



HUNGRY

LEARNING TO FEED YOUR
SOUL WITH **CHRIST**

RONDI LAUTERBACH

Foreword by **ELYSE M. FITZPATRICK**

H U N G R Y

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SOUL WITH CHRIST

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P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lauterbach, Rondi, author.

Title: Hungry : learning to feed your soul with Christ / Rondi Lauterbach.

Description: Phillipsburg : P&R Publishing, 2016.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016017563 | ISBN 9781629952017 (pbk.) | ISBN 9781629952024 (epub) | ISBN 9781629952031 (mobi)

Subjects: LCSH: Spiritual life--Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4501.3 .L3845 2016 | DDC 248.4--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016017563>

To my husband, Mark,
who has nourished and cherished me these thirty-eight years

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Foreword

What's more satisfying than sitting down to a sumptuous feast that's been prepared by a skilled master chef? Everything about that kind of eating is inviting: the aromas, the pairings, the platings, even the table settings. Some of that food is so beautiful that I hate to destroy the artistry by eating it, but it smells so good that I can't resist!

There are people (both women and men) who love to create lovely meals, who use that exercise as an expression of their love and creativity. I am thankful for them, but that's just not my gifting.

This is more how it goes around my house: shocked that it's already a quarter to five, I grab the frozen hamburger out of the freezer, nuke it in the microwave for five minutes, and slap it on the skillet with leftover chopped onion and Hamburger Helper. Then I snatch the bag of salad out of the veggie drawer—sometimes checking the use-by date—rip it open, douse it with the dregs of questionable ranch dressing, pile it all on a plate, and call, “Dinner's ready!” as we take up our positions in front of the five o'clock television news program.

Is that kind of eating actually nourishing? Sure it is . . . sort of. But it certainly isn't anything you'll remember the day after. In fact, you might try to forget it. (And we haven't even mentioned the many days when my “cooking” takes the form of whatever my new favorite fast food restaurant happens to be.)

I just asked what was better than a sumptuous feast, lovingly prepared. Here's the answer: a feast on the Word of God.

Christians know that they should read the Bible regularly. That's kind of a no-brainer, isn't it? Since God has condescended to lay before us an assortment of such delicious words, we ought to slow down to really enjoy them. But we already know that, don't we? So we cram in reading as best we can, sometimes just so that we won't feel bad about not reading *again*.

Sometimes we read our Bibles the way I prepare dinner. You know the drill: It's six forty-five in the morning, and we know that the gang will be up at seven o'clock, the day will blast off, and the next time we'll have an opportunity even to breathe won't be until we fall exhaustedly into bed fifteen hours later when the thought of reading anything with understanding is laughable. But . . . *I've only got fifteen minutes*, we might think. *How can I do anything of any import in that short time?*

It's easy to assume that if we had an hour to study the Bible, we could really get something out of it. But since a full hour of uninterrupted thought is as scarce in our homes as a beautifully plated filet mignon, we cram as much as we can into the twelve minutes that we now have left and hope that something sticks.

But, honestly, we can't figure out how reading a two-thousand-year-old letter from Paul to a slave owner is supposed to make any sense to us at all . . . and by the time we get done with even a tiny New Testament book like Philemon, we're more confused than ever. *If only I had more time to study, I'd do better with this; I bet I would understand it*, we think. But more time never comes.

And then there are those bleak fast-food days when we don't even pick up our Bibles at all but rather tune in to a podcast and hope that some sustenance gets into our starving souls through iTunes. We consistently find ourselves *hungry* for something more but don't know how to stop that craving in the time that we've got.

You may not need to read another book about how the Bible is the Word of God. I may not need to tell you that you ought to read it. Perhaps you already know that and already feel pretty bad

about how you're doing it. The problem is not always with knowing that we should read and digest God's Word; the problem is with how to do it in the time that we have *and* to stay motivated.

That's where this immensely helpful book comes in. My friend Rondi Lauterbach has lovingly, beautifully, and wisely plated all the ingredients you'll need in order to begin studying your Bible, even if (*especially if*) all you have is fifteen minutes every day. Using the paradigm of cooking a nutritious meal, along with the book of Philemon, Rondi is going to help you to learn how to read *and* really digest the Word of Life.

But that's not all that she's going to do. She'll also accomplish something that most writers of Bible study books fail to do: she'll help you to see Jesus, the true Bread, the Living Word, on every page . . . and in that, she'll give you a unique motivation to keep on. You don't read your Bible just so you can cross it off your daily list or learn some new steps so that your life will finally become what you hoped it would be. You read, study, digest it so that you can feast on Jesus, the one who loves you, who will speak to you, and who gave his body and blood for your life.

Shockingly, Jesus is the missing ingredient in nearly all books about Bible study; aside from a gospel sprinkling here or a "remember the cross" thought there, you'd think that he wasn't the main point of Scripture. But he is. And Rondi won't let you push him aside or pick around him. He's there on every page in Scripture, as he said he was, and Rondi will continue to present him to you so that you will be motivated by his love, his life, and his delight in you and will learn to satisfy your hunger with the only meal that can actually do so.

