



HELP *for the* HUNGRY SOUL

EIGHT ENCOURAGEMENTS

TO GROW YOUR

APPETITE FOR GOD'S WORD



KRISTEN WETHERELL

“I pray almost every day that the Lord would create in me a greater hunger for his word and his ways. But for that to happen my appetites must be reoriented. In *Help for the Hungry Soul*, Kristen Wetherell reveals our deepest hunger pains as she points us to the only source of true satisfaction. So pick up this book, and you will taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Courtney Doctor, Director of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; Bible teacher; author, *From Garden to Glory* and *In View of God’s Mercies*

“*Help for the Hungry Soul* serves as an encouragement to all of us, regardless of the season we are in, that God himself delights in arousing, sustaining, and satisfying our spiritual hungers by giving us the gift of his word and his presence. These short, content-rich chapters will encourage you afresh that God delights in filling the hungry with good things (Ps. 107).”

Amy Gannett, Founder and Creator, Tiny Theologians; Writer and Bible Teacher, The Bible Study Schoolhouse; author, *Fix Your Eyes*

“In *Help for the Hungry Soul*, Kristen Wetherell has found a way to champion the habit of Bible reading without the frequent side effects of guilt or legalism. She invites us to dig deeper into God’s precious word while also freeing us from the obligatory ‘quiet time.’ This book is a hope-filled encouragement to those who long for more of God and yet constantly feel unable to find the time or energy to follow through.”

Kelly Needham, wife; mom of five; author, *Friendish* and *Purposefooled*

“This book is more than a good read. It’s a life-changer that will increase your hunger for God’s word. Honest, personal stories from real people will enable you to identify with their struggles to grow in his word. Kristen Wetherell’s insights increase my commitment to pray for each of my twenty-one grandchildren to fall in love with the word of God (Ps. 119:105).”

Susan Alexander Yates, speaker; blogger, SusanAlexanderYates.com; author, *Risky Faith* and *One Devotional*

“‘Gather a day’s portion.’ That’s a truth I love to rehearse in the morning as I open up the Bible and ask for God’s help. It’s a reminder I don’t need to do too much in morning devotions—and I need to make sure to do the main thing. And it’s a feeding image—a picture of hunger and eating and satisfaction. Of the many good ways we can approach reading, studying, and meditating on God’s word, the feeding image is as important—and practically helpful—as any. That’s why I love the vision of this book: to grow your soul’s appetite for God through his word. Kristen Wetherell is both a skilled and reliable guide. So take up and read yourself into greater hunger and feed afresh on the only one who truly satisfies.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, *desiringGod.org*; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

“Reading *Help for the Hungry Soul* will be a ministry of grace to you. Not only will this book stir your appetite for the deep things of God, but it will also give you a satisfying and nourishing meal along the way.”

Jared C. Wilson, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Author in Residence, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *The Imperfect Disciple* and *Love Me Anyway*

“At last! A book that is full of encouragement in an area where many Christians feel only defeat. *Help for the Hungry Soul* will stir your heart to feed on God’s word. It will entice you with the *why* and equip you with the *how*.”

Colin Smith, Senior Pastor, The Orchard, Arlington Heights, Illinois; Founder and Bible Teacher, Open the Bible

Help for the Hungry Soul

Help for the Hungry Soul

*Eight Encouragements to Grow Your
Appetite for God's Word*

Kristen Wetherell

Foreword by Jani Ortlund

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*To all the saints in Jesus Christ who are at The Orchard,
who trust, proclaim, preach, teach, study, read,
love, and hunger for God's word:
may you grow deeper roots, richer life, and more fruit.
I thank my God in all my remembrance of you (Phil. 1:3).*

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Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

PSALM 81:10

Foreword

APPARENTLY, I WAS A VERY FUSSY EATER as a baby. My pediatrician insinuated that my mother was not trying hard enough to get her eighteen-month-old daughter to eat, and Mom was distressed. She determined to get me to eat more. “Come on, darling. Open up! This tastes yummy. Try it—you’ll like it!” But have you ever tried to get a fussy toddler to open her mouth and take in what you know she needs? It is pretty much impossible to pry open little jaws that are firmly clenched shut in a picky protest. And even if you could force in a little bite of nourishment, how would you get her to swallow it?

