

**Spiritual Hunger | 1 Peter 2:1-3**  
**The Rev. Dr. Matt Lee | The Falls Church Anglican**  
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**Discussion Questions on page 17**

**Intro:**

- Back in my seminary days at Gordon-Conwell near Boston, there was a group of us who used to hang out together, pray together, and do ministry together. But one of our favorite things to do together was to travel into the city to find great hole-in-the wall places to eat.
- We were “foodies” before “foodies” were a thing.
- And I remember one night, after we had studied, we were all longing for the same type of cuisine: All of us were craving good Korean food because the Korean food scene wasn’t that great in Boston at the time.
- And someone had the brilliant idea of doing a **“quick”** road trip to Flushing, New York where we knew there was great Korean food.
- Now mind you, this was in the middle of the week, while classes were in session, AND it was about a 4-hour one way drive!
- But the more we talked about it, our craving became so intense that we did a crazy thing. We all hopped into a car and just started driving. We were on a mission and were willing to sacrifice our time, money, and sleep to fill that craving. Thankfully, we were all single at the time, so we could get away with it.
- But we eventually got to New York late night, had an amazing Korean meal, then went over to a friend’s place, took a nap, then had another great meal, and then drove back another 4 hours.
- It was a pretty crazy, but fun night. All this because of an intense craving for a certain food.
- Now, why do I share this?

- Well, that **type** of intense craving and hunger that led me and my friends to sacrifice our time, money, and energy and do something so crazy is the **type** of intense craving, longing, and passion that God calls His followers to have, except not for physical or material things, but for “spiritual” things.
- In the passage which was just read, God through Peter tells us:
  - “***2 Like newborn infants, long for (or ‘crave’) the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation***”
- In other words, just like newborn babies intensely and desperately need and crave physical milk because without it they would not survive, so WE are to long for, crave, and desperately hunger for “spiritual” milk.
- But the question is, and the question for us this morning is what exactly IS this “pure spiritual milk” that we are to crave as followers of Jesus?
- And why is it so important that we have a craving? And just as important, how do we actually cultivate this craving, especially if we feel like we are lacking in it?
- Well, these are the questions I want to explore with us through our passage this morning.
- And for those of you who are note-takers we’ll look at three things: the **meaning**, the **importance**, and the **means** of spiritual hunger.
- Ok... so, let’s begin with the first question: What exactly IS this “pure spiritual milk” that we are to intensely hunger for?

### 1. What does it mean? (The Command)

- Well, again, Peter uses a very simple metaphor of infants who desperately need and long for, or “crave,” their mother’s milk in order to survive.
- And here, Peter is connecting this command to the “new birth” that he talks about in **Chapter 1 vs. 3.**
- He’s reminding us of the truth that when we become followers of Jesus, we are “born again” and experience a “new life” in Christ.

- And part of this new life is that like newborn babies, we desperately NEED what Peter calls “the pure spiritual milk.”
- And it’s important to note that this is a “command”, an imperative – so not optional for Christians.
- As well, what Peter does in this chapter is juxtapose this “craving” for spiritual milk with the “desires” for sinful fleshly things.
- As he says in **Chapter 2 vs. 11**: “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions (or longings) of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*”
- In other words, as strong as our desire is for worldly things, our desire for spiritual things should be much stronger.
- Ok, so now to the point of “pure spiritual milk.” *What in the world does this mean? Well, a few things...*

**a. God’s Word:**

- First, it’s a reference to God’s Word.
- Because right before this passage, Peter says: “*you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding **Word of God**... The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the **Word of the Lord** remains forever.” (1 Peter 1:23-26).*
- So, to intensely crave “pure spiritual milk” is to intensely desire to consume the Word of God, i.e. The Bible.
- It’s to desperately desire to read, listen to, think about, and obey the God’s Word. It is to desire to meditate on it “day and night” as **Joshua 1:8** and **Psalm 1:2** talks about.

- However, “pure spiritual milk” goes beyond just longing for God’s Word. Peter here isn’t telling us to **just** to read the Bible more, or hear more sermons, though this is important.