So pull up a chair. Get ready to feast. Hope you've come hungry. You're about to be fed a supremely delicious meal.

Enjoy!

Elyse M. Fitzpatrick
Author of *Idols of the Heart*

Introduction

Running on Empty

*For he satisfies the longing soul,
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.
—Psalm 107:9*

Imagine I see my son late one night when I walk into the kitchen to get some water. The refrigerator bulb illuminates his face as he stares blankly ahead. Cold air pours past him. “Mom. There’s no food in this house.”

I wrap my robe more tightly and peer into our moderately stocked refrigerator. *Poor starving teenager. His hunger drives him to forage for food every three hours. It’s like having a new-born again.*

“Actually, there’s a sandwich in here waiting for you to find it. Look. There’s the bread; here’s some leftover turkey. You could add cream cheese, some of that cranberry sauce, and a bit of lettuce, and you’ve got a Thanksgiving sandwich. It’s all in there; you just have to learn to see the makings of a meal.”

He stares at me, then starts grabbing ingredients with both hands. In minutes he is wolfing down a monstrous sandwich, sighing with pleasure.

Score one for Mom.

HUNGRY BODIES

A mom expects her kids to get hungry. After all, a healthy appetite is a sign of life. She plans for their hunger so she won't get caught by surprise. She keeps Cheerios in the diaper bag, pretzel packets in her purse, energy bars in her car. A mom is prepared because she knows that hunger can hit anyone without warning. Even her.

I'm one of those people who get low blood sugar. It can plummet suddenly when I'm in the middle of an exercise class or out running errands. It's as though a gas tank needle suddenly drops below empty. I'm often surprised by the urgent need to stop and refuel.

One day my need hit me on the way home from work. I had planned to run by the cleaners, mail a package, and pick up a few items for dinner. By the third stop, brain fog hit. *I'm not going to make it.*

Fortunately, I was at the grocery store. *Good. I'll pick up some protein bars and eat one right away.* I headed to the far right aisle. *I forgot—they've rearranged the store. I think they're on the other side. I'll get them on the way out.* I picked up the three items on my list and circled to the other side of the store. No protein bars. I was getting desperate, so I grabbed the first thing I saw that qualified as instant food: maple leaf cookies.

Cookies for dinner. That's what happens when hunger catches me off guard.

Hunger is definitely a driving force in our lives. Have you ever whipped into the drive-thru at McDonald's because your detox diet left you craving french fries? Or stood over the sink eating ice cream out of the carton at midnight because dinner didn't quite do it for you?

If hunger can drive our bodies like that, what does it do to our souls?

HUNGRY SOULS

During my teen years, I not only had a taste for potato chips and M&M's but also developed an appetite for achievement. I had begged my parents to let me switch from my sheltered church school to a large public high school. After checking it out thoroughly, they consented, but with a few stipulations. "You have to take your schoolwork seriously. We expect you to keep up your grades and stay on track for college."

I did what I was told and pleased my parents by performing well. But the truth was, the more I filled myself up with achievement, the more I craved it. Before long I was addicted to success and the kudos that accompanied it. On the outside I was a good and cheerful student, a credit to my school and my parents, but on the inside things weren't so pretty.

Addicts know well the law of diminishing returns. It seemed that every day I had to prove myself all over again. I had to stay ahead of the competition. I soon began getting up at four in the morning to study, popping prescription meds to stay awake and increase my concentration. Anxiety churned and sometimes surfaced as panic. The next award satisfied me only briefly before the growling emptiness drove me into another whirl of effort.

I was running on empty.

What about you? Do you know when your soul is hungry? I wasn't aware of my drivenness, though it was probably obvious to the people around me. You may find yourself suddenly getting irritated by every little thing. You may become easily offended, reacting in anger to your family, picking fights with your friends, neighbors, even strangers. *What's wrong with me?*

Our souls are a swamp of feelings. Vague dissatisfactions cloud the surface while deep longings—for truth, affirmation, friends, significance, peace—rise briefly and then sink again.

They pull us under. We surface, gasping and lurching for the first thing we see.

We act out of hunger before we realize what we're feeling.

HOPE FOR THE HUNGRY

The connection between physical and spiritual hunger is on our society's radar these days. Popular author and physician Deepak Chopra hands us the appropriate diagnostic question "What am I hungry for?" and goes on to answer it this way:

The impulse you feel can be simplified into a few basic categories:

You're hungry for food.

You want to fill an emotional hole.

You want to fill a hole in your mind (such as low self-esteem, bad body image, or a sense of failure or frustration).

To these I would add a fourth impulse, which is spiritual.

*You want to fill a hole in your soul.*¹

His diagnosis is accurate. Not just our bodies, emotions, and minds but also our very souls are hungry. We want to fill a hole in our souls.