Fortunately, I’m not such a fussy eater these days. I love all kinds of foods and, surprisingly enough, find myself willing to try new ones. In fact, I’ve even come to enjoy the venison and elk my dear Ray fills our freezer with each fall. It’s a good thing I have a healthy appetite!

In *Help for the Hungry Soul*, Kristen Wetherell shows us how God uses our natural physical hunger to teach us about our supernatural spiritual hunger for him. Just as we can starve our bodies, we can also starve our souls. And if we refuse his

soul food, he won't force-feed us. That's really scary. After all, whose spiritual appetite stays consistently strong week after week, month after month? We need help.

Kristen helps us see that God himself arouses, sustains, and satisfies our deepest hunger. I love her short, clear chapters with engaging stories of hungry souls feasting at the table of the King. She shows us how eager our heavenly Father is to satisfy our soul hunger. "The hungry soul he fills with good things" (Ps. 107:9). My affection for God's word has been renewed as Kristen helped me fall more deeply in love with Christ himself, the living Word.

That's why I'm grateful for this book. Kristen understands the wonder it is to go from hindered to hopeful, from dulled to delighted, from picky to passionate. She calls this wonder the *miracle* of loving God's word. And she guides us in *how* to bring our fussy hearts to our kind King for him to work that miracle in us.

Help for the Hungry Soul is an enticing invitation to every one of us to slow down and feast on the bread of life (John 6:48). I hope you'll accept this invitation to "open your mouth wide" and let him fill it. You'll be glad you did. Now—let the feasting begin!

Jani Ortlund

RENEWAL MINISTRIES

*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.*

ISAIAH 55:2

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life;
whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and
whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*

JOHN 6:35

*Nothing can make us hungry for Scripture
more than Scripture itself.*

DONALD S. WHITNEY
Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health

Introduction

A Hunger to Hear from God

I WROTE THIS BOOK because I am hungry, and I know I'm not alone.

Look around you. Beneath the digital cries for attention is hunger. Lurking under the nagging sense of not-enoughness is hunger. Lingering beside the longing for more is hunger.

Hunger is everywhere. It is within you and within me.

You know it. It's that insatiable craving for more that not even the biggest promotion or highest honor can curb. It's that unsettled feeling that all is not right with the world, even after the best and brightest day, and that there is more to be enjoyed and more rest to be found. It's the grumble of discontentment that keeps us hopping from one thing to the next as we think, *There must be more to life than this.*

And yet, we settle for less.

I wonder how many of us know what it is to feed these hunger pangs, the crying-out of our souls, with food that doesn't ultimately satisfy or nourish us. That's why I wrote this book—a book about food.

Well, sort of.

Help for the Hungry Soul is ultimately a book about your soul, and the food your soul needs to live.

Born to Hunger

I was born hungry. So were you.

Think about it: What is the purpose of an appetite? If we had no appetite, we wouldn't know the loveliness of eating food. Appetite is beneficial; it leads us to seek what we need to survive and thrive. It is our body's cry for help, a God-given alarm system for our flourishing.

A person with a skewed appetite (or no appetite) is a person whose body is unwell.

The same goes for your soul. Have you considered that it was also created with an appetite? You were made to desire and hunger for your eternal Creator (Gen. 1:26–27; Eccles. 3:11; Isa. 55:6–7; Mic. 6:8; John 15:5). Man and woman (you and I) were fashioned to reflect the God whose existence never ends, as our Creator breathed the breath of life—*God's* very life—into Adam's nostrils and planted the tree of life beside him in the garden (Gen. 2:7–9). It has always been God's delight to share his life with us.

Our souls were made to live forever, feasting always on his goodness.

And so, in a moment of great opportunity, what did the serpent use to tempt Eve to disobedience? He used appetite, *hunger*.

