

# A HUNGER for GOD

## A WORD from OUR SPONSOR

by: *Mike Morrison*

### Sermon Recap on 9/19/2010

by Thomas and Alberta Ecker

Woody Allen is not only a comedian, but also sometimes a philosopher with serious observations about life. As a movie director, he often wanted to deal with serious issues rather than comedy. He has a wit and a knack for humor, and that helped him earn money to do the other movies that he really wanted to do. He knows that life is not all about laughter; there is something more to life that he wants to find and experience – but I suspect that he has never found it.

Once when he was asked why he had an affair with a woman who was not his wife, he responded, “The heart wants what it wants; that’s all there is to it.” He had a desire, and he didn’t think he had any control over his heart. He felt he had no choice as to what his heart *might* desire.

And yet civilization demands, and Christianity demands, that people exercise self-control, that the meaning of life does not consist in simply following the desires of our heart like following some alien power that has taken control of our life. If a person’s heart wants to have an affair, to break promises we have given to someone else, to hurt the people who make sacrifices to help us, then if life is to be meaningful, then we have to say NO to our heart. We have to exercise self-control, or *heart-control*, to take control of what we supposedly *want*.

That’s not really my topic for the message today, but it is related. I’d like to talk today about having a hunger for God, that we desire God as if our life depended on him, because it does.

But sometimes it seems it does no good to tell people that they ought to have a desire for God. They already *know* that, and they don’t have the desire. *Telling* them to hunger for God does not create a desire. It’s like telling a man that he is supposed to be faithful to his wife, when he’s thinking, I know I should, but I really want this other woman, too. Can’t I have both? Can’t I be faithful and still have an affair?

Well, no.

And the question in Christianity is sometimes, Well, I know I should love God with all my heart, but my heart really doesn’t care much about that – my heart wants a good job, a quiet life in the suburbs, a few friends, and that’s about all I want. And isn’t it God’s job to give me the desires of my heart? Shouldn’t he be serving my needs, instead of me serving him? He’s rich and I’m poor, so shouldn’t he be giving me some money, instead of asking me to give to him?

My heart wants what it wants, and that's about all there is to it. If one of those preachers at church has a heart for God, that's great. More power to them. They are following their heart, and I will follow mine. I can't do much about it, anyway. I can't change my desires, and I can't start hungering after God when I am not really hungry. Even if I tell myself to be hungry, even if I tell *other* people that I am hungry, doesn't make me really hungry.

So if the preacher starts talking about having a desire for God, then I will just tune him out and start thinking about lunch, or about my job, or a quiet life in the suburbs, or going home and watching TV, or having a life that is pretty much like everybody else's. Never mind that most people have a rather boring life, a rather meaningless life, with a few pleasures and then they die, pretty much like an animal. If they want to commit adultery and think they can get away with it, they do. They are just following their heart, doing the desires of their heart.

Can we do anything about the desires of our heart? Woody Allen didn't think so, but I think we can. I think that we are more than an animal, that God has given us the power to shape our lives, instead of being carried along on the current. I think the stability of civilization depends on the ability of people to control their wrong desires, and to seek new and better ones. I think that our decency as human beings, and our ability to keep our promises and to be loyal to our spouses, depends on an ability to say "no" to wrong impulses.

And the Bible says that we can. It is not easy, but it is possible. If we are to have a meaning life, a decent life, a life of being faithful to who we say we are, then we need some control over our heart.

And the Bible also says that we can't do this very well. Some people do better than others, but we all fall short of what we know is right. So God offers help. The Bible calls it a new heart. Now, this "new heart" is not like a heart transplant, where the old heart is taken out and we are given a completely different heart. All within one day, when we are completely unconscious, the old heart is removed and the new heart is placed inside us. No, the Bible is not talking about a physical organ, but a spiritual element within us, the seat of our thoughts and desires, the spiritual reality of *who we are*.

God does not simply kill us and start all over. He does not take over our hearts and change our desires overnight without any involvement from us. No, God works on *the heart that we already have*, changing it – not putting in a completely new heart, but making the old one new.

And this takes time, and it takes our involvement. And this process of change comes when we say "no" to the wrong desires of the heart – "no" to adultery, for example – and "yes" to the right desires.

And that brings me back to the theme of my message today: A hunger for God. If we don't have a hunger for God, is it possible to develop one? Is it possible to shape our heart, instead of letting it dictate our lives?

Yes, it is. But of course you have to *want* this result in your life, so what do you do if you don't want it? What if this hunger for God sounds really boring, what if you'd really rather have a good job, a nice house in the suburbs, and a few friends?

C.S. Lewis compares it to a boy who is so busy making mud pies in the back alleyway, that he does not want to go on a holiday at the beach. Lewis says that the problem often is not that we have strong desires for wrong things, but simply that our desires are too weak. We are too easily satisfied with mud pies, when we should be looking for, longing for, hungering for, something much more.

