

PROOF #1

TASTES AND DESIRES

*Taste and see that the LORD
is good. How happy is the man
who takes refuge in Him!*

PSALM 34:8

Do you remember a time when someone kept encouraging you to try some unusual kind of food, but you resisted because you didn't think you would like it (like sushi)? Then, you tried it, and WOW—it's now one of your favorite things! That can happen. But you've probably also tried a food, only to realize that it's even worse than you thought it would be. Unfortunately, that's been my experience more often than not.

Whether you are a picky eater like me, or you like just about everything, the truth is that our tastes—the things we crave—have a very powerful effect on our actions. Think about when you're seriously craving something in particular—like chocolate. Heaven help the person who gets in your way! How can a nice, easygoing girl turn into a crazy, get-out-of-my-way-now-or-else person? It's simple: cravings take over, and you lose control.

Cravings aren't just limited to food. We can crave attention, acceptance, love, and purpose, among other things. Like a strong craving for a certain food, our cravings for these things can feel all-consuming at times. That, my friends, is why we must look to Scripture and see what it teaches about these desires.

*Taste and see that the Lord
is good. How happy is the
man who takes refuge in Him!*

PSALM 34:8

Notice that Psalm 34 tells us to "taste and see." It does not say "taste and maybe you will see;" it simply says, "taste and SEE that the LORD is good." Unlike new foods, we don't have to worry about the Lord not living up to the hype. He will always fulfill and satisfy because that is who He is, and He can't go against His own character.

When you're walking with God, you will notice that your tastes change. You will begin to crave and feast on different things. You are motivated by different desires and tastes that will be evident in all areas of your life. Basically, you will turn from focusing on the things of the world to the things of God.

Over the next five days we will look at different "proofs" that you are becoming more like Christ. It's exciting to identify the ways that God is already working in your life and important to note the places where you can allow Him more access to change you. We'll cover a wide range of topics, from your relationships to your desires, words and deeds. We will focus on some ways you may have already been experiencing change as well as what to do if that change hasn't been happening. Get your taste buds ready because God NEVER disappoints.

...Now, time for a little sushi.



Hungry?

So rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, desire the pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow by it for your salvation, since you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 2:1-3



Have you ever been around a hungry infant? Babies are unhappy and unsettled until they get their precious bellies full. And even though they're tiny, they're going to let the world know when they are hungry—and that they are unhappy about it! When we were babies, milk was all our little bodies could handle. It was the main source of nutrients for our growth, development, and overall well-being in the early years of life.

Wouldn't it be really strange if one of your friends whipped out a baby bottle full of milk at the lunch table? Definitely. Milk sustained us as infants, but we move on to heartier foods as we grow. Just as babies can handle more solid foods as they develop, we, too, can handle more spiritual truths as we grow as believers.

For optimal spiritual growth, we should seek to feed ourselves the best, most pure forms of spiritual nutrients. 1 Peter 2:1-3 points out that we *need* pure spiritual milk to grow. And with time, we learn to *desire* pure spiritual milk because we've tasted that the Lord is GOOD and know nothing else can satisfy.



As we “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8), it should leave us hungry for MORE—more of the Lord in active relationship with Him through prayer, through His Word, and in corporate worship and Bible study with other believers.

You see, when we acquire a taste for God’s goodness, we begin to crave things that are pure and holy. As our cravings change, so do our motives. As we dwell in the presence of God and experience His goodness, our goal will be to obey Him and glorify His name.

Jesus promised us in Matthew 5:6, “Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed, for they will be filled.” Try not to focus on the word “blessed,” in this passage, but rather focus on the phrase, “for they will be filled.” The things we choose in our lives that please God will bring about fulfillment. Then, the blessings come when we’re satisfied and full of Him.

When we’re physically hungry, we become weak and lethargic until our bodies receive some form of nourishment. Similarly, we can become spiritually weak and lethargic when we’re not communicating with God and spending time in His Word. In turn, this hinders our effectiveness in the work the Lord has given us.

Spiritual weakness makes us vulnerable to the lies of the Enemy. We begin to believe that other things in this world can fulfill and satisfy us. However, we were made to crave God—to know Him more, love Him more, and obediently follow His lead. God Himself put that longing and desire for Him inside us. Revelation 7:16 says, “They will no longer hunger; they will no longer thirst...” You see, girls, He’s the only One who will fully satisfy. May we spend our lives in a constant quest for more of Him and what He has for us!

Let’s start off this week with the following question:

What are the things that you desire, long for, and crave in your life?