God had given Adam and Eve the freedom to eat from every tree in the garden except one (Gen. 2:9, 16–17). *Just*

one. Every other tree would sustain them, but the evil tree would destroy them, body and soul. The enemy used a familiar instinct—a good, God-given instinct—to deceive and kill. Our first parents ate, and they would never be the same. Neither would we.

The Word at the beginning who made them hungry for him, who made them to live with him forever, had spoken clear words for Adam and Eve to live by. But they chose different words and listened to a different voice (Gen. 3:11, 17). They fed themselves with lies, and they died.

Body and soul, they perished in their sin.

Now, thanks to Adam and Eve, our appetites have gone terribly wrong. We are still as hungry as ever—but for the wrong things. And so, from the garden throughout the generations we have dealt with our soul-hunger in manifold, creative, yet unsuccessful ways. How God has dealt with it, however, has been quite simple and straightforward.

He has spoken. “Man shall not live by bread alone, / but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4; see Deut. 8:3).

Many People Are “Hungry”

This is a book about God’s word, but it’s not a *how-to*—there are lots of excellent books about Bible reading and study methods. Here, I write about the *why*, the heart behind opening our Bibles. I want to help the person who feels stuck and defeated.

So, yes, this is a book about food, but of a different category. It is about the life-giving nourishment God has graciously provided for his hungry, starving people throughout

the ages: his word. I am praying that *Help for the Hungry Soul* will freshly entice you to feast on true food, the living words of the living God who alone can sustain and satisfy your eternal hunger with himself.

Now, you may be thinking, *That's great, Kristen. Bible reading might come easily to you, but it's hard for me. I know I'm supposed to, but I have little desire for it. I'll never be where other Christians are, where I should be.*

In truth, my heart is in a similar position as yours. Just when I thought I would be writing this book from a place of relative strength, I was thrust into the reality of my weakness. I was reawakened to my need for grace. I was reminded that all of us are dependent on the Lord to make us more hungry for him.

If you think you're alone in not wanting to read your Bible, think differently. A recent article about American Bible reading habits says, "Relatively few Americans—including Christians—read the Bible often." Only one in six adults reads the Bible most days during the week.¹

This finding confirms what I've heard from many people over the last year. Through surveying various groups and talking to friends, church leaders, and pastors, by far the most common word used to describe people's appetites for God's word is *hungry*, yet this takes on different tones in different contexts. Some have said their hunger is a deep and ever-increasing desire for Scripture (praise God for that), while many others have used *hunger* to describe a languishing or longing of the soul.

1 See Joe Carter, "When We Don't Delight in Reading Scripture," *The Gospel Coalition*, May 15, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>.

People are hungry—but not hungry enough to engage.
 People are hungry—but not sure what to do about it.
 People are hungry—but for things other than God’s word.

Revival and Reorientation

How would you describe your current appetite for God’s word? Maybe it has been years since you’ve opened a Bible, or maybe you’ve never read it before. Perhaps you engage with Scripture consistently, but your heart feels flat to it, and you’ve grown discouraged. Maybe Bible reading has seemed like more of a “supposed to” than a “want to,” and you’re not convinced you could feel differently. Or maybe the desire is there, but you struggle to act on it.

It seems to me that the church needs a revival of hunger for the living words of the living God—a compelling answer to the question, *How can I love Scripture again?*—as well as a reorientation about what engaging with God’s word actually looks like for hungry people with full lives.

We need a stirring up and a settling down.

As we’ll see, the stirring up of the human heart isn’t a formula but a supernatural gift.² In other words, the right spiritual food doesn’t necessarily *equal* spiritual appetite. A person can engage with God’s words by reading or hearing them and remain hardened, as Jesus talks about in his parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–23).