There is nothing wrong with a good job, a nice house in the suburbs, and a few friends. But there is far more to life than this, and there is something wrong if we are *satisfied* with a life that has no more than this. There is nothing wrong with the boy who is happy to make mud pies in the back alleyway, but there is something seriously wrong if he continues to make mud pies for the rest of his life.

So if your goal in life is to have a good job, a nice house, and good friends, well, that's OK, but it's a trivial goal. We all need to set our sights *higher* than that, more meaningful than that, to want *more* out of life than that.

"But I am happy with what I have," says the boy playing in the mud. "And if I'm happy, isn't that good enough? Why should I have to take a bath and give up the mud for a long car-ride to the beach, when I am already happy where I am?" Well, the parents might respond, "It is because we are convinced that this period of temporarily going without, is only a tiny inconvenience compared to the mountain of happiness you will have on the beach. And if you really want to, you can take one of your mud pies with you, but once you get to the beach, you are going to see something so grand that you are going to forget all about your mud pie."

Christ is offering us something much more than mud, or the mundane pleasures of good jobs, nice houses, and a small circle of friends. Those things are not wrong, but they are just pointers to a far greater reality that God is offering us.

The joy that we have with good things in his life is good, and God *wants* us to enjoy these things, but he does not want us to think that this is *all* that he offers. It is only a foretaste of better things to come, and he wants us to desire the *better* things, as well as be thankful for the small things we have now. If we like these small things, he says, then we will like the bigger things even more. And I'm not talking about more money, bigger houses, better suburbs, or more prestigious friends.

Well, as you might know, this idea comes from the Bible, and today I would like for us to look together at a passage in Paul's letter to the Colossians, in chapter 3.

To make a long story short, the people in the city of Colosse were looking for salvation in all the wrong places. Now, it is good that they were looking for something more than what this life offers, but they were going about it in some rather odd ways. Some of them said physical things were bad, so we ought to live without them as much as possible. And some were apparently into

rituals, and some were saying that if we observed the holy days of the Jewish calendar then we would be closer to God.

And Paul responds that no, those festivals were only shadows of Christ. They were a promise of good things to come, but now that the good things are *here* in Christ, we should not get fixated on the promises. It's like we enjoy being engaged so much that we refuse to get married.

Paul is saying, Do you want to get close to God? That's good, because that is exactly what Christ is offering us. *In him* all the fullness of God dwells. We don't need rituals, and we don't need to punish ourselves – what we need is Christ. He is everything we need. When we have faith in Christ, we are united to him – united in his death to sin, united in his resurrection to life, united even with his entry into heaven. When we are in him and he is in us, we are connected to everything that God is, everything that he wants to give us.

OK, so Christ is really good. And what are we supposed to do about it? That brings us to chapter 3 – let's read verse 1: **“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”**

We have been united with Christ, he is saying, so that's the one we ought to be thinking about. Not only that, he is the one our hearts ought to be set on, and the one our desires should be focused on. Our goals, our hopes, our dreams, our desires, ought to be in heaven.

And it's not a matter of “what the heart wants, it wants, and that's all there is to it.” No, Paul says that we can *choose* to set our heart on good things, and we do not have to be slaves of our own desires. We can *choose* to desire the things of God, rather than the things of this world. That does not mean that the things of this world are wrong, but simply that they are not the greatest *good* in the universe.

**Verse 2: Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**

This repeats the thought of the previous verse, but let me comment on the word *things*: C.S. Lewis points out that if we seek only the *things* of God, then we have begun to idolize the things. We are seeking God only as a means for *us* to get the good things he gives. And with that attitude, he says, we will never find these *things* satisfying. If our attitude is only what we can *get*, if it is essentially oriented toward our self, then we will never get enough, or have enough; we will always want more.

The only way our desire can be fully satisfied, is if our goal is something infinite – and that is God himself. We need to hunger for God, not just the things of God. Yes, we should hunger and thirst for righteousness, but righteousness should not be our biggest goal in life, especially if it's our own definition of what righteousness is. Then we will forget about humility and mercy and grace.

Love is good, says Lewis, but when we try to make it a god, then it becomes a demon, distorted away from its real purpose. If we think that love is the supreme good, then we give it our own definition and it becomes centered on us, either on us receiving love or thinking that everything

else must exist so that we can give it love – when in reality the world does not exist for us at all. If we seek love as an end in itself, then it becomes something that *we* want, and *we* are the ones who are defining good and bad, and our whole project will self-destruct.

All the good things of God are *defined* by God, and held together in balance, only by God. If we want righteousness, we need to seek the *author* of righteousness. If we want love, we need to seek the never-ending *supply* of love, and that is God. If we want the joy of a good job and a nice house, we need to seek the author of joy, the creator of homes and families and friendships.

