

STUDY 13

Expansion and Opposition

- 1. Can you recall a situation when you experienced a strong prompting from God and you just ‘knew’ that Jesus wanted you to do something?**

An opportunity for members of the group to share their experiences of being a Christian. This could develop into a useful discussion. Follow-up questions such as “...what happened next?” or “...did you act on the prompting immediately?” might help. In connection with the latter, if someone is not sure about the prompt, it is good to pray into it, to give God time to increase the conviction or to allow it to evaporate. People who are sensitive to God’s promptings generally say that it gets easier to recognise God’s speaking with time and obedience.

- 2. The disciples were slow to appreciate who Jesus really was. Like them, we can be slow to recognise what God is doing amongst us. Often it is when we look back that we appreciate these things. Can you think of examples in your own life or the lives of people you know which bear this out?**

Another opportunity for people to share their experiences. It might be worthwhile asking the group to consider what lessons they could take forward for the future from these recollections

- 3. Jesus felt the need of rest, although He didn’t always get it! Likewise those who serve God today need to build in opportunities for refreshment and restoration. What are the symptoms of burnout and how can it be avoided?**

Some symptoms are: feeling tired or drained most of the time; feeling helpless, trapped and /or defeated; feeling detached / alone in the world; having a cynical / negative outlook; self-doubt; procrastinating and taking longer to get things done; feeling overwhelmed.

Avoiding burnout: cultivate a balance of work and rest, with time for relaxation and restoration; share the load of responsibilities with others; manage time well with priorities and planning; recognise the symptoms and take steps before things get worse; take regular exercise; be accountable and take advice; allow God to guide and avoid being driven by self-imposed targets and goals.

Burnout can sometimes be part of a bigger picture. Some leaders feel the need to keep tight control over everything. But one of the main functions of a leader is to raise up other leaders to continue and extend the work of God. So stepping back and allowing others the opportunity to develop their gifting and skills is an opportunity to do that as well as ease up.

- 4. We can be spiritually hungry and physically hungry. Jesus is concerned to satisfy both. Imagine you were asked preach or teach on this subject. Put together a short outline with your main points. Think more widely than Mark’s gospel.**

There are many ways to approach this.

In some places, sometimes physical food is short. So, a starting point could be the *Lord’s Prayer* - ‘give us

this day our daily bread' (*Matthew 6:9-11*) and the thrust of the message would be to reassure listeners that God is concerned to meet physical needs as well as spiritual needs. In the same *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus spoke about not being anxious about our basic needs (*Matthew 6:25-34*). His teaching was that if we seek God's Kingdom first, then these other needs (like food and clothes) would come to us. One way to apply this could be to talk about sharing in the body of Christ.

Another approach could be to talk about the priority of finding and doing God's will. In *John 4:34*, Jesus said, **"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me."** This is a challenge to God's people about the issue of priorities. This is certainly a message for those prosperous nations where obesity is a significant problem.

An alternative might be to talk about God's word as spiritual food. It has milk for babes, bread and meat for those who are pressing on to maturity. The writer to the Hebrews stressed the need to go beyond the foundations and press on to maturity (*Hebrews 6:1-2*). Paul, when talking to the Ephesian elders, said that he had not failed to declare to them the whole counsel of God. He said that the *Word of God* would provide nourishment to enable them to be built up to receive their inheritance.

Another approach might be to talk about times of feasting and celebration, and times of fasting and mourning. There is a place for both in the Christian life.

Yet another approach would be to talk about going through dry times. There are seasons when Christians feel distant from God and life is tough. Perhaps they have little spiritual appetite. It is at these times, as with all seasons of suffering and trial, that we need to keep going and put down deep roots. Often such times are a prelude to a deeper work that God is doing in our lives.

When Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, it was to point to both God's love for the people and His power to care for them. These are truths that can be woven into any of the above approaches to the theme of spiritual and physical hunger.

5. What can we do to learn to be in tune with Jesus, knowing His mind?

There is no single, simple answer to this question. There is our part and there is His part. Trust Him. Obey Him. Feed on His Word. Pray. Seek His Kingdom. Listen with an open heart and mind. Forgive others and ask for forgiveness. Stay connected to God's people and be alert for opportunities to serve Him; these are a start.