**b. “All” spiritual nourishment:**

- Because as some theologians pointed out, including Calvin, the pure spiritual milk can be **ANY and ALL spiritual nourishment** that Christians need after the new birth.

*Now that he [Peter] has taught that the faithful are regenerated by the Word of God, he exhorts them to lead a life corresponding with their birth. . . . Infancy is here set by Peter over against the old age of the flesh, which leads to corruption; and by the word milk, **he includes all the feelings of spiritual life**. . . . He then compares the vices, in which the old age of the flesh indulges, to strong food, and milk is called that way of living which is suitable to innocent nature and simple infancy. (Calvin 1963:256)*

- This includes not just God’s Word, but also prayer, the sacraments, serving, and being involved with the community of faith.

**c. Jesus Himself:**

- But most importantly, the “pure spiritual milk” is ultimately Christ Himself.
- As one commentator noted, “there can be no (spiritual) food beyond Christ.” (Best 1971:97).
- As Jesus Himself reminds us in **John 6 & 7**, “I” am the Bread of Life” and the Living Water. And anyone who is spiritually thirsty and hungry can to come to Him and be satisfied.
- In other words, the pure spiritual milk is ultimately the presence and the person of Jesus Himself.
- HE is our ultimate spiritual nourishment. HE is the one that feeds us as we spend time WITH Him, listening to Him through His Word, talking to Him in prayer, serving and loving Him through our gifts, and fellowshiping with other believers.
- And we are reminded of this truth EVERY time we partake of communion.

- **So to summarize**, to “crave” for or “long for” pure spiritual milk is to intensely desire Christ and the things of Christ that nourishes our spiritual life.
- **Connect:**
- For us this morning, as we think about this. I think the question that this command elicits is this: How much do we **actually** long for and desire Christ and the things of Christ?
- To put it another way: What IS the “level” of our spiritual hunger for Jesus?
- God longs for us to have the same type of desperation that the Psalmist declares in **Psalm 42** where he says:

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*
- Or in **Ps. 63**, where he says: “O God, you are MY God, **EARNESTLY** I seek you; my soul **THIRSTS** for you; my body **LONGS** for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”
- And **Psalm 73**, where he says: “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has **NOTHING** I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”
- And we examples of this spiritual hunger all throughout Scripture.
- One prime example of this was The Apostle Paul, who in **Philippians 3**, revealed the depth of his spiritual hunger for Jesus when he declared:

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (**Phil. 3:7-12, NIV**)

- And Paul was SO hungry for more of Jesus that he could genuinely proclaim in **Philippians 1:21** that “to live IS Christ,” that is, living IS all about Jesus and knowing Him and serving Him, and to “die is gain” because death brings him closer to Jesus.
- But THIS is the type of longing that God desires ALL us to have as followers of Jesus.

## 2. **Why is it important? (The Purpose)**

- So, that’s the “meaning”. But why is this so important?
- Well, the end of **verse 2** answers this for us: “<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, **that by it you may grow up into salvation.**”
- And here, to “grow up into salvation” is referring to the process of sanctification, that is, the process of becoming more like Jesus.
- In other words, the reason why spiritual hunger is so critical is because ***it’s the key to spiritual growth.***
- That is, the only way we go from being “spiritual infants” to “spiritual adults” is by constantly consuming “pure spiritual milk.”
- Specifically, the more we long for Christ and the things of Christ; and the more we spend time with Him in His Word and prayer, and engage in worship, fellowship, and service with other believers, the more we will grow in Christ-likeness, which is the ultimate goal of the Christian life.
- So, it’s pretty straightforward: ***If we want to become more like Jesus; if we want to grow spiritually and become spiritual adults, it begins with having a longing for, a hunger for, the pure spiritual milk of Christ and the things of Christ.***

### 3. How do we cultivate it? (The Means)

- But I think that most of realize this.
  
- And I think that most of us would love to have that intense passion and desire for Jesus like the Apostle Paul.
  
- *But the question is, and the hard part is the “how” do we have this type of craving and passion, especially if we feel like we’re lacking it?*
  
- Well, this is where I want to focus the rest of our time this morning because I want to get pretty practical here.
  