But Chopra's prescription isn't deep enough. In an earlier book he counsels us to look within. He recommends self-awareness through spiritual practices such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. According to Chopra, our self-awareness has been contracted by problems of various kinds. We need to move from "contracted awareness" to "expanded awareness" with the goal of "pure awareness."² This is his spiritual solution to our hunger problem.

1. Deepak Chopra, *What Are You Hungry For? The Chopra Solution to Permanent Weight Loss, Well-Being, and Lightness of Soul* (New York: Harmony Books, 2013), 16 (italics in original).

2. Deepak Chopra, *Spiritual Solutions: Answers to Life's Greatest Challenges* (New York: Harmony Books, 2012), 4–7.

Self-awareness might help us to diagnose our hunger, but looking inside ourselves for the answer assumes that we can fill our own souls. But how can we do this? When our stomachs are empty, we don't turn inward. We open the refrigerator.

Where do we go to find food for our souls?

The Bible takes this question seriously. One day a large crowd goes looking for Jesus (John 6:25–40). The people's stomachs are empty, and they're hoping that he'll feed them again as he did the day before, when he turned five loaves and two fish into enough to satisfy them all. Today they want more bread. Another miracle might be nice too—entertainment with the meal.

Jesus knows what they want. He sees the crowd. He hears the question behind their question, "Lord, when did you get here?" He is well aware of their hunger.

Jesus also knows that bread isn't what the people need. Their stomachs will feel empty again in a few hours. Entertainment won't satisfy them either. Their curiosity will soon demand another sign of his power. They need food for a hunger that they're not yet aware of.

So Jesus says to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (v. 35).

In saying this, Jesus is telling the crowd two things.

First, Jesus is telling the people that he is aware of their true need, even if they aren't. He knows that they need food for their souls, that they have a hunger to be fully alive. They don't need to become self-aware, because he is aware for them and is compassionate enough to tell them what he knows.

Second, Jesus is saying that he is ready and able to provide for their true hunger. He knows that bread will keep them alive only one day at a time—merely surviving. But the bread he offers will allow them to live with a capital *L*—thriving. Jesus doesn't

stop at giving the crowd self-awareness and then send them off on a spiritual quest. He offers to provide for their hungry souls.

And the bread that he offers is himself.

The people are baffled by his words, and I think that his words sometimes go over our heads too. But Jesus lets his announcement hang in the air, for their sake and for ours.

FEED ME

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Those words were shockingly good news to me as a teenager. I'd been feeding on achievement, and all it had brought me was more hunger. This wasn't life; it was addiction, "a banquet in the grave."³

Jesus offered me the gift of life in exchange for the law of diminishing returns that I had embraced. He called me not just to hear his words but to feed on them—to take them seriously, to believe they were true, to be convinced of them personally. He called me not just to feed on his words but also to feed on *him*. That meant to take him seriously, to understand who he claimed to be and what he came to do, and to place my trust in him.

I barely understood the message, but God helped me to believe and, by believing, to feed on Jesus as my Bread of Life for the first time. As it turned out, I would need to feed on him again.

In my thirties I went through a personal crisis. Motherhood had disturbed more than my comfort; it had challenged my sense of identity. I had done well in school and had always assumed I would have a successful career someday. Kids? Of course I would have a few of those too. That's what the culture told me at the time: you can have it all—kids, career, happiness,

3. I borrowed this phrase from Edward T. Welch's book on addiction, *Addictions—A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001).

fulfillment. I swallowed that line, finished college, and settled into graduate school. The first baby arrived. Then two more.

I was up to my ears in diapers, toddlers, sticky fingers, and runny noses. How was I supposed to concentrate on anything else, much less on a career? Maybe when the children started school I would have the mental bandwidth. So I kept putting it off, thinking that my time would come. I embraced being a mom, but motherhood didn't feel like enough. I wanted to make something of myself.

The crisis hit. The last child entered grade school. I found myself with a chunk of free time each day to use as I wished, but in agony I realized that I didn't know what to do with it. Where was that career that would fill the empty spot? My children still needed me to be available to them. What fabulous job would fit my limited schedule and also fill the hole in my soul?

I didn't want a career; I craved an identity.

Who am I? The question haunted me. Sometimes in the middle of the night I would dream I was falling into a dark well and would wake up with a start, terrified. My soul felt like a black hole, sucking me downward.

I read my Bible. Tried to pray. Journalled my despair. Then, one gray and dreary morning, the Holy Spirit quietly brought Christ's words to my mind: *I am the Bread of Life*. It felt so personal—the very words I needed to hear.

I knew those words. I believed they were true. But that day the Spirit of God spoke them to me again. I took them from the page of my Bible and began to feed on them. I had been looking for life in so many places for so long, and all the while Jesus had been holding out his life to me with both hands.

That day I learned that Jesus' life isn't just my rescue from achievement addiction—it is my very identity. And it is mine for the taking, not just today but tomorrow and all the days after.