But we also can’t expect our appetites to grow if we aren’t feeding on soul-food. There is a connection between consuming

2 More on this in chapter 2.

God's words and loving God's words. And yet, we also need his direct, divine intervention. *We need him.* As pastor and author John Piper says:

The act of reading, in order to be done as God intended, must be done in dependence on God's supernatural help. . . . If more people approached the Bible with a deep sense of helplessness, and hope-filled reliance on God's merciful assistance, there would be far more seeing and savoring and transformation than there is.³

The stirring up of our souls is something only God can do—and is anything too hard for him (Jer. 32:27)? As you read this book, my hope is that God will use it to this end, that he will whet your appetite for his word as we explore the questions *Why should I love Scripture?* and *How is it possible for me to desire it again?* I pray that by the end you will be refreshed and compelled to feast on his living words in a new way. I pray that, right this moment, you will open yourself up to this supernatural possibility, however apathetic or discouraged you may feel.

But we not only need a stirring up; we also need a settling down.

I don't mean "we need to settle" (far from it!). I mean *we need to rest* in the many amazing opportunities and contexts we have to consume God's word, rather than constantly feeling guilty about not having perfect daily devotions—what we have come to know as "quiet time."

3 John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 183–84.

Daily quiet time is not bad or wrong! It is, in fact, a very good habit. But we need a reorientation about what loving God's word actually looks like for hungry people with full lives; we need *biblical* reorientation, rather than trying to mimic historical or cultural ideals. Ultimately, we need to combat false guilt from narrow notions about what it means to feast on God's words and rest in God's kindness to give us ample opportunities to enjoy Scripture.

In other words, it's possible you're not failing in this area as much as you think you are. I believe we will be encouraged by what we discover.

A Hunger to Hear from God

The brief chapters that follow are eight encouragements for growing an appetite for God's word, the everlasting food your soul needs most. Some of these will take us back to the basics, reminding us of truths we may have forgotten or taken for granted. Others will give us a fresh perspective on what it looks like to engage practically with Scripture.

You can read the chapters in the order they are written, or jump around as you see fit (although they do build on one another). Each one ends with an application section with exercises and other prompts that I hope will be useful to you. Above all, I encourage you to have your Bible beside you as you read, to let this book drive you to *the* book.

Woven throughout, you'll also find short testimonies written by other believers, in various life stages and vocations, about how God has increased their appetite for his words. I hope these stories will encourage you to pursue a Bible-nourished life.

INTRODUCTION

So, what do you say? Will you receive God's invitation to listen diligently to him, eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food (Isa. 55:2)? Might I be so bold as to whet your appetite for God's soul-nourishing words of life? My challenge to you is to read to the end and see if his Spirit hasn't stirred in your heart, even to a small degree, a longing for more—a hunger to hear from him.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

PSALM 139:1

*Let us search our ways and find out how
matters stand between ourselves and God.*

J. C. RYLE
Practical Religion

*For he satisfies the longing soul,
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*

PSALM 107:9

Know Your Hungry Heart

I STOOD BEFORE a room full of women from a local church who had gathered for a weekend retreat. For the past three days, I had had the great joy of teaching them from God's word and connecting with them in conversation. These women loved the Lord and one another, and were clearly hungry to learn from Scripture together—so hungry that they had committed an entire weekend to this pursuit. I hadn't planned on surveying them for this book, but after the last session I asked them if they would be willing to answer a few questions for me.

Their insights have been invaluable (thank you, sisters!). One of the questions I asked—the one that seemed most important and revealing—was, *How would you describe your current appetite for God's word?*

By far, the most common answer was *hungry*.

Three Kinds of Biblical Hunger

My question for you right now is the same: How would you describe your current appetite for God's word?

My aim in this chapter is to help you know yourself better so you can discern how you might grow. I'm praying that God, by his Spirit, will help us understand our hungry hearts, what we are desiring most, and how those desires play out on a normal day as they relate to God's word. Think of this chapter as a kind of "heart check."

First, we will look at three kinds of biblical hunger and consider which one best applies to us. Then we will look at five common hindrances that can keep us from growing an appetite for Scripture. Ready? Let's begin.

Starving Hunger

First, there's the starving hunger of a heart that is always hungry but never satisfied. God says this is like trying to fill up a broken, holey jar with water:

For my people have committed two evils:
 they have forsaken me,
 the fountain of living waters,
 and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
 broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jer. 2:13)

This is every human being's natural condition, as we seek to feed our hunger with what can never satisfy us (Isa. 55:2). It is a useless and exhausting way to live.