- And there are three practical applications for us to consider, and it’s laid out for us in this passage.
  
- a. Repent of the sinful spiritual hunger killers:
  - First, if we want to grow in our spiritual hunger ***we need to be aware of and repent of the sins that kill our spiritual appetite.***
  
  - Peter puts it this way in **vs. 1**: *“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”*
  
  - A better translation of these verses is: **“Crave true, pure milk as newborn babies *so that* by it you might grow up into your salvation **by putting off** all malice, and all deceit. and hypocrisies, and jealousies, and all slanders...”**
  
  - **Explanation:**
    - Here the word to “put away” is more literally “take off” which refers to the removal of clothing.
  
    - So, just like taking off a jacket, we are to “take off” and “remove” from our lives those things that kill our spiritual appetite.

- And here, Peter reveals that the main killers of spiritual hunger are ALL the sins of “malice,” which are evil thoughts, intentions, or actions.
- ALL “Deceit,” which are lies and half-truths; “Hypocrisy”, which refers to putting on a show, hiding real intentions, or covering motives; “Envy” which can include spite, jealous feelings, ambitious actions that harm others; and “Slander” which includes gossip, unrestrained criticism, cynical comments, and exaggerated sarcasm.
- In other words, EVERY type of sin can kill our spiritual appetite.
- **Connect:**
- And I think we’re pretty aware of how this works.
- We know that when we give into sin, whatever it may be, the desire for spiritual things is pretty much gone.
- Because when we realize we’ve sinned, we can get discouraged, feel ashamed and guilty, and the tendency is to drift away from God.
- But when we “put off” and “remove” that clothing of sin through the practice of ***confession and repentance***, God not only forgives us, but restores our spiritual appetite for Him.
- That’s why confession and repentance of our sins is such an integral part of the Lord’s Prayer and why we have a dedicated time on Sunday mornings to confessing our sins.
- Thus, the very first step in cultivating and growing in our spiritual hunger is to identify and repent of those sins that kill our spiritual appetite. And to practice this daily in our time of prayer.
- And the more we do this, the more our spiritual cravings will start to grow.
- That’s step 1.
- b. **Prioritize the “Ultimate” things over the “Good”:**

- Now, the second “means” by which we can cultivate our spiritual hunger is a bit more subtle.
- It’s not explicit in this passage, but one of the big spiritual appetite killers are not necessarily the BAD things like sin, but it’s actually the NEUTRAL or even GOOD things that take the place of the ULTIMATE things.
- And this probably hits a bit closer to home, especially for me.
- Because it’s when “neutral” or “good” things like Hobbies, sports, even family take precedence and priority over the “ultimate” things, which is Christ and the things of Christ, that our spiritual appetite can get reduced.
- How often when we get so busy with the “neutral” or even “good” stuff of life, kids sports, our work, working out, entertainment, or spending time with friends, that we put spending time with Christ and the things of Christ on the back burner, and say, “I’ll eventually get to it.”
- But when we do that, without knowing it, it slowly but surely erodes our appetite for God.

**Illustrate:**

- I remember seeing this firsthand during COVID.
- As people were disengaged from worship and community because we had to be online.
- It became so easy to not tune into worship, and say, “well, I’ll get to it” or “watch” it sometime later when I have more free time, and then get busy with other things – good things.
- But when the time came to return to in-person worship, many of these families who were very involved prior to covid had drifted away spiritually and were nowhere to be found: NOT because they were doing something “bad,” but because a lot of “good” things had taken precedence over the “ultimate” things; sort of like the frog in the kettle illustration. Slowly and unknowingly, their spiritual appetite was reduced.