That's Jesus' offer to all who are hungry: a present-tense, life-sustaining relationship with him.

BRING YOUR HUNGRY

I assume that you picked up this book because you're hungry. You might consider yourself an outsider to the Christian faith, or you might be a committed insider. You might even be straddling the boundary line of faith, shifting your weight from one foot to the other. But one thing is certain: you're hungry.

Welcome to the table.

Together we're going to explore what the Bible has to say about hunger, both physical and spiritual. Together we're going to ask questions, such as:

- Does my hunger matter to God?
- Is hunger good or bad?
- How can I recognize my hunger? Understand it? Satisfy it?
- Where can I find food?

The Bible has a lot to say about hunger and even more to say about food. It has the most to say about a God who wants to feed us. We've come to the right place for our search, "for he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things" (Ps. 107:9).

Here's the menu.

- *Part 1: Hunger.* We'll learn where our hunger comes from and why it feels insatiable. We'll consider the story of the God who gives birth to his children and then feeds them. We'll talk about the surprising role of the wilderness, the problem of cravings, and our hope of satisfaction. I've also included some questions at the end

of each chapter for personal reflection or discussion in a group setting.

- *Part 2: Plenty.* We'll learn how to find food for ourselves from the Bible. We'll learn to cook this meal together. I'll give you tools, and we'll practice our skills. But we won't stop until this feast tastes right—sweet as honey—which means that we'll need to learn to see Jesus, hear the good news, and taste his grace on every page of the Book.

That's what I plan to bring to the table. What about you? What are you bringing to the table? Ponder that for a minute and scribble a thought or two at the bottom of this page.

Then come. Bring your hungry to his plenty.

PART ONE

H U N G E R

One

Hunger

*The belly is an ungrateful wretch, it never remembers
past favors, it always wants more tomorrow.*

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in
the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

When I think of being driven by hunger, I picture Lucky, our fat old beagle.

We bought him because beagles make the cutest puppies. What we didn't realize is that beagles are essentially noses attached to stomachs—rather large stomachs, I might add.

Lucky had no brain, only an appetite. That meant he had one mission in life—whenever the front door opened, he bolted out of it, nose first, in search of food. There was no way to catch him. We tried, of course, cruising around the neighborhood in our car, windows down, listening for the baying voice that gave away his position. But he always eluded us.

One evening after we had given Lucky up for coyote bait, we looked out our kitchen window to see him trot up the driveway with a package of fresh hot dog buns dangling from his mouth. Since the grocery store was four miles away, we figured that he had swiped them out of the back of some woman's minivan while

she was taking groceries inside. We pictured her scratching her head, wondering if she was going crazy, when she couldn't find those buns at dinnertime.

Another time, I didn't realize that Lucky was gone until I got a phone call from the nearby junior high school. "Hey, lady, are you the one who owns the beagle? You need to come and get him; he just ate a piece of cake off a teacher's desk . . ."

"What am I hungry for?" would have been a meaningless question for our beagle. He never stopped long enough to ask it.

DEEP HUNGER

But we do. When we find ourselves rummaging in the refrigerator but can't seem to settle on what we want, we ask it. When we find ourselves restless, moving from room to room without settling down, we ask it. When we find ourselves obsessing over yesterday's job interview or the sharp comment that our best friend made to us last week, we ask it.

What am I hungry for? Our uncomfortable feelings are symptoms of a strong desire or need for something that we haven't yet named. A battery of blood tests can diagnose a nutritional deficiency, but it's not always easy for us to name our other hungers. We're always on the prowl for a label that fits us.

Name That Hunger

A smartly dressed young woman was chatting with me before a weekend retreat in British Columbia. She had just landed a high-profile job in a marketing firm downtown. Giggling nervously, she admitted, "I feel like an impostor. They all think I know what I'm doing, but I don't. I'm afraid they'll find out!"

I could relate to her lack of self-confidence, but I had never thought of myself as an *impostor* before. What an intriguing

label. When I looked it up later, I found that *impostor* was more than a well-chosen word—it had been identified as a syndrome.

The term *impostor syndrome* was coined in the 1970s to describe the experience of people who are convinced that they are incompetent despite evidence to the contrary. Instead of accepting the evidence, they dismiss it, assuming that they've tricked everyone into thinking that they're smarter or better qualified than they actually are.¹

That seals it, I thought to myself like a psychological hypochondriac. I think I've got a case of impostor syndrome! Now what can I do about it?

Wonder Woman

Taking my self-diagnosed hunger for self-confidence in hand, I began to research my condition. I read about a variety of management techniques, but the one that I liked best came from the research of Harvard assistant professor Amy Cuddy.