PRACTICE (JOURNAL & PRAY)

- ◆ Spend a few minutes journaling about the things that distract you from having a genuine hunger for the Lord. Be honest with yourself, not focusing on appropriate “church answers,” but instead on the truth. Then, jot down your answers to the following questions:
 - ◆ *Do you crave spending time in God’s Word? If not, why not?*
 - ◆ *Do you desire to be around other believers who lift you up and encourage you to pursue Christ? Explain.*
 - ◆ *Is your heart’s desire to fulfill your own plans or to fulfill God’s plans for your life? Explain. Why is it a better choice to live surrendered to His plans for you?*
 - ◆ *Why don’t the things of this world ever truly satisfy?*
- ◆ Confess to God the places and people you’ve looked to for fulfillment other than Him.



LINGER

- ◆ Reread: 1 Peter 2:1-3
- ◆ Dwell on: Psalm 34:8
- ◆ Memorize: Matthew 5:6



PROCEED

Use this section to keep moving forward as you apply the lesson to your daily life. Talk about it with someone you trust who can help you walk this spiritual journey with victory.

- ◆ Discuss your answers to the questions in the “Practice” section.
- ◆ Ask the Lord to help you crave Him above anything else—and He *will* help you. He wants you to turn your attention and affections to Him and ask.



Who Am I?

For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7b (ESV)



You've probably met people who initially seemed attractive for whatever reason, but your opinion about them changed after getting to know them. Upon seeing who they truly were, their "insides" weren't nearly as attractive as their outward, physical appearance. You probably learned at a young age that just because someone looks good on the outside doesn't mean his or her heart is beautiful. Still, we often judge people solely based on their looks, possessions, accomplishments, or social status. Think about the following questions:

What is the first thing you notice about a person when you meet them? Have you ever felt like you were only judged based on your appearance or accomplishments? Does anyone actually know the real you? Do you even know the real you?

There are definite dangers to placing too much focus on outward appearance. When we focus on attracting attention to a certain trait or accomplishment, we limit ourselves to being known by that alone. We're allowing people to identify us based on that characteristic instead of helping them focus on who we are—and more importantly—who God is. You see, God created us for a much greater purpose; to

bring Him glory. Exalting His name through our entire beings should be the primary purpose of our lives.

As believers, we house the Holy Spirit in our bodies. (How cool is that?) First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body." Our bodies were given to us for a much greater purpose than to simply attract attention for ourselves. But we often forget that truth. We use our bodies to gain the attention of others, which is such an empty feeling in the long run.

I remember shopping for jeans with a teenage friend one time. She was trying on pair after pair... you know the drill. With every pair she tried on, they got tighter and more revealing. She finally asked my opinion about her favorite pair. They happened to be a little too much of everything—too tight, too emphasizing, too revealing. I responded to her by saying, "Those are perfect if you want people to like you for the body parts those jeans emphasize."

We are being fed the lie that we will only find value and satisfaction if we look a certain way or have important accomplishments. But drawing attention to ourselves based on our outward appearance will never bring us the satisfaction we desire. And guess what? Our desire for attention shows that we are craving the approval of people over the things of God. We can so easily become consumed with promoting ourselves that we completely lose sight of seeking the Lord and finding fulfillment in Him.

As you seek the Lord, you will begin to care more about how you look to God and how you can use the body He's given you to glorify Him. You will begin to understand that when people notice you for what's inside, then God gets that glory because He is the One who makes anything good in us.

Look at what 1 Samuel 16:7 says is important to God—the condition of our hearts. Hair, makeup, flawless skin, and a perfect body have no eternal significance. God is concerned with what's on the inside. And we should be, too.

PRACTICE (JOURNAL & PRAY)

- ◆ In your journal, write down the first things you judge someone on. Then, answer the following question: How would it make you feel to be judged based on anything other than who you are?
- ◆ What evidence do you see in your life that you spend more time trying to attract attention to your appearance instead of your character?
- ◆ How does it make you feel to know that God cares more about your heart than your outward appearance? What do you think constitutes a beautiful heart?
- ◆ Write out a confession of any misplaced cravings you've discovered. Pray for eyes to see as God sees and for wisdom to be more focused on who you are over how you look.



LINGER

- ◆ Reread: 1 Samuel 16:7
- ◆ Dwell on: Psalm 34:10
- ◆ Memorize: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20



PROCEED

Use this section to keep moving forward as you apply the lesson to your daily life. Talk about it with someone you trust who can help you walk this spiritual journey with victory.

- ◆ According to Psalm 34:10, what will you experience when you seek the Lord, rather than the approval of others?
- ◆ Discuss specific things you can do this week to intentionally focus on using your whole self to point others to God and His glory.
- ◆ Hold each other accountable to focus less attention on the outward appearance and more on the heart.



Words & Deeds

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17



As a child I constantly heard my parents say, “Your actions speak louder than words.” Now that I am a parent myself, I often use that same statement with my children because it’s so true. It means nothing to me if my kids say they’ve done something just to get me off their backs, but their actions can’t back up those words.

