

Hunger and thirst for God



Way In

This course will help you explore the ancient Christian spiritual practices that John Wesley called ‘the means of grace’. The ‘means of grace’ are God’s gifts to us, given so that we can know and serve God better. Wesley described them as ‘channels’ of God’s grace, and in this course we will be coming to the channels to learn how to receive more of God’s love in our lives.

In this first session, you will have time to meet your group and also to start to explore the spiritual practices that nourish Christian discipleship.



Connect

1. Take it in turns to finish the sentence:
“The thing I most look forward to when I get up is...”
2. In the last month, what has helped you feel close to God? Share this with the group.



Contemplate

1. Place a bowl of dry sand – or a wilting flower or plant – in the middle of the group. Listen to someone read Psalm 63.
2. Leave silence for members of the group to pray this prayer, based on the start of the psalm: *You, God, are my God and I am thirsty for more of you in my life.* Some may pray silently, but others may find it helpful to pray aloud.



Consider 1: Read Scripture

Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.
(Isaiah 55:1-2, 6) NIV

Jesus said to them: “I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,

and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

(John 6:35) NRSV

Wesley’s wisdom

Beware of quenching that blessed hunger and thirst, by what the world calls ‘religion’: a religion of form, of outside show... Let nothing satisfy you but the power of godliness, a religion that is spirit and life – you dwelling in God and God in you...
(John Wesley: Sermon on ‘Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount’ – Discourse II)



Consider 2: More about Spiritual Practices

- The Bible uses the powerful images of hunger and thirst to describe our longing for God. There is always more of God to know and more of God’s love to receive and share.
- The spiritual practices are the activities that help meet our soul’s hunger for God. They are the ways that we ‘come’ to God, that we ‘seek’ God and ‘eat and drink’ of God’s goodness.
- In this course we will explore how to grow in God’s love through:
 - prayer
 - scripture
 - fasting
 - fellowship
 - the Lord’s Supper.
- Wesley called these activities ‘means of grace’ – things we do to receive what only God can give.
- Wesley preached a famous sermon on the Means of Grace. In it he warned that we should always remember that the goal

of using the spiritual practices is *to know God and receive his love*. Just 'saying our prayers' is not the point: meeting God through prayer is! Just 'reading the Bible' is not the point: hearing God speak through Scripture is.

- If the *ultimate* goal is *not* simply to learn how to use the spiritual practices, but **to meet God** through using them, this requires us to exercise:
 - **faith** – *expecting* to meet and receive from God when we read Scripture, pray, meet together, fast and take Holy Communion!
 - **commitment** – giving regular time to the spiritual practices. No one else can develop your spiritual life or eat your spiritual food!
 - **hunger** – being spiritually hungry is a good thing – in fact we can be too easily satisfied and perhaps should seek to be more hungry!



Consider 3: Your response

Spend some moments of quiet considering your responses to the readings. Jot your thoughts in the boxes below.



What new thing have I seen about spiritual practices in this session?



What questions has this session raised?



What am I looking forward to in this course about spiritual practices?



In what sense am I 'hungry or thirsty' to grow in my walk with Jesus?



Consider 4: Sharing wisdom

Now share your thoughts, questions and insights together in the group.

- Take it in turns to share something from your personal reflection.
- Listen to one another carefully.
- Discuss the issues raised, sharing your knowledge, experience and wisdom together.
- Aim to help one another find out what you are each learning about the importance of the spiritual practices in following Jesus.



Commit 1: Reflect

Take a few moments to sit in silence together, reflecting on this session. How is God asking you to respond as an individual? These questions might help you think through your response:

- On a scale of 0-10, how hungry am I for God? What makes me hungry for God?
- If you were to write a prayer asking for God's help in using spiritual practices. what would it say?



Commit 2: Focus

Write one thing in the box below that you would like to take away from this session, either to do, or to think and pray about further.



MY ACTION POINT: In response to this session on spiritual practices, before the next meeting I would like to...



Commit 3: Pray

We bring you our meeting.
We bring you our thinking.
We bring you our believing.
We bring you our doubting.
We bring you our understanding.
We bring you our confusion.
But above all;
we bring you our hunger for your life in us,
and for our life in you.
Through this week, and through this course,
feed us Lord we pray.
Amen.