displaying it around his neck. It was stuffed into his back pocket. The thrill was over. Even gold medals fade. That's a profound human reality.

So Jesus commends a hunger for something different, something that has significance in the whole scheme of life a hunger that when filled with the right thing has lasting quality.

Second, Jesus blesses appetite for righteousness.

Righteousness is a word that is used throughout scripture to convey a specific kind of wholeness as it relates to God's dream for the world. It literally means "right doing" which is applied to the context of justice; doing what is right and just on behalf of those in need, being a voice for the voiceless, a help for the helpless, a power for the powerless, a hope for the hopeless. It's a very active word—a verb, really—where a person of justice not only values and respects all of life but works passionately and tirelessly to bring wholeness and meaningful life to those who need it most. Biblical righteousness is always described as an outgrowth of God's righteousness. It conveys a human passion and hunger to work on behalf of God to set things right in the most just and merciful way possible, whether it's for people or the environment and natural world.

It is the pursuit of this kind of righteousness, it is the passion and hunger for this kind of life, that Jesus says brings the highest and deepest satisfaction and fulfillment. Because, as scripture emphasizes over and over again, when we encounter those areas of life of greatest need and suffering and injustice, we are encountering God. No wonder we experience such deep and meaningful fulfillment when we hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Mother Theresa often said that when she held that tiny dying child on the streets of Calcutta, she knew she was holding God. And those acts of mercy and righteousness brought her greatest joy and most profound spiritual satisfaction beyond anything else she did in her life.

It's a fundamental spiritual principle: when we live to serve and love the broken places in life, our own brokenness becomes more healed and we find greater wholeness ourselves. When we live and hunger for what God lives and hungers for, we are satisfied.

David Letterman once interviewed Eric Bergoust, the American Olympic gold medalist in the freestyle aerial ski competition some years ago. Dave asked Eric how many jumps he had to do in the finals. "Two," Eric replied, "So they have to be good, perfect if you're going to get the medal."

"Well, what I want to know," Dave said as the audience began to snicker, "is how in the world you can get back up on your skis and go flying down the hill and then shoot straight up into the sky doing all sorts of twists and turns ... after you've had a major crash. I mean, you had a spectacular crash-landing earlier in the week."

Eric smiled and the audience laughed out loud as a video clip was shown of Eric's disas-

trous run. After twisting and turning in midair, he ended up landing right on his face; as Eric pointed out after the clip, right on his Adam's apple. It was a spectacular flop, looked terribly painful!

"How do you get back up and do it again?" Dave asked.

"Well, in all my years of ski jumping, I've had thousands of face-plants in the snow. You get to knowing how it feels after awhile. I guess you kind of get used to it. So it doesn't scare you. And you're willing to get back up and try again for that perfect jump. You get back up and do it again if you want to win!"

That's passion. Hunger. It's what a person is willing to do if they're really hungry for something. You feel the hunger. You allow it to move and motivate you to action. And you do something about it. You direct that hunger to where it counts the most.

Imagine what could happen in this broken and hurting world if people invested the same hunger and passion and tenacity toward righteousness and justice they put toward winning a medal or a game or a promotion or a courtship or an addiction. Imagine the kind of wholeness people would enjoy within themselves as well as within the world.

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant's Notes



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Additional Resources

MacDonald, Gordon (1986). *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*. Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books.

Lindbergh, Anne M. (2003). *Gift from the Sea*. New York: Random House.

Miller, Donald (2003). *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. (2002). *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. Chestnut Ridge, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. (1975). *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. New York: Doubleday.

Pippert, Rebecca Manley (2001). *Hope Has Its Reasons: The Search to Satisfy Our Deepest Longings*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree or disagree that all humans have deep heart hungers? Why or why not?
2. Do you think it is possible that deep hungers become blocked by other, more immediate but shallow hungers, so that what a person thinks he or she longs for is not the real need? Why and how?
3. If you wish, share a deep hunger you feel, and some of the obstacles you face to satisfying this hunger.
4. How does working to heal the brokenness around us help to heal our own?
5. Is it possible to drown our own realization of our need in throwing ourselves into that of others? What are some safeguards against this self-deception?
6. How can we help each other see our own souls more truly? Be specific.

Group Activities

Purpose: To take a closer look at the righteousness-equals-wholeness paradigm.

Preparation: You will need enough tables for as many small teams of four to six as you need for your group. Each table should have a supply of large paper or poster board, markers, pens, magazines, scissors, and glue.

Assignment: Divide the group as equally as possible among the tables. Say: “If righteousness means wholeness, then by definition it would include physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. First, design a diagram at your table which represents this kind of wholeness. You have ten minutes.”

After the ten minutes are up, say: “Now each one may take a piece of paper or poster and create a personal representation of one kind of brokenness you feel in your life and some ways you can begin to heal that brokenness. You may work alone or help each other as much as you like. You have ten minutes.”

Debrief: Have each team share their diagram of wholeness, and discuss why it is that we have narrow definitions of righteousness, like keeping certain rules. Allow time for some who wish, to share their personal representations and plans, too.

Time: Allow three to five minutes for the group to get into teams at the tables. Then, allow 10 minutes for the first diagram, 10 minutes for the personal work, and at least 15 to 20 minutes for sharing with the entire group. More time will be necessary if you have an overall group larger than about 30 people.

Handout 1

What are the hungers of my life and what am I doing about them?

“What most strikes me, being back in the United States, is the full force of restlessness, the loneliness, and the tension that holds so many people. The conversations I had today were about spiritual survival. So many of my friends feel overwhelmed by the many demands made on them; few feel the inner peace and joy they so much desire ... There seems to be a mountain of obstacles preventing people from being where their hearts want to be. It is so painful to watch and experience. The astonishing thing is that the battle for survival has become so ‘normal’ that few people really believe that it can be different.” (Henri J.M. Nouwen)

1. Two Universal Truths

A. _____

B. _____

“The problem is not merely one of woman and career, woman and the home, woman and independence. It is more basically: how to remain whole in the midst of the distractions of life; how to remain balanced, no matter what centrifugal forces tend to pull one off center; how to remain strong, no matter what shocks come in at the periphery and tend to crack the hub of the wheel.” (Anne Morrow Lindbergh)

2. Heart Hungers

What do I really hunger for?

What are my obstacles?

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3. Two Universal Principles

“Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”
(Jesus, Matthew 5:6)

A. Jesus commends _____

“I wasn’t mentally tough before I met Coach Lombardi. I hadn’t reached the point where I refused to accept second best. To win, you have to have a certain amount of mental toughness. Coach Lombardi gave me that. He taught me that you must have a flaming desire to win. It’s got to dominate all your waking hours. It can’t ever wane. It’s got to glow in you all the time.” (Bart Starr)

B. Jesus blesses appetite for _____

What does righteousness mean?

It's a fundamental spiritual principle: when we live to serve and love the broken places in life, our own brokenness becomes more healed and we find greater wholeness ourselves. When we live and hunger for what God lives and hungers for, we are satisfied.

What three specific things will I do to seek greater wholeness in my life and in the world around me?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.