In 2012 Dr. Cuddy gave a talk about power poses and the difference they can make in our sense of self-assurance. With research to back up her claims, she showed that how we stand, sit, and walk affects hormonal levels in our blood that in turn affect our mood. Standing like Wonder Woman for two minutes—hands on hips, feet wide—actually boosts our confidence by measurable levels. Her TED talk must have hit a nerve, because it went viral and now has over thirty million views.²

Impostor syndrome therapies and Dr. Cuddy's research have been helpful to many people. Managing our confidence is useful when we have a specific task in front of us that must be

1. Carl Richards, "Learning to Deal With the Impostor Syndrome," *The New York Times*, October 26, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/26/your-money/learning-to-deal-with-the-impostor-syndrome.html?_r=0.

2. Amy Cuddy, "Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are" (TEDGlobal, 2012), video, *TED*, 21:02, last accessed April 25, 2016, http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en.

done. But we eventually find that our hunger for confidence goes deeper than the specific circumstances that provoked it. It seems to linger long after the job is done. It pops up again at unexpected times.

Managing this hunger doesn't satisfy it.

Why Am I Hungry?

We need to ask a deeper question than "What am I hungry for?" because we need to find a deeper answer. That question is *why*. Why are you and I hungry for self-confidence—or for anything else? And why won't that hunger stay satisfied?

Five hundred years ago, a young Bible scholar began what was to be his life's work with these words: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."³

He went on to say that we can't know God without knowing ourselves and that we can't know ourselves without knowing God. The two are connected. They're actually interrelated. You can't have one without the other.

Where should we start, then? That was John Calvin's question too: "But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other." Our hunger can provide an entry point. One way to know ourselves is to begin to take our hunger seriously—to recognize it, understand it, and ask why.

When we realize that our diagnosis of hunger is superficial and our strategies for treatment inadequate, we begin to look around for help. Eventually we look up. "For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts toward God in whom he lives and moves." We find ourselves

3. This and the following three quotations are from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 1.1.1.

seeking God, and then, to our surprise, we find him looking down to seek us.

“Every person, therefore, on coming to the knowledge of himself, is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find him.” One way to know God and ourselves is to follow the breadcrumb trail of our hunger through the pages of the Bible.

Why am I hungry? Let’s take that question with us as we open the Book.

HUNGER BEGUN

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, means *beginning*. It’s a good place to start our quest to understand hunger. The first chapter of Genesis opens with these words: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

Whether we are reading these words for the first or for the hundredth time, we can observe one thing right away. God is assumed. He exists before everything else. His presence is stated as a given, without apology or explanation. You could say that he stands alone on the stage, except that there is no stage yet.

The second thing we see from this single sentence is that God made everything else—the theater, the stage, the scenery, the props, the players, you, me. There’s one major distinction introduced here: God and everything else. The Creator and everything he created. This may seem obvious, but it’s pertinent to our discussion of hunger.

God Is Never Hungry

Here’s the implication: God is not hungry. Not ever. Not for anything. Hunger describes us but not him.

The idea that God doesn’t need anything recurs throughout the Bible. The clearest explanation comes centuries later in these

words spoken by a converted Jew named Paul to the cosmopolitan citizens of Athens:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he *needed* anything, since he himself *gives* to all mankind life and breath and everything. (Acts 17:24–25)

God is the one who gives, not the one who needs.

But there's more. God is not just "not hungry"; he is satisfied, utterly satisfied. That's the positive way to put an absence of hunger. God is satisfied in every area in which we are needy. We long for meaning, identity, purpose. We long for relationships of mutual love, honor, and respect. We need these things to make us feel fully alive. God doesn't need these things to feel fully alive, because he already has them. He is as fully alive as it gets.

You might argue with me here. "I can see that God doesn't need food," you might say, "but what about relationships? Since God is alone on the stage, he might be, well, lonely. Perhaps he created the world to fill that one need?" That's good reasoning. And that's one of the ways in which Genesis 1 points to the true nature of God as one God in three persons.⁴

The fact is that our hunger plunges us into the deep end of the pool, into the very nature of God himself. We are so needy

4. Genesis 1:26 is another pointer: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" Why does God refer to himself with the plural pronouns *us* and *our*? Genesis 1:2 offers a partial explanation: "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." The Spirit of God is also there. Genesis 1:3 gives the third clue: "And God said, 'Let there be light.'" The Word of God is present too. The Triune nature of God, hinted at in the Old Testament, is made clear in the New Testament—e.g., Matthew 3:16–17 (the baptism of Jesus); Matthew 28:19 (the triune name of God); 2 Corinthians 13:14 (the triune blessing).

that we need to receive help from someone who isn't needy in the least. God is that someone. He doesn't need a relationship with us because he existed in a perfect relationship of mutual love, honor, and respect *before* the beginning, as Father, Son, and Spirit. Alone (one God) but not lonely (three persons).

In other words, the triune God is not only complete, he's completely happy. "God is that being who exists as the triune love of the Father for the Son in the unity of the Spirit. The boundless life that God lives in himself, at home, within the happy land of the Trinity above all worlds, is perfect. It is complete, inexhaustibly full, and infinitely blessed."⁵

This is the God who is presented to us in the first sentence of the book of beginnings.