It makes me think of my heavenly Father and how He must view me as His child. I am someone who often says one thing and does another. “*Actions do speak louder than words,*” I imagine God saying as He looks at my life. It’s not enough to offer lip service to God because He sees our hearts.

I don’t know if you’ve figured this out yet or not, but our words also carry a lot of power. Luke 6:45 says, “A good man produces good out of the good storeroom of his heart. An evil man produces evil out of the evil storeroom, for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.” The mouth will speak what spills over from the heart.

I don’t think we can talk about this topic enough, especially as young ladies—actually all women should be talking about the power of words. As females, we tend to talk... about everything. But all too

often talk can become toxic. However, when we pursue “even more” of what God has for us in our individual journeys with Him, our words—and the way we use them—will change.

We don’t begin speaking a different language or pick up a new accent, but what we talk about, who we talk about, and how we talk will change. And the words we use shouldn’t just change because we call ourselves “Christians” and follow an exhaustive list of do’s and don’ts. Our words change because God has changed our hearts; we have been made new! What we once pursued as a means to satisfy is no longer enough. Our hearts are different. We are different. Therefore, our words become different as well.

Remember when we talked yesterday about the Holy Spirit dwelling in our bodies? God has given us His Holy Spirit to convict, lead, and train us in godliness. When we’re focusing on pleasing Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us, we will no longer feel OK about talking about that girl on the soccer team, using bad language as a means to fit in with a certain crowd, or embellishing stories in order to appear more interesting. When we live an “even more” life, our words hold importance. As Colossians 3:17 says, “...whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Our words should reflect Christ to others.

Our words aren’t the only things that change as a result of Christ in us. When our hearts are surrendered to our Savior, our actions change as well. As we discussed earlier, our actions hold more validity than just our words. The proof of our spiritual maturity is seen in the way we live our lives. There’s something that is different about us from the inside-out. Through our words and actions, we love and serve better.

We should always be striving to become more—more of who He desires for us to be both in word and deed.

PRACTICE (JOURNAL & PRAY)

- ◆ In your journal, do a brief self-examination of your life. Do your words and deeds match up? If not, why not?
- ◆ Would your friends and peers say you have integrity? Why is integrity important in reflecting Christ to others?
- ◆ How are you using your words to point others to Christ? In what ways have you fallen short? Explain.
- ◆ How can you and your friends hold each other accountable concerning your words and actions?
- ◆ Spend some time with the Lord. Confess where you’ve fallen short, and ask Him to help you use your words and actions to glorify Him.



LINGER

- ◆ Reread: Colossians 3:17
- ◆ Dwell on: Luke 6:45 (MSG)
- ◆ Memorize: Luke 6:45



PROCEED

Use this section to keep moving forward as you apply the lesson to your daily life. Talk about it with someone you trust who can help you walk this spiritual journey with victory.

- ◆ Discuss areas in your life where you tend to say one thing and do another.
- ◆ Why are our actions so important if we are going to exhibit a faith that is more than just words?

DAY
4

Relationships

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. Proverbs 13:20 (ESV)



Have you ever had a pair of shoes that you just loved? They were your favorite go-to shoes for just about anything, and then one day they didn't fit any more? It's a heartbreaker when reality hits that those shoes that you LOVE just don't work any more. What could possibly happen to make you relegate something you had so enjoyed to the next bag of Goodwill® donations? It's usually as simple as the fact that your foot grew! That's a normal thing.

Although you will eventually stop growing physically, we should NEVER stop growing spiritually. This is exactly what we have been talking about in our quest to live in the "even more" mind-set of a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

The past couple of days you've investigated some specific areas in which your tastes and desires are changing. Once your words, actions, tastes, and even desire for attention change, you will start to notice that some of the people you spend time with don't fit right any more. You'll seek different friends and a different community. In fact, an important part of continuously growing in your faith is

surrounding yourself with other believers who can help you grow, hold you accountable, and encourage you to continually follow God. In other words, you'll want to be around people who are also being changed by God.

That doesn't mean that you necessarily have to get rid of all your friends or break up with your boyfriend. But it does mean you shouldn't be surprised to notice some changes in your desire for certain types of relationships.

For instance, since your words have been changing, you may feel uncomfortable hanging with people who spend the majority of their conversations tearing people down, gossiping about others, or being negative all the time. This is a good thing! You also will be more uncomfortable with guys who are only interested in you because of your physical attributes and who could care less about your relationship with God. That's *very* good!

Scripture warns us about what happens when we aren't careful with the people we are in relationship with. Proverbs 13:20 says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (ESV). As we crave more of God, we'll gravitate toward the people who reflect His character.

Be thankful that you are changing. It's a beautiful thing that happens as you grow more and more like Jesus. Notice what Proverbs says: "the companion of fools WILL suffer harm." It doesn't say that we *might* suffer harm; it assures us that when we surround ourselves with "fools"—those who aren't growing into the image of Christ—we will suffer at some point.