- John Piper, in His book, ***A Hunger for God*** puts it this way:

*“The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but **endless nibbling at the table of the world**. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night.*

*For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of his love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (ref. Lk. 14:18-20).*

*The greatest adversary of love to God is NOT his enemies but his gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable...*

*(And later he writes)... If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is NOT because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great..." (Piper, *A Hunger for God*, pg. 23)*

- *For us this morning*, the challenge and the question that I think we really need to ask ourselves is: *Have we been nibbling so much at the table of the world, and have stuffed ourselves with “small” things, even “good” things, that there is no longer room for the great, the “ultimate”, which is Christ and the things of Christ?*
- Now, just to be clear: I am NOT saying that we STOP having fun, spend time doing good and enjoyable things, or stop loving and spending time with family and friends. These are GOOD things and we OUGHT to do these things.
- But it's about priority: About putting the ULTIMATE things above the GOOD things.
- Just something for us to think about this week.
- c. ***Engage in those things that increase spiritual hunger:***
  - Well, the third practical “means” by which we can cultivate spiritual hunger is revealed in **vs. 3**, where Peter says: *“<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— <sup>3</sup> **if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.***

- *A better way to translate this is: “Crave true, pure milk as newborn babies... **since you have tasted that the Lord is good.**”*
- That is, it’s not just about “repenting of” or “reprioritizing” those things that kill our spiritual appetite, but it is feasting on the things that INCREASE our spiritual appetite.
- *Specifically, we are to “taste that the Lord is good,” which is a reference to **Psalm 34 vs. 8.***
- *But how do we “taste that the Lord is good”? What’s Peter referring to here?*

### **1. Experiencing God’s Faithfulness in Suffering:**

- Well, one way is ***by experiencing and seeing God’s faithfulness in the midst of our suffering.***
- Now, this is a whole ‘nother sermon and needs a lot more attention, but one of the main themes of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is the experience and endurance through suffering as followers of Jesus.
- And there is a LOT to unpack regarding this theme, but for our time this morning, I just want to mention how one of the great motivators in spiritual hunger, as many of us know, is the experience of suffering and pain.
- Difficulty often DRIVES us to Jesus. Because it’s there that we can’t HELP but “hunger” for God and cry out to Him.
- And it’s when we see and experience God’s ***faithfulness*** IN the midst of our suffering that we “taste” of His goodness and THAT creates in us a greater desire to know, love, and serve Him.
- Peter in **Chapter 1** says this:

*<sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even*

*though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,<sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1:6-9)*

- Now, a word of common-sense caution here: suffering isn't something that we "seek out" SO THAT we can taste the goodness of God.
- Because we all know that we'll get enough of it without trying very hard.
- But understanding that one of the purposes of suffering is to drive us to Jesus SO THAT when God shows His faithfulness, we will taste and see that He is good, may help us see our suffering in a different light; and may even give us the hope to endure.
- And when we DO experience God's faithfulness in and through our suffering, it will create in us a greater desire and hunger to know, love, and serve Him.

## **2. Experiencing God's grace through the Gospel:**

- But another way that we "taste and see that God is good," and this is something that we can actively do on our part is by experiencing the truth of God's grace through the Gospel.
- That is, the more we understand and experience God's grace shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the more we "taste" of His goodness and the more we will "crave" the pure spiritual milk.
- And if you look throughout **1<sup>st</sup> Peter**, this is another major theme of the letter.
- For instance, right before **Chapter 2**, Peter reminds us:

*<sup>18</sup> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. <sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. <sup>21</sup> Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. (1:18-21)*

- And I mentioned this before, but the more we understand and experience afresh and anew the truth of God's grace shown in Jesus, the MORE it will drive us to Himself.
- Because the more we think about WHO we were before Jesus, how desperate we were, without purpose, without eternal life, but then through faith in Him, that we were forgiven, accepted, saved, it's like "tasting" how good God is.
- And as a result, we will have a greater spiritual hunger and craving for Christ and the things of Christ.
- And it's pretty apparent that ***the Christians who tend to REALLY hunger after God are those who realize how much they are LOVED and FORGIVEN by God.***
- **Examples:**
- As I mentioned before, the Apostle Paul was a prime example of a person who "craved" the pure spiritual milk of Christ.
- But the reason for this was because he realized how MUCH he had been forgiven and loved by God.
- He was constantly overwhelmed by the fact that God not only forgave Him for being a persecutor of Christians, who dragged men and women to jail for following Jesus, but had given Him a new purpose and calling to share the Gospel with the rest of the world.
- He was overwhelmed by how much God loved Him even though He was "least of the apostles" as he states in **1 Corinthians 15:9**, and the "foremost of sinners" in **1 Timothy 1:15**.
- And it was this awareness of and experience of God's grace that "drove" Him to run hard after God.
- As he shares in **1 Corinthians 15:**

