

Crisis of Faith

“Why Isn’t My Life Turning Out How I Hoped?”

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Intro

Grab a Bible, go to John 6. Started a new series last week called Crisis of Faith; looking at times where faith in God seems difficult, confusing, implausible. Doubts loom large and God seems small and distant. I would guess many of us relate; Christian or not. Whether you’ve been through times of intense questioning or seasons of fog and spiritual depression. Some of you are there right now. And even if you aren’t, listen because 1.) Someday you will. And 2.) all of us have and will have friends who walk through these Crisis of Faith times. Last week we looked at Mary and Thomas dealing with intellectual doubts and having no category for a man resurrecting. Today we’re looking at whole different kind of crisis of faith we’ll see in John 6.

Read the passage/Tell the Story. Long story. Going to bounce through it to summarize.

John 6:1-15 - the crowd comes to Jesus because they had heard of the healing miracles he was doing.

John 6:2

And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

Jesus asks Philip where should we buy bread for all these people?

John 6:6

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

Philip says, we can't do that; we could never afford that. And if you grew up in church, you know what happens next: Jesus flexes a bit by taking a little boys Lunchable; and feeding the 5000, most scholars agree the crowd was 10-12k if you include women and children. And the crowd is amazed. Look how they respond in

John 6:14

“This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

Literally this dude must be from God! Fast forward a bit and the hungry crowd is back. They loved the free meal yesterday, so they’ve come back for more. Skip down to v. 25

John 6:25-27

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

Immediately, this feels like a very different interaction from the one Jesus had with this crowd yesterday. He cuts straight to the heart. “Let me tell you why you're really here. You're just hungry. You’re chasing your empty bellies. You haven’t come to listen to what I should say. You completely missed the point of my miracle yesterday. Which was to draw your attention to me. You've come to me just hoping for me to fulfill your appetites. That's not what I’m here for.

In other words, **you’ve not come for me. You’ve come for you.**

You're chasing something that won't last. What you need to be pursuing is what will last.

So, they basically say, "Okay, great. We'd love to not be hungry ever again. What do we have to do? What must we do to do the works of God?" And Jesus says, "Believe in the one God has sent." i.e. Himself. Remember v. 14 - The prophet come into the world! And verse 30 kills me:

John 6:30

So, they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Wait, for real? You just ate the miracle food He gave you YESTERDAY. That wasn't a good enough sign? Jesus again goes for the heart.

John 6:32

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 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 ...**41** So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven. "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'"

Now wait a second, five minutes ago in v. 14 ... He was the Prophet sent by God into the world. Now in v. 41 he's "just the carpenter's son"? By v. 52 they're arguing with Him. And by v. 66 - many walk away and no longer follow Him.

Here's the question: **What changed?**

And the answer is Jesus didn't give them what they wanted. That's the only the thing that changed. They go from of course Jesus is from God. I've eaten the bread He gives! To theological doubts about who He is. To arguing with Him and rejecting what He says. To walking away.

This is **disappointment doubt**. And it's unfortunately common. And it's not a logical doubt. The thought, "My life isn't going how I want it to go, so Jesus cannot be the Son of God." That's not a logical thought. But that doesn't mean it isn't powerful nonetheless.

In fact, as a pastor I've seen more people walk away from Jesus because of this than anything else. Jesus is not doing what I wanted him to do. My church is not what I want it to be. My city isn't all that great. My job isn't fulfilling. My sin hasn't disappeared, I'm still struggling.

People sometimes say they don't believe in God anymore, when the only thing that really changed is parenting your family is hard right now. You're tired of poopy diapers and your kids rebelling. Friendships and marriage with other sinners are hard work. Work is hard. The reality of your life just isn't what you hoped it would be. Disappointment doubt.

You need to know there are many things in our culture that make this specific crisis of faith so prevalent and dangerous. -->

Sociologist Charles Taylor calls the age we live in "the age of authenticity." It sounds nice. And there's some real good in it. We don't want fake. We don't want dishonest. We get riled up about #fakenews and #alternativefacts, right? But, Taylor goes on to say that the driving force in in this age of authenticity is **"expressive individualism:"** My personal authenticity and my personal happiness are the most important aspects of life and I must do whatever it takes to express them always. I must embody my truth and my

happiness at all costs. And this expressive individualism becomes what some call **the gospel of Self-fulfillment**.