Food for the Hungry

Turning back to Genesis,⁶ let's keep our eyes peeled for anything related to hunger.

The story of God's creation of all things unfolds over the next two chapters, first in poetry, then in prose. In chapter 1 we see him building the structures of our world and filling them with life. The poet seems to craft his account to show that the one who creates life also sustains it. Like a good host, God provides food before the guests arrive.

Thus we read that all plant life is created on day three, in preparation for the arrival of animal life, including us, on day six. Then God connects the dots between our hunger and his provision. "Behold," he says, and it's as though he makes a sweeping gesture to the vast array of plant life, then turns to the man and the woman. "You shall have them for food" (Gen. 1:29).

5. Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 62.

6. If you don't have a Bible available, you can look up the book of Genesis on Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com). I'm using the English Standard Version (ESV) in this book.

All the animals, as well as man and woman, would be fed from this abundance.

The need was met before the need was felt. In creation, God made food first, then made creatures with an appetite. In paradise, hunger is always satisfied.

God Made Me to Hunger

What does that mean for us? It tells us where hunger comes from. We are beings who need to eat. If we don't have food, we get hungry, weak, and faint, and eventually we die.

God made us that way. He could have created beings that don't need nourishment, like a rock or a perpetual motion machine. He could have made us self-sustaining, able to produce our own food within ourselves. He could have made us to need food only once a month or once a year.

But he didn't. He chose to make us creatures who wake up hungry every day and have to grab breakfast before we head out the door.

This tells us several more things about us, our hunger, and the God who feeds us.

We're dependent on something outside ourselves to sustain our lives. Remember, we go to the pantry, not to our inner selves, when our stomachs rumble. This fact, so obvious in the physical realm, gets muddled when we think about spirituality. But we are not self-sustaining spiritually any more than we are physically. Our souls' food is *out there*, not in here.

Hunger is good. What would our lives be like if we didn't have an appetite? We get a small taste of this when we have the flu. Nothing tastes right, and we don't feel like eating. But when our appetite returns, even a piece of buttered toast tastes incredible. A good appetite is the best thing to bring to the table.

God is good. He creates desires that he plans to satisfy. Our appetite is more than matched by his provision. The abundance and variety of physical food on this planet shows his generosity. He made food for us to *enjoy*,⁷ not just to subsist on.

But God has other food for us that he doesn't give to the animals. He made us for a relationship with himself.

HUNGER TESTED

As we move from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2, we encounter one more word about food, which points beyond our physical hunger. God speaks to the man again:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:16–17)

Before the woman is created, God speaks to the man, giving a command (really two): "You may surely eat" and "You shall not eat."

Now, if you're an outsider to Christianity, these words may seem to confirm your suspicions about religion. God sounds like a cosmic killjoy. First he gives, then he says, "Don't touch!" Why the generous provision and then the one prohibition? Why make any rules at all?

What might sound at first like a power play is actually an offer, an invitation for the man to bring his deep hungers to the table. Paradise won't be complete as long as the man is alone. But before God creates the woman to satisfy that loneliness, he

7. "... God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

offers the man a relationship with himself. God's command is the offer. Adam's obedience is how he will say yes.

"But," you may ask, "what do rules have to do with a relationship?"

Everything. Rules tell us how to please the one we love.

Rules of Relationship

When we fall in love with someone, funny things can happen. I once developed a crush on a boy who loved to play basketball. At that point I was a bookworm who didn't know what to do with myself when Mom said, "Go outside and play," except to take my book outside and read there. But once I began to like this neighbor boy, I started to dribble and shoot like nobody's business. If he liked basketball, by golly, I was going to like it too.

That relationship didn't pan out, but when love blossomed between my husband Mark and me years later, the scenario replayed itself—not with basketball but with wanting to please the other person. I offered to take up golf. He offered to take me dancing.

Other rules developed over time. If he wanted to show that he loved me, he needed to buy me the right kind of hand lotion when I sent him to the store. Not the cheapest kind, not the kind that he thought was best, but the kind that I asked him to get. If I wanted to show that I loved him, I needed to keep our dog Lucky from digging up the drip irrigation line. Not just to let him out and forget about him, but to take him out, watch him, and bring him in.

All this wasn't about the hand lotion or the drip line; it was about the person. The rule says, "This is important to me." How I respond to the rule shows what I think of the person.

The Purpose of Hunger

Here is the test that God sets up for the man: "I have given you everything you need. More than you need. But you must

know that life comes from me, not just from these things. The way to choose life is to choose me, to love me more than you love the things I give you.”

Now, remember who we’re talking about. God isn’t some lonely teenager with pimples. He isn’t a confirmed bachelor who has suddenly decided that he wants company. He is completely happy and content in the fellowship of the Trinity. So happy that he wants to share his life with us. So content that he doesn’t need to.

God’s word of command is simple and brief: “You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” He sets up for the man one rule for being in relationship with him. Obeying this word is the way to say yes to him and to his offer of life and love.

