

What's wrong with me? Gluttony

Message for Sunday, October 29, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23 and more

Children's Message: from Galatians 5:22-23, fruit of the Spirit.

I have two balloons with happy faces painted on them. They both look pretty happy, don't they. Both of these are Christians, and that's easy to understand. God is so good to us, so kind and loving, that it's just natural for us to be happy.

But what happens when trouble comes? When someone calls you a nasty name? When someone tells lies about you? When your parents won't let you do something you really want to do? Do you lose control and have a big fit? Let's see how these two balloons react when the heat is on.

This candle represents bad things happening in our lives. What's going to happen to this balloon when I hold it over the flame? Right, it's going to burst. Let's watch and see! *And it does.*

Now let's try this balloon. Hold it over the flame and... nothing happens. Hold it there longer and... still nothing happens.

This balloon doesn't explode with frustration and anger. It has self-control. What's different about this balloon?

Answer: It has some water inside it. The water absorbs the heat, so the balloon doesn't melt and break.

That water in the balloon is like the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit is God living in us. He helps us to keep our joy, even when bad things happen. He helps us to have self-control.

Thank-you, God!

Message: "What's wrong with me? Gluttony"

1) **Gluttony: not knowing when is enough**

Have you heard about those restaurants which dare patrons to try eating their monster meal? One of the most famous is the Big Texan Steak Ranch in Amarillo, Texas. They offer a 72 ounce steak—that's four and a half pounds of meat!—plus a

shrimp cocktail, baked potato, salad, and a roll. It costs \$72, but if you can eat the whole thing, by yourself, in under an hour, it's free. Lots of people can't resist the offer of free food, so they have a regular stream of people ordering the platter. The vast majority don't make it, so it's a great money-maker for the restaurant.

Of those who are successful, most do it in just under an hour. Thirty-six people have done it in half an hour. But the record holder is Molly Schuyler. In 2015, she set the record by eating one of these gigantic meals in 4:18. But that's not all: she immediately ate a second meal in 7:29. And a third in 8:13. Three unbelievably large meals in 20 minutes!

Now get this: Molly Schuyler is 5' 7" and weighs 125 pounds. She wears size 8 clothing. Not exactly the image you were expecting, I'll bet. She works on the competitive eating circuit. That's right: scarfing down these monster meals is her *job*! She makes her living from the prize money she wins at eating competitions. She won \$5,000 for those three steak dinners.

In this series of messages, we're looking at the ancient list of Seven Deadly Sins. So far we've covered pride and envy. Today we're looking at gluttony. Gluttony is a huge problem, at least here in North America.

What kind of a world do we live in where gluttony is glorified? There are TV shows dedicated to the theme of monster meals, and people win thousands of dollars for stuffing their faces.

Gluttony is the excessive desire to consume more than what one requires. Gluttony is about over consumption. This includes more than just food, though. It could be the desire to have another yet pair of shoes, or spending hours watching YouTube videos, or even work—you've heard of workaholics. It could be just about anything, where you are pulled to have more and more, to do more and more, beyond what you need.

Some people may ask, "Why is gluttony even a sin? It's nowhere near as bad as murder or rape or robbery. It doesn't hurt anyone else." Interestingly, Pope Gregory the Great, who collected the list that we call the Seven Deadly Sins back in the fourth

century, felt gluttony was the worst of all sins. He wrote, "Unless we first tame the enemy dwelling within us, namely our gluttonous appetite, we have not even stood up to engage in spiritual combat." In other words, gluttony is the door through which a host of other sins enter our lives. The other Deadly Sins are similar to that.

2) Healthy Virtue: Self-control

But we also want to look at the positive, the Healthy Virtue alternative to gluttony: self-control.

Galatians 5:22-25, New Century Version:
The Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

The wonderful paradox here is that we gain self-control by surrendering our lives to God. Then the Holy Spirit lives in us, and gives us the power to live in God's way.

3) How to tame gluttony

a) Surrender your life to God

This is the first step. Everything that follows here is strategy. But without God's power working with us, we're fighting a losing battle.

b) You must find and admit your areas of gluttony

Maybe food isn't your problem. It might be something else. Pick one of the below, and focus on that for the rest of this message.