Jen Pollock Michel - *Why living your truth bravely isn't enough* - "The gospel of self-fulfillment has been centuries in the making; ... happiness is our only duty today, self-betrayal our only sin. It's not simply that the lines of morality have blurred in modern times, making truth relative. It's not even that religious belief has waned. Rather, the good life has been radically redefined according to the benefit of the individual while the former measures of flourishing—God's glory, society's health, the family's well-being—have been displaced."

The fundamental ways we measure success and goodness for a whole society has shifted. What's best for you trumps everything else. In fact, we go so far as to believe that what is BEST for society is for you to be most happy and personally fulfilled.

And on top of that, philosophers have created a whole new category for an aspect of our culture that puts extra pressure on you when it comes to self-fulfillment: **hyper reality**.

Hyper Reality is an exaggerated presentation of life that exceeds and embellishes reality. In our media-drenched culture, it's a new electronic reality full of images and symbols that capture our imagination and convince us what life should be like. So, we walk down the checkout line at a grocery store and we see dozens of beautiful women on the magazine covers. Except that these women first went to a professional makeup artist to have blemishes hidden before being photographed by a professional photographer with perfect lighting who selected only the best pictures which still got digitally edited before publishing. So, the picture we're seeing isn't real. If that model saw that picture of herself, she'd think "Aww, I wish I looked like that."

And we can know this. But there is still an overall impact on what we think beauty is.

Same thing with pornography. It looks like a digital representation of real sex, but it's not actual reality. And girls and boys and men and women hooked on it start to become impacted by this hyper real idea that this is what sex should be. Sex should be available whenever I want it with anyone I want it with who will be willing to do whatever I want. And that's not real. At all.

In some ways, this is most of **social media**. In 2013, the New Yorker published an article; "How Facebook Makes You Unhappy". The whole point was that what we're looking at isn't real. Not really. It's what people want us to see... All smiles and posed pictures... Nobody posts the photo of the hole in the wall because they just threw a hairdryer at their spouse.

Philosopher Umberto Eco calls all this hyper reality "**the authentic fake**." Looks so authentically real... except that it's not. It's a mirage. And it's helping make us miserable.

All of this; expressive individualism + the gospel of self-fulfillment + hyper reality combines to set us up for constant and perpetual discontentment. It reinforces the constant sense of "I will be happy when _____." When my life looks like these lives on Instagram. When my house looks like this HGTV Pinterest house. When I live in this cooler city. When I get a promotion. The blank is filled in differently by everyone but it's this psychologically justified discontentment. Until _____ I won't be fulfilled and I won't really matter.

And this discontentment all boils down to "Life isn't really going how I wanted."

Sometimes it's more overt and easier to see it:

- A 35-year-old woman who isn't married yet and she wants to be married more than anything else.
- A 45-year-old man having a midlife crisis because he realizes he's been working for decades to make money for someone else and none of his boring life has any real lasting purpose.

- Sometimes it's a much more generalized, "I just don't really like my life..."
- My job is kind of meh.
- My spouse is kind of meh.
- My house is kind of meh.
- Work is hard.
- Parenting is hard."

And if we don't go to God with this discontentment, the pattern tends to be that guys you're going to find yourself getting angry; low grade frustration and impatience with the people around you. Girls you're going to tend to get anxious.

And then instead of taking this discontentment to God... what do we do? We go shopping. Maybe buying a new house, a new car, a new outfit will fulfill me.

Gregg Easterbrook - *The Progress Paradox* - Logically speaking, Americans should be happier – after all, income is up, deadly diseases are down and the average American thinks nothing of jetting around the country. While previous generations dreamed of a chicken in every pot, now we're striving for an SUV – or two – in every garage... Unipolar depression, the condition in which a person simply always feels blue, is today ten times as prevalent as it was half a century ago.

And Jesus says all of this is because we're chasing "food that perishes."

But, here's what we do here in the South, and what the crowds do in John 6, is we'll just sprinkle some Jesus sauce on this whole philosophy. We take the gospel of self-fulfillment and add God. So, the "*I should be happy*" story becomes, "*Actually, God should be equally and unequivocally committed to my happiness as I am.*"

So, we'll come to God because we want him to give us this good life. We'll start coming around church because we want to have a better marriage or so our kids won't get wild.

The message of Christianity gets misconstrued as "come to church, come to Jesus, and get what you've always wanted." Now, many of us would never say it that way... perhaps we'd never say it out loud... but it can become our very sneaky underlying belief system;

And the reason it's sneaky is that is not that God doesn't provide good things to us. He does! It's not that Jesus doesn't heal marriages, or want to help you with your kids. He does. But getting those things is not what Jesus is first and foremost about... Jesus is saying here in John 6 I didn't come first and foremost to give you bread. I didn't come to fulfill the deepest desires already in your hearts. I came change your heart so that you want me most of all.