On its own efforts, the human heart remains empty and starving. It will always be searching for satisfaction in the wrong places—unless God himself rescues us.

Perhaps this description feels too close to home. Perhaps you have found yourself desperate to be satisfied in your deepest heart, but nothing in this world has been able to do this for you. There is good news: *You were made for more. You were made for God, for fullest satisfaction in him.*

Your Creator is also the Redeemer of the starving heart. In every way that the world has come up empty to you, you can count on him being the fullness your soul most hungers for. Why not ask him, even right now? He will delight to answer your hungry call, filling you with his Spirit and changing what you love (Pss. 14:2; 145:18).

Seeking Hunger

Have you gone through seasons when God seems far away and you have little desire for him? You know the Lord is the only true fulfillment for the longing of your soul, but reading your Bible feels dull and dry. My hand is raised. I've lost count of the times I've experienced this and have now come to expect these seasons. They are part of the normal Christian experience.

Are you there right now? Know you are not alone. In fact, your desire to keep seeking God proves the genuineness of your hunger for him (1 Pet. 1:6–7). Only those who love the Lord want more of him when he feels distant (Pss. 27; 63). Only those who have tasted and seen his goodness know when that taste wanes (Ps. 34:8).

Why do we experience these seasons? We will look more carefully at five specific reasons below, but certain factors leave us feeling far from God and hungering for more of him, such

as physical and mental exhaustion, suffering, struggles with sin patterns, distraction, and God’s purposeful withdrawing so our hunger for him will grow.¹

Whatever your situation, hear God’s promise to you as you seek him: “I love those who love me, / and those who seek me diligently find me” (Prov. 8:17).

Satisfied Hunger

Finally, there is the holy hunger of the satisfied heart. Over the past several months, I have grown to love Psalm 119, which might be the best example of this kind of hunger. The psalm is a complex and honest heart cry of hunger to know and rejoice in God and his words—the kind of hunger that every believer in Jesus has the privilege of knowing, in some form and degree, because of his intervening, transforming grace.

Notice the complexity and realism in the psalmist’s words:

My soul clings to the dust;
 give me life according to your word!
 When I told of my ways, you answered me;
 teach me your statutes!
 Make me understand the way of your precepts,
 and I will meditate on your wondrous works. . . .
 I cling to your testimonies, O LORD;
 let me not be put to shame!

1 The Puritans called these “God’s desertions,” times when God withholds from us a perceived sense of his presence (although he never actually leaves us). See Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2021), 10.

I will run in the way of your commandments
when you enlarge my heart! (Ps. 119:25–27, 31–32)

The psalmist plays his song from heartstrings deeply rehearsed in God’s character, ways, and words, for he knows the Lord and wants more of him; and yet, at the same time, he plays a *realistic* song. He has learned to hunger for God all the more because life is hard and his heart is wayward—but God is entirely trustworthy.

Right there is the blessing of true Godward hunger: *the more of God we come to know, the more of God we want to know*. This doesn’t mean perfection, for all our yearnings in this life will be incomplete until we see Jesus; but it does mean we have endless potential to grow, as we seek more of God and receive the fullness of joy that only he can give (Ps. 16:11).

We long to be satisfied in him and in his precious words.

Five Common Hindrances to Bible Reading

At this point, you may want to turn to the final section of this chapter (“Knowing Your Hungry Heart”), where you’ll see a couple of exercises to help you process what kind of hunger you are currently experiencing. Feel free to fill out your responses now. When you’re ready, continue reading here.

What often keeps us from engaging with Scripture? See how many of these five hindrances apply to you.

1. Distraction

We are living in an age of unparalleled opportunities and unrelenting stimulation, when the influence of technology has

greatly affected our desire and ability to receive God's word. The digital hubbub has rewired our brains, making us obsessed with noise and newness, addicted to instant gratification, and unable to focus, all of which can make hearing and reading God's word—a practice that is helped by concentration, commitment, and quiet—difficult.