- Food
- Shopping
- Environment
- Alcohol and other drugs
- Smoking
- Entertainment
- Idleness
- Work
- Other... What is your weakness?

You see, the first step in taming gluttony is identifying it.

Psalm 32:5, New Living Translation:
Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

See the word "confessed" and then the word "forgave." Draw a line between them. When you confess, that opens the door for God's forgiveness and healing to flow into your life. As long as we live in denial and try to hide our sin, it only gets worse. The hole we're in just gets deeper and deeper. But when we confess our sin, then God can help us replace that gluttony with self-control.

c) Ask for God's wisdom before you consume

What do you think: if you have a problem area in your life, and you pray before doing that thing, will that make a difference in your life? Of course it will! Gluttony is our life in a state of disorder. Prayer helps to restore order. Prayer invites God into our lives, to guide and direct us.

We often fall into gluttony because there is something about ourselves that we are not happy with. We might over eat because we are lonely, because we are depressed. We often over shop because of issues of self esteem, the inability to deal with our emotions like anger. We might overwork because we feel we're not good enough, and we have to prove our worth. Gluttony covers up another hurt. Until you are aware of what gluttony is hiding in your life, you are never going to deal with the root issue. And God wants to deal with the root issue. He wants to deal with the spiritual issue, the heart issue.

You see, gluttony is ultimately a spiritual issue and therefore, it requires a spiritual solution. One of the steps toward that solution is to pray before you act.

d) Set a limit for "enough"

This is another key to overcoming gluttony. "I need to buy a new outfit, and this is the most I will pay. I may see something really nice ones on sale for forty dollars more, but I won't even try them on. This is my limit."

The book of Proverbs in the Bible tells us what happens when go beyond healthy limits.

Proverbs 23:20-21, Good News Bible:

Don't associate with people who drink too much wine or stuff themselves with food. Drunkards and gluttons will be reduced to poverty.

The Bible never says it's wrong to have a drink. The problem is when we go over the limit. Going to

the casino is OK, as long as you set a limit and walk out when it's gone. It's a dumb way to spend your money, but it's OK. The same is true with all kinds of things.

e) Go on a fast

You may have heard about fasting, but don't really know much about it. Fasting is going without something, for a period of time, in order to grow spiritually. It's a spiritual discipline which has been practised in the church for centuries.

Jesus expected his disciples to fast; it was a regular part of their spiritual practice.

Matthew 6:16-18, New Living Translation:

"When you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, who try to look pale and dishevelled so people will admire them for their fasting. I assure you, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will suspect you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in secret. And your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you."

Whatever it is that you overdo, take a break from it. If it's food, well clearly you need food to stay healthy, so perhaps just fast for one meal or one day a week.

NOTE: Fasting is *not* a technique to lose weight! That's not its purpose. The purpose is to exercise self-control, and gain discipline in that area of your life. You take the time that you would normally spend getting ready for a meal, eating it, and cleaning up—take that time, and spend it in prayer, and meditating on some passage in the Bible.

Some people find they spend way too much time watching TV or watching YouTube videos. You can fast from that. Maybe you overwork, you're a workaholic. Fast from work for a day. Actually, we're supposed to do that already: take one day a week as a Sabbath, when you take a break from work.

4) The answer is in God, not in me

It's easy for our defence against gluttony to turn into something which is focussed purely on me: what *I* eat, what *I* do, and so on. So we need to keep going back to the fundamental principle: having God in our lives is the real focus, the real answer.

Gluttony is trying answer a spiritual problem with a physical solution. That will never work. Your deepest needs are not going to be met through food or TV or drink or anything physical. They are only met through our relationship with God.

1 Corinthians 10:31, New Living Translation:

Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, you must do all for the glory of God.

Next Steps:

-) Say "Thank-you" to God that you're not on your own in this struggle. God is with you, there to help you.
-) When you are considering having more or doing more, stop and pray: "Do I really need this? Or is this a sign that I'm really hungry for something else?"
-) Exercise self-discipline. Just like physical exercise, we get stronger the more we do it.