It's about way more than just trying to squeeze into shoes that are now too small. Your relationships directly affect your life, and the consequences can be HUGE! Choose to learn and grow with those who are also showing proofs of God's work in their lives.

PRACTICE (JOURNAL & PRAY)

- ◆ Take a few minutes to evaluate your main relationships and note where you've seen changes already. Where do you need to see more changes?
- ◆ Who are the five people you are closest to right now (excluding family)?
- ◆ Do these individuals point you to Christ? Explain.
- ◆ Pray that God will show you clearly how each of your relationships need to change. Ask for opportunities to share your stronger faith with those who you feel differently about because of your growing relationship with the Lord.



LINGER

- ◆ Reread: Proverbs 13:20
- ◆ Dwell: Psalm 1:1-2
- ◆ Memorize: Psalm 1:1



PROCEED

Use this section to keep moving forward as you apply the lesson to your daily life. Talk about it with someone you trust who can help you walk this spiritual journey with victory.

- ◆ Discuss Proverbs 13:20. What two approaches to relationships does this verse compare?
- ◆ What does it mean to delight "in the LORD's instruction"?
- ◆ Take some time to share any relationship changes that need to be made. Pray for each other to have the strength to follow God's leading in these situations.



Just not feelin' it?

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:1-5 (ESV)



Can we just be real? We know some of you may be reading through this first week and saying, *Hold up! This isn't for me. This is just too much.* We want you to know that it's OK. Rest assured that we're all works in progress. All we're asking is that you'll hang with us over these next 40 days. Push through. Seek what the Lord wants to do in your heart and life and watch Him show up!

We don't have a magical equation or three-step program that gives you the fire and passion to live for Christ. But we do have the knowledge that our God is good and true. He is alive, active, and in the business of transforming hearts and lives from the inside out. He just wants us to yield to His will and be open to His plans and purposes for our lives. To arrive at this place of surrender, we must stop seeking the things of this world to fill the void in our lives and look to Him instead.

If you're cravings in life haven't really changed since giving your heart and life to Jesus Christ, I challenge you to dive into today's passage of Scripture. Colossians 3:1-5 teaches us how to put to death our struggles in this life.

The first thing is to **seek**. Seek the things above, the forever things, the stuff that matters. Don't focus solely on the temporary. Seek after the things that glorify Christ and will last for all eternity.

Next, we need to **set**. Set our minds on things above, not on earthly things. We must get to the point where we believe wholeheartedly that Jesus is enough—where we focus on God, not on the things of this world or on Jesus plus something else. It's all about Jesus!

When we seek Him and set our minds on things above, He becomes our primary focus and the object of our affections. When this happens, our lives begin to look more like His. What we do, how we talk, where we go, who we hang out with, what we choose to partake in—it all changes. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come." Our old selves have died to something better—JESUS in US!

In Colossians 3:5, we are challenged to put to death our earthly desires and replace them with virtues that reflect Christ's character. It's a choice we must make, but we can't do this in our own strength. We must seek the Lord to change our hearts and help us in this process. He promises us over and over again in His Word that when we seek Him, He will be found, and He will help us. When we are secure in Christ, our lives will reflect the very life of Christ in us.

So, here is a closing challenge for you today and for this week—pray! That's it. Ask God for to help you desire a deeper relationship with Him. If you're still fighting the desires of your flesh and this world, ask God to strengthen you and help you stand strong. Saturate your mind with His Word and surround yourself with other believers who hold you accountable. I guarantee when you've tasted and seen that the Lord is SO GOOD, you won't go back to your old self. You will have new tastes, and your cravings will be for the Lord.

PRACTICE (JOURNAL & PRAY)

- ◆ Close today by reading Philippians 4:8-9.
- ◆ List specific things you are struggling with as you work through this week's sessions.
- ◆ Be honest with the Lord. He sees your heart, and He knows what you're struggling with. Lay your burdens and struggles before God today, and let Him help create within you a hunger and craving for more of Him.



LINGER

- ◆ Reread: Colossians 3:1-5
- ◆ Dwell: Philippians 4:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:17
- ◆ Memorize: Colossians 3:2



PROCEED

Use this section to keep moving forward as you apply the lesson to your daily life. Talk about it with someone you trust who can help you walk this spiritual journey with victory.

- ◆ Be honest with the Lord if you're in a season where you're "just not feelin' it" in your relationship with Him. Maybe you're craving the things of this world over the things of God. Share your struggles with a trusted mentor, accountability partner, or friend.
- ◆ Holding each other accountable when we struggle is such a healthy thing. When we begin to slide back into living out of "our flesh," we need people to pray with us and pull us back to the Word.
- ◆ List the names of two people you give permission to be totally honest with you about your spiritual walk.