That’s the tension that we’re left with at the end of Genesis 2. A rule has been given, a test of appetite. Will the man pass the test? Will his appetite for God be greater than his appetite for the one thing that he can’t have?

The purpose of hunger in our lives is the same. Will our hunger lead us *to* God or away from him?

God's Plan to Feed Us

When God gives this command to the man, he is offering him something that he hasn’t offered the animals: a two-way relationship of love. He invites the man to respond to love with love.

God not only made us, he made us for himself. That’s the point of the first two chapters of Genesis. Our relationship with him is what is meant to feed our souls. Everything that we long for—including our longing to know ourselves—is meant to be found in a dynamic two-way relationship with the God who made us and knows us.

This is the deep answer to our deep hunger. It’s also the written testimony of Christian thinkers throughout the centuries. The African bishop Augustine of Hippo wrote these words in the fourth century: “You made us for yourself and our hearts

find no peace until they rest in you.”⁸ His words still resonate with the hungry today.

But to enjoy that relationship, the man must pass the test.

HUNGER CORRUPTED

Soon after God creates Eve, another character enters the story—a talking serpent. Where does he come from? We’re told that he’s one of the creatures that God has made. The only other thing that we’re told is that he’s crafty, a description that is confirmed as soon as speaks.

The Serpent addresses the woman, not the man, and his words question God’s words (“Did God actually say . . . ?”). He stirs her doubts about them, and then he flat-out contradicts them. He opposes God’s “You shall surely die” with his “You will *not* surely die” (Gen. 3:4).

Which word will the woman believe?

We can all picture the cartoon gimmick of an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. They argue their case back and forth while we look from one to the other until our heads start to spin. The devil then throws the angel a final insult, which makes the angel give a self-righteous sniff and disappear. *Poof!* Then we make our choice.

That’s what temptation can feel like: an argument between internal voices. But this scene is shaped by an *external* word—the real word given by God to govern not just the man and woman’s choices but their very desires.

Which word will the woman act on? She’ll choose the one that she wants more. The words of the Serpent lodge in her heart and stir her hunger. The forbidden fruit promises to give her something that God has denied her. Something good—very

8. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Classics, 1961), 21.

good. To be like God. Never mind that God has already created the man and the woman to be like him, for that is what it means to be made in his image (Gen. 1:27).

The Serpent has made the fruit from the tree sound new and exciting.

The words of the Serpent also insinuate slander against the character of God. “God knows . . .” implies that God has given his command not with their best interests at heart, but with his. It sounds like he’s making empty threats just to keep the goodies for himself. “He’s not good—he’s a liar and a miser” is the Serpent’s hiss.

The temptation begins to take hold of the woman’s appetite. Not only her senses—what she hears, sees, smells, and eventually touches—are engaged but also her desire. “The tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6).

Hunger tempted isn’t hunger gone wrong. Not yet. Temptation resisted would have preserved hunger as the good thing that God had created. But then the woman made her choice. She and the man both did.

She took the fruit, ate it, and gave some to the man. He ate it. They chose what they loved more, spurning the love of God and preferring to love themselves.

With that choice, hunger went terribly wrong, and with it went everything else.

HUNGER CURSED

Ever since the day of Adam’s choice, the lie of the Serpent has lodged in our hearts: *God is not good. His commands are unreasonable. He must be holding back on us.* Now that the relationship has been broken, why should we care about the rules?

We’ve all had the experience of reducing God to the angel on our right shoulder who argues with the devil on our left.

When we get tired of the back-and-forth wrestling with our conscience, we dismiss them both with a *poof* and go off to do what we want.

I win, we're tempted to think. *I don't need God's pesky rules anyway. I know what's best for me. I certainly know what I want, and what I want right now is not God, but this thing in front of me.*

The problem is that when hunger goes wrong, it breaks the boundaries of normal appetite. Take our hunger to know ourselves. It has become a craving. That's why we endlessly take personality tests and gift inventories. That's why we repeatedly pick up books that promise to tell us about ourselves and put magazines in our shopping carts that offer to help us to understand what color we should wear or why clutter bothers us so.

Once unleashed, our hunger becomes a wild inner beast that rages and demands constant attention. Not knowing ourselves, we become obsessed with ourselves. We turn every conversation into a competition so that we can reassure ourselves that we're winners. Or, if we can't win, we decide not to climb that ladder and instead go off to find a different one, telling ourselves that we may not be great but at least we're good at something.

Or we curl up and quit.

Hunger unleashed becomes hunger insatiable. It threatens to swallow us whole. This is hunger fallen. This is hunger cursed.

They shall be wasted with hunger. (Deut. 32:24)

Through want and hard hunger

they gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation;
they pick saltwort and the leaves of bushes,
and the roots of the broom tree for their food. (Job 30:3–4)

Hunger

You shall eat, but not be satisfied,
and there shall be hunger within you. (Mic. 6:14)

This is death by hunger. And we've brought it on ourselves.

