What Are You Hungry For?

Attention, connection, and the hunger underneath.

Snacks and Meals

You can eat a whole bag of chips and still be hungry. Your stomach is full, but your body is still waiting for something it actually needs. Snacks fill space. Meals feed you.

The same thing can happen with people. You can spend an evening collecting likes, views and comments and end the night lonelier than you began. Something filled the space. Something else was still missing.

THINK IT THROUGH

After an hour of scrolling, how do you usually come away? After an hour with a good friend? What's the difference?

Attention Is Not Connection

Love Is a Habit draws a line between two things that look alike. Attention is being noticed. Connection is being known. Attention can come from a thousand strangers in a minute. Connection usually comes from a few people, slowly, over years.

Attention asks, “Do you see me?” Connection asks, “Do you know me, and will you stay?” The first is a snack. The second is a meal. We need to be seen, but being seen by many is not the same as being loved by some.

THINK IT THROUGH

Who in your life really knows you, including the parts you don’t post? How did that connection grow?

Built to Keep You Scrolling

The apps on your phone are not neutral. Many are designed by smart people whose job is to keep your eyes on the screen as long as possible, because your attention is what they sell to advertisers. The endless feed, the little red dots, the pull-to-refresh: these are not accidents.

That doesn't make phones evil or the people who use them weak. It means it's worth asking who benefits when you can't put it down. A tool that serves you is good. A tool that is quietly using you deserves a second look.

THINK IT THROUGH

Which app is hardest for you to put down? What do you think it was designed to do to you?

What the Research Says

In *The Anxious Generation* (2024), the social psychologist Jonathan Haidt argues that when childhood moved onto smartphones in the early 2010s, rates of anxiety and depression among teens rose sharply. He points to lost sleep, lost play, lost time face to face, and constant comparison.

Not every researcher agrees. Some say the evidence shows a link, not proof that phones caused the rise, and that other things changed too. That's an honest debate, and it's still going on. But almost everyone agrees on this: time spent truly with people, in person, is good for us, and many young people are getting less of it.

THINK IT THROUGH

From your own life, what do you think phones add, and what do they take away?

A Hole Shaped Like Something

People often say there's a "God-shaped hole" in every heart. The phrase is usually credited to Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician of the 1600s. He didn't use those words, but he did write something like it: that people try to fill an endless emptiness inside them with everything around them, and none of it works, because only something infinite can fill it.

The Bible says God has "set eternity in the human heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). If that's true, it explains a lot. It explains why the next notification never quite satisfies. We may be pouring small things into a space made for something much larger.

THINK IT THROUGH

What have you tried to fill an empty feeling with? What happened when you did?

Feeding the Real Hunger

If attention is a snack, what is the meal? Love Is a Habit points to the things that feed the heart: real friends who stay, family meals, serving someone who can't pay you back, quiet time with God, being outside, making something with your hands.

None of these are as fast as a feed. That's part of why they work. Connection takes time because people are worth time. The deepest hungers are fed slowly.

THINK IT THROUGH

Which of these feeds you most? When was the last time you made room for it?

A Knock at the Door

There's a picture in the last book of the Bible. Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Notice what he offers. Not a broadcast. A meal. Sitting at the same table. The God who made the hunger offers connection, not attention: to know you and to stay.

THINK IT THROUGH

What would it mean to you that God wants to know you, not just see you?

Try an Experiment

Here's a small test. For one week, trade some of your screen time for one real connection each day: a phone call instead of a text, a walk with a friend, a meal with your family with the phones in another room.

You don't have to quit anything forever. Just notice. Pay attention to how you sleep, how you think about yourself, and how close you are to people at the end of the week.

THINK IT THROUGH

What would be the hardest part of that experiment for you? What do you guess you would learn?

Look Back

Here's the path we walked. Snacks fill space; meals feed you. Attention is being noticed; connection is being known. Many apps are built to keep your attention, so it's worth asking who benefits. Haidt links phone-based childhood to rising teen anxiety, and others debate how much. Pascal wrote of an emptiness only something infinite can fill. Real hunger is fed slowly, by people and by God, who offers a meal at the table.

If you feel alone even with a full feed, you're not strange, and you're not alone in that. Tell a friend, a parent, a youth leader or a counselor. Find a group that meets in person, like a church, club or team, and keep showing up.

THINK IT THROUGH

Who is one person you could spend real time with this week? When will you ask them?

Sources

A theme of Love Is a Habit (forthcoming): attention is not connection. Retold here in our own words.

Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (2024). For a critical view, see Candice L. Odgers, "The Great Rewiring: Is Social Media Really Behind an Epidemic of Teenage Mental Illness?" *Nature* 628 (2024).

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (published 1670), the fragment on the "infinite abyss" (numbered 425 in the Brunschvicg edition, 148 in Lafuma). The phrase "God-shaped hole" is a later summary, not Pascal's words.

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