I didn't come primarily to GIVE bread. I came to BE bread.

Any message that says "Come to Jesus and get your dream... Whether that's money, health, a job, a spouse, or even a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment." is a perversion of the gospel.

When you say, "I will obey God if..." Whatever is on the other side of that if is your real reward. It's your real god. And you're just using God to get it. That is all wrong. God does not step into our lives to help us achieve our goals. Becoming a Christian means we lay aside our goals and begin to serve God and work to pursue His goals.

But if we're not wary of this, these ideas can be really tempting because they preach a partial truth about God's love of providing for His children, but they don't tell the whole story. So, I need us to hear this simple truth Jesus says in vv. 35 and 47-48.

John 6:35, 47-48

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...**47** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. **48** I am the bread of life.

He says I'm the real bread of life. And if you get me inside of you, you'll never be hungry again. He's contrasting Himself with the food that perishes. He's contrasting Himself with hyper-reality! Jesus says "there's a type of food that perishes. There's a type of life that doesn't last. An experience of self-fulfillment that always leaves you hungering for another meal."

And then there's me. I'm the bread of life.

Get me inside of you and you won't need the gospel of self-fulfillment anymore because you'll actually be satisfied. Get me inside of you and you'll be able to start to see through the hyper-reality to what's eternally substantial and significant.

When you're feasting on the bread of life, your job can just be a job. It doesn't have to be the perfect fulfillment and expression of your truest identity. Your spouse can just be the sinful human that they are. Because Jesus is your source of perfect love. So, they don't have to be perfect. Singleness can just be the season of life that you're in. Sex can just be sex.

But this satisfaction will always be just out of reach if you don't understand what Jesus is saying here. Because he's saying, "If you're going to follow me, then I demand superior primacy in your life. Satisfaction in me must be greater than satisfaction in anything else. In Jesus' mind, there are only two types of bread. Himself; the eternally satisfying, soul-beautifying, unconditionally loving bread of eternal life. Or bread that perishes. And you've got to pick one.

This story ends mostly sad with a blip of hope.

John 6:66

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Lots of folks couldn't handle it. Couldn't handle Jesus not giving them the life they always wanted and fulfilling their desires.

Which let me just pause and say, if we're going to follow Jesus, we've got to consider that we're choosing to follow a guy who never got married, never had sex, never got rich, never owned a company. He did all his work perfectly and for it, He got demoted, rejected, betrayed and abandoned. He grew up in the small nothing rural town of Nazareth and most of his ministry happened in small fishing towns around the sea of Galilee. Finally made it to His destination city of Jerusalem where He got slaughtered.

If you think following that guy means you're going to have a picture-perfect family and always only have upward mobility with no demotions or life difficulties ever; it's just a strange conclusion. **I think we need to really pause and consider what it means when Jesus says, "come follow me."**

Following Jesus is not a means to the end of making all your dreams come true. Some of your deepest longings may go unmet. Your biggest dreams may never come true. Because Jesus never promised to give us the life we want. But He does promise to give us Himself.

John 6:67-69

67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" **68** Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, **69** and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Jesus asks, “Are you going to leave too?” And Peter is just, “Jesus where would we go?” He’s saying, You are the bread. You are the good life. You’re what I need. I have no other options.

The biggest difference in whether we keep trying to use Jesus to get other gifts from Him or whether we see Him like Peter, “Where else would we go?”

All of it comes down to do we see Him as useful or beautiful?

Many of us approach Jesus like we approach a tire iron. You know the long metal tool you use to get your tire off? What a useful tool! And it’s so useful I’m going to keep it in my trunk so whenever there’s an emergency I can pull it out. But until I need it, completely forgotten about. And after we’ve used it? Back in the trunk and forgotten about it until we need it again.

Thanks, useful Jesus tire-iron.

But Jesus, Son of God of the universe, holy in all His ways, gloriously seated at the right hand of the Father, precious blood poured out to pay for your sins and purchase you into His family. Jesus has no interest in just being a useful cosmic tire-iron for you. He intends for you to come to see Him as beautiful. Highest treasure. Bread of life.

Questions leading into Communion

- Will you give up everything to have him?
- Will you give up control to have him?
- Will you give up your dreams to have him?
- Will you give up your preferred sex life to have him?
- Would heaven still be heaven for you, if Jesus was not there?