HUNGER RESCUED

It's a good thing that God doesn't go away when we dismiss him. He's not like the cartoon angel on our shoulder: small, petty, and easily dealt with. And that's good news, because he doesn't leave us alone in our misery.

God came to the garden on the day that Adam and Eve blew it for all of us. He came while they were still reeling from their choice, cowering in the bushes, hiding and blaming and naked and so ashamed.

His coming terrified them. *He must be coming to judge us.* So they hid. *He must be coming to kill us. How will we die?* In their minds, that was the only question still left unanswered.

He came, and he called, "Where are you?" The God who knows everything invited their response, calling for them like a father calls for his children when they've stayed out too long after dark.

The man and the woman came out of hiding. God questioned them, asking them to tell him what he already knew. They squirmed and blamed and made excuses. The Serpent was there too, waiting for the scene to play out like he hoped. Waiting for God to follow his own rules and kill the creatures he'd made.

Then God surprised us all.

Curse, Death, and Promise

God turned to the three of them—the man, the woman, and the Serpent—with a curse in his hand and flung it with all his power at the Serpent alone. "*Because you have done this, cursed*

are you . . .” (Gen. 3:14). The remaining curses were directed not at the man and the woman personally but at the life they would lead from then on.

Yes, life. Life would continue, though it would be hard and hungry. Life would continue for now, though death would come later. But *life* would continue. The woman would have children. The man would grow food.

What about the death that had been promised? Who then would die? This was important. God had said that whoever ate of the tree would surely die, and the Serpent had said that they would not. If God’s Word is to be believed and counted on, it must be true all the time.

God gave the man and the woman not one but two deaths that day—one to be executed immediately, the other promised for some future date. That very day an animal (maybe several) died at God’s own hand. He used the animal skins to clothe the man and the woman. The animals died instead of Adam and Eve, covering not just their nakedness but also their true guilt and their felt shame.

The second death came in the form of an announcement of a future event. Death would fall on the Serpent. God promised that there would be a day when the Serpent would be crushed by a descendent of the woman. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

Far from being a fable to explain why women don’t like snakes, this promise points to the end of evil by predicting the death of the Evil One. Evil won’t win. There’s hope.

And so we leave the garden, devastated but comforted. We came with a question: *Why am I hungry?* We leave with an answer. *My hunger is created by God, broken by sin, and redeemable.*

We can’t fix our hunger, but we are given the promise of someone who can.

The Hungry God

Who is up to this challenge? Adam and Eve represent us all. Who can win what Adam has lost? Who can rescue not just us but also our hunger?

John's gospel gives us a clue. "*In the beginning*," John writes, taking us back to Genesis 1:1, when God was alone on an empty stage—except there was no stage yet. And then John tells us plainly what was only hinted at before: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This is a strange sentence. But in a flash of insight, we see why God, even alone, is not lonely. The Word of God is with God and at the same time *is* God. Mind blowing.

Then the stage is created, furnished with scenery, filled with action as the first players make their entrances. The play has barely begun when the plot spins seemingly out of control. The stage becomes crowded, littered with death and debris, as the drama twists and writhes forward.

Enter a new character. In John's words, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

God the Son—never hungry, always blessed—leaves the director's chair and assumes his place on the stage. The God who is never hungry becomes a baby who cries for milk from his mother. He becomes hungry so that he can rescue our hunger.

The last word won't be *death* but *birth*.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. "Managing this hunger doesn't satisfy it" (p. 28). Think about your own hunger for self-confidence or some other desire. How do you try to manage it? Does it work?

Hunger

2. Review the section “God Made Me to Hunger” and the three sub-points (pp. 32–33). Which of these was the most surprising or meaningful to you? Why?
3. “Will our hunger lead us *to* God or away from him?” (p. 35). Have you ever thought about the purpose of hunger in your life? Identify one area of hunger and think about where it tends to lead you. The prodigal son (Luke 15:17) gives a good illustration of this.
4. Why might the corruption of hunger lead to so many other evils? Consider Proverbs 10:3 and James 4:3.
5. What hope is there for our hunger?

HUNGER:

it drives our bodies, shapes our day,
and affects our choices.

We are all too familiar with our physical hunger and the guilt it often inspires. But God *designed* us to hunger—our hunger is good! It shows we are meant to depend on something outside ourselves for satisfaction.

But what about the hunger we feel in our souls?

While also from God, our spiritual hunger is corrupted—leaving us binging on “junk food” like our idols and cravings. Where do we find true satisfaction for our hungry souls?

It comes when our souls feast on the Word of God—and on Jesus himself. Rondi shows us how to prepare a Bible study like a recipe for a spiritual banquet that will truly fill us.

Learn how to *consume* the Bible instead of just reading it—and then how to share this meal with the hungry around you.

“Some meals require an appetite, and others create one.
This book is of the latter type. . . . I think you’ll find, as
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His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures*

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SPIRITUAL GROWTH
ISBN: 978-1-62995-201-7



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