We need to seek the source, not just some of the byproducts. Each of the byproducts is good, of course, but if we choose some of God's gifts to the exclusion of others, then we have set ourselves up as a god who chooses what is good and what is not so good. What we need is to seek the whole package, and that is found only in God himself.

So how do we know what the package is like? How do we get a glimpse of what God is like, with the perfect mixture of all his good qualities? How do we see the right balance between righteousness and grace, between love and anger? It is by looking to Jesus. He told Philip, If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Paul said, In him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells. He reveals to us what the Father is like, and he reveals to us what we should be like.

Now, this is not a matter of seeing and copying, as if we could say, "Jesus did such and such, so I will, too." That would be acting as if we had the power to be like Jesus, to be like God. We don't. That is why the Bible talks about God living in us, Christ living in us, the Holy Spirit living in us – we can be like God only if *God* is in us.

That's another reason we need to seek *God*, not just the benefits we can get from him. We cannot get the results – at least not in the proper balance – by seeking them directly — we can get them only if we seek God as the source of all good things, and then he will give us what we need.

If you hunger for righteousness, then hunger for God. If you hunger for love, or for peace, or for joy, then hunger for God. If you hunger for a good job, or a nice home, or a few friends, then hunger for God, too.

If you like those things, good – God has a lot more in store for you. Just realize that these things are merely mud pies in comparison to what God really wants to give us. Sometimes we have to give up the mud pies while we travel to the beach, but once we get there, we will realize that we really didn't sacrifice much in order to get there.

Let's keep reading in verse 3: **For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.**

Sometimes I think too much about the life that died, and not enough about the new life that I have in Christ. That's because the new life is hidden, and I have to believe it is there even when I can't see it.

Verse 4: **When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**

The things that are now hidden will become visible, both the good and the bad.

So, what do we do? When our hearts are set on God, what does our life look like?

Verse 5 tells us: **Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.**

These are the things the natural heart “wants to do.” We cannot just follow our heart. What the heart wants the heart wants, that’s true, but it is not true that that’s the end of the story. We can do something about it; we can *change* what the heart wants – or rather, we can let God change it.

But we have our part to do, to tell our heart to desire the things of heaven, and to tell our heart that we are going to starve its wrong desires to death – we are going to keep saying **no** to sexual immorality until the desire gets weaker and weaker; we are going to say **no** to greed, until the heart gives up asking for more and more. This is not easy and it is not quick, but it is the only way we are going to have a meaningful life that rises above the level of animal desires.

Verse 6: **Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.**

God will intervene – he will interrupt human history to bring in a new and dramatically different age. That is when Christ will appear and as Paul says, will give to each person according to what they’ve done.

Verses 7 and 8: **You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.**

It’s not just lust and greed that have to go – the words we *speak* need a transformation, too.

Verses 9-10: **Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.**

You know, no one stays the same throughout life. We all change, whether we believe in God or not. All people are learning, growing, changing, or becoming more set in their ways. And Paul is saying that if we set our hearts on things above, then we will be changed to be more like he is – in this case, more trustworthy. We have a choice as to what kind of people we become. We can choose whether to like something, or not.

Paul has not listed every sin – he has just given some representative examples. We could add more to the list, if we wanted to, by going to some of the other letters he wrote. But that’s enough for now. We should put sin out of our lives. And what are we supposed to do instead?

Verses 12 and 13: **Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.**

When we get dressed in the morning, do we think about clothing ourselves with compassion?

**13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**

When we have a hunger for God, it is going to change the way we interact with other people, because God cares about how we treat other people. We cannot love God without loving people, too. God doesn't want his children squabbling with each other and mistreating each other. A hunger for God will translate in our lives into compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and mercy.

**Verse 14: And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

But the love has to be defined by who God is, not *our* ideas about what love is.

I recently read a book called *unChristian*. It's done by the Barna research people, and they interviewed a statistically accurate sample of non-Christians in America, asking them about what they thought of Christians. And the basic answer was, those people don't act much like Jesus did.

You see, most non-Christians in this country have attended church at some point in their lives, and they know a bit about what the church teaches. They probably have a lot of misunderstandings, but they know that Christians are supposed to love other people, and they don't see it happening. We fall short of what we are supposed to be doing.

Maybe their expectations are not very realistic, but I think it is probably true that our performance isn't very good, either. So what do we do when the church teaches that love is important, but we don't live it out? Should we quit teaching? I don't think so. Should everybody just walk away from the church and do the best they can? No, I don't think that is much of a solution, either. We need help, and church is the place that can keep pointing us to the kind of help that we need – and that's God. As Paul says, we need to set our hearts on things above, to lift our sights a bit higher.

God loves us, and he is the source of genuine love, and he gives us strength to love. The human heart is deceitful, as likely to lead us astray as to lead us right. So we need to seek God first, to hunger and thirst for who he is, and all the good things will follow from that.

I'm Mike Morrison, with a Word From Our Sponsor.