You know the scenario. You're thinking about a Bible passage or a recent sermon, only to find your thoughts wandering about that work project you have to finish or that recent debate you heard online (which causes you to check your phone again). Hello, distraction.

How have you seen technology's influence become dangerous to your walk with God? How have you seen the enemy use it to keep you from God and his life-giving word (Mark 4:15)? Distraction is one pervasive hindrance we'll want to be aware of as we seek to grow.

2. *Dullness*

Technological and cultural advances have lavished us with an abundance of Bible resources. These are gifts from God that can stir our hunger for him. But sometimes they have the opposite effect: we take them for granted and become bored with what feels overfamiliar.² As pastor and author J. C. Ryle says, "We hardly know the value of the air we breathe, and the sun which shines on us, because we have never known what it is to be without them."³ Dullness of heart can especially affect those who have become well-acquainted with the Bible, like

2 More on this in chapter 4.

3 J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2013), 98.

pastors, seminary students, and Bible teachers. I'm talking about myself here.

What might this look like? Perhaps it becomes easy for us to approach our Bibles as a mere duty rather than as communion with the living God (John 5:39–40). Dullness may cause us to forget that we don't actually deserve to hear from God at all, and it might tempt us to look for extrabiblical revelation, as if hearing from God directly through Scripture isn't enough for us. We need to be on guard for hearts that have become dull to the word of life.

3. *Deceit*

Our hearts can also be deceived into believing lies about God and his word. This is one of Satan's greatest tactics as the father of lies (John 8:44). Even for believers in Jesus whose hearts have been set free by his truth (John 8:32), the temptation toward deceit is real.

That said, we can ask God to make us aware of untrue thoughts that distract us from God's word and dull our hearts to his beauty, authority, and power. What might these lies sound like? Rather than believe that God is loving us well through his words, we suspect the Bible contains only *rules and restraints that limit and condemn us*. Rather than trust what God says, distrusting our own fallen wisdom in favor of his perfection, *we question and doubt him*. Rather than hunger for eternal realities and love what God loves, we are deceived into *settling for worldly values and ideals*, thinking they will make us happy.

We are at war. The Christian life is a great battle for the heart as we put off deceit and let the truth set us free from it—which is why we need the word.

4. *Discouragement*

What has made it hard for you to endure, or what has sent you into seasons of spiritual dryness? Maybe you haven't opened your Bible for months because your newborn has kept you up all night for equally as long. Maybe your aging parents need you constantly, draining your tank of whatever might have been left for the Lord. Or maybe Bible reading feels more like a chore to complete than a blessing to enjoy.

Perhaps you're in the midst of a kind of suffering you never saw coming: illness, chronic pain, depression, grief, and other trials that make it hard to get out of bed in the morning, let alone invest energy in God's word. Our pain fills our heads, weighs on our hearts, and tempts us toward discouragement and apathy.

Jesus also notes persecution "on account of the word" (Mark 4:17). When we choose to follow him, there are uncomfortable costs (Mark 8:38), whether we are sacrificing our reputations or finding our very lives in danger. People of the world will think we are crazy for being people of the book.

We *will* be discouraged from walking with God in this fallen world. The question is, Will we allow these discouragements to drive us to his word or away from it?

5. *Desires*

We don't always want what's good for us (vegetables and exercise, anyone?). Wrong desires can also hinder us from hungering for God's word—and not only that, they can kill us slowly as our hearts shrivel under their influence. If

we are outrightly living in sinful practices (1 John 2:16), there will be no room in our hearts for God and his word (James 4:4).

But what about those of us who desire to love and please God, but don't always want what's good for our souls? We no longer live in sinful practices, but we still war against sin's presence and wrong desires (Rom. 7:21–25). This fight can affect our hunger for the word.

Sometimes good things can replace God, as they take priority over him and become the pattern for our days. What “good-desires-turned-idols” have hindered you from enjoying God in his word? That extra hour of sleep that becomes a habit, leaving no time to read the Bible? The desire to make more money, which leads to working more hours, which leaves you too exhausted for anything else? The ease of regularly opening Netflix or social media, rather than seeking a better rest in the words of life?