<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (1 Cor. 15:9-10)

- THIS was the key to His spiritual hunger.
- Even Peter, the author of this letter, was an example of how the grace of God created a deep hunger for God.
- As many of us know, it was Peter who had a major failure right before Jesus was crucified.
- We remember him denying Jesus three times and feeling so ashamed and guilty about it.
- But then in **John 21**, we see Jesus not only forgiving Peter, but also showing Him immense grace as He restores Him and calls Him to “feed His sheep.”
- And I know that this is just tradition, but it was said that Peter was so filled with gratitude, love, and passion for Jesus that when he himself was crucified for his faith, he wanted to be hung upside down because he didn’t feel worthy to be crucified like Jesus.
- And over and over again, what we see in the lives of Jesus’ followers is the truth that **“The level of their spiritual hunger depended on the level of their understanding and experience of God’s grace.”**
- As Jesus puts it in **Luke 7:47**, it’s those who have been forgiven much who will love much.
- **Apply:**
  - One practical application of this is something that I shared in a previous sermon: **“Before starting our day, “preach the Gospel” to yourself.**
  - Take a moment to remember who you were BEFORE you were saved by Jesus, then remember what Jesus did for you and how much you are forgiven, loved, and accepted by Him.

- And take a moment to thank Him for His grace and forgiveness and see how that changes your spiritual appetite for Christ.
- “Taste” and SEE that God is good BEFORE you begin the day; more important than “tasting” that crucial cup of coffee.
- As I mentioned before: Don’t start the day before you know that you know that you are loved by God.
- Another simple application is: ***to regularly share your testimony to others about your salvation.***
- Whether it is with other believers or with people who you are reaching out to, remembering and sharing your salvation story causes you to remember His goodness and grace in your life.
- And it’s amazing how doing that increases your spiritual appetite for Jesus.

**Illustrate:**

- I experienced this the first month I began working at this church.
- I was asked to share my testimony with some of the staff and Vestry members. And I hadn’t done that for awhile.
- But as I spent time remembering how Jesus saved me right before my senior year in High School, and recalled how God had sowed the seeds of the Gospel ALL throughout my life.
- I was so overwhelmed afresh and anew by His grace.
- I remembered how I was so lost, so empty, without purpose before meeting Jesus. And how I felt such a deep hole in my heart.
- But then during a retreat, when I was confronted with my sins but then confronted with God’s love and grace despite my sins, that my life was completely changed.

- Because for the first time, I experienced and felt a love, peace, joy, and purpose that I never had before.
- And I was so overwhelmed by how much God loved me and forgave me.
- And how right after that retreat, all I wanted was to help others experience this same love.
- And as I remembered that experience of salvation and shared my testimony again, my spiritual craving for Christ was stirred once again. Because I had “tasted” the goodness of God once again.
- *And so it is for all of us here:* When we take the time to remember God’s goodness and grace shown in Jesus; when we take the time to remember His love shown on the cross despite our sins; and especially when we are able to share that testimony to others, we will “taste” and see that God is good.
- And will begin to have a greater “craving” for the pure spiritual milk of Christ and the things of Christ.
- So, that’s the MAIN application for us this morning because “spiritual hunger” and “craving” isn’t something that we can “manufacture” on our own.
- But it comes and grows the more we understand and experience HIS grace shown through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- So rehearse and preach the Gospel to yourself this week; and if you are able, share your testimony not just for other people’s sake, but for your sake.
- Let’s pray (**PRAY**).

Small Group Questions:

1. What is the “level” of spiritual hunger in our lives? (On Scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest) – Explain
2. What are those things (good or bad) that tend to curb our spiritual appetite?
3. In what ways can we practically ‘cultivate’ spiritual hunger this coming week?