This isn't to say that extra sleep, working hard, and entertainment are necessarily wrong (although they could be). But we want closeness with God to be the priority and pattern of our days, rather than the cares of the world and the desires of our flesh.

Pursuing Hungry Hearts

With these five hindrances in mind, at this point you may be feeling disheartened. If you're like me, you're thinking, *I struggle with most of these often, if not all the time.*

But remember our goal. We want our appetites for God's word to grow so our hearts are increasingly satisfied in him.

We need to acknowledge these hindrances—distraction, dullness, deceit, discouragement, and desires—so that, with God’s help, we can begin to throw off anything that would keep us from loving his words. We long to look instead to Jesus, receiving his words with faith (Heb. 12:1–2) and growing in deeper hunger for him (John 6:35).

This is the goal, friends, and it’s where we are headed in the rest of this book.

But how do we get there?

The reality is, none of us can attain this on our own. But Jesus is the Creator and Redeemer of our hearts, and therefore we are never without hope for change. The only way our affections for him will grow is if he gives growth (1 Cor. 3:6). The only way we will ever learn to love his words above all else is if he places such a love within us (Jer. 31:33). And the only way we will find our hunger for him changed—*and our hearts increasingly satisfied*—is if we plead with him to do what only he can do (Ps. 107:9): a miracle.

Knowing Your Hungry Heart

1. How would you describe your current appetite for God’s word?

Circle the words that resonate most with you right now. There are no right answers, just honest ones.

Indifferent	Anxious
Eager	Distracted
Overwhelmed	Bored
Desirous	Consistent
Sporadic	Craving

KNOW YOUR HUNGRY HEART

Longing	Strong
Disappointed	Nervous
Guilty	Hopeful
Desperate	Curious
Parched	Lazy
Thankful	Struggling
Lacking	Skeptical

2. On a scale of 0–10, how hungry are you to hear from the Lord?
3. Which of the three types of hunger best describes you right now? Why do you think this is?
4. Use the table below to determine which hindrances are currently keeping you from engaging with God. Start by reflecting on your habits associated with each hindrance. Don't hold back; get them all down on paper. Then in the third column, write down what you would like to see change so that God's word becomes more central in your days and heart.

Hindrances to Bible Reading

Hindrances	Current Habits	Potential Changes
Distraction		
Dullness		
Deceit		
Discouragement		
Desires		

A Growing Affection for God’s Word

Lydia (forties, wife, mother, and women’s discipleship codirector)

I grew up in the church. I was a pastor’s kid, both of my grandfathers were pastors, and I attended a Christian grade school, a Christian high school, and a Christian college. I participated in AWANA, Sunday school, and youth group. I often won sword drill games or Bible trivia. I knew a lot about the Bible, and I knew a lot of theology and doctrine. But I don’t think I could say with the

psalmist, “Your law is my delight” (Ps. 119:174), or with Jesus, “Man shall not live by bread alone, / but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

In truth, I did not love God’s word. It was not what fed my soul. It was part of my life, but I held no affection for it. Until recently.

My affections for God’s word shifted as I began to regularly participate in the women’s Bible study at my church, then even more so when I was asked to help lead one of the Bible study small groups. In addition to my knowledge of the word increasing and my understanding being sharpened, my affection for the word of God deepened significantly. My affection for Christ is now richer. By God’s grace, the help of the Holy Spirit, and the day-to-day transformative power of the gospel, I am different, and I attribute studying his word to playing a major role in that.

Another influence on my affection for the Bible happened in the spring and summer of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Author and podcaster Abbey Wedgeworth curated an Instagram series called “Significant Psalms,” where she invited other women to share how a specific psalm had formed and impacted them. As I listened to each woman speak the truth about God, his character, his love, and his care for his people, my heart was drawn to the Psalms so deeply that I started reading one psalm a day. I quickly included my young children, and every morning at breakfast we read through a psalm together. Then after finishing the Psalms, we moved on to Proverbs, Luke, and Acts, and we have continued to read through other parts of the Bible together.