

From Gluttony to the Joy of Delayed Gratification

Pastor Tom
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There's a show on TV that I come across every once in a while when I'm at my fitness club. The bike I ride has a TV you can watch while you peddle. This show airs when I work out. It's called "My 600 lb. life". It follows the lives of people who weigh 600 pounds or more. It describes itself like this. "Telling powerful stories, it follows medical journeys of people as they attempt to save their own lives. The featured individuals – each weighing more than 600 pounds – confront lifelong emotional and physical struggles as they make the courageous decisions to undergo high risk surgeries and drastically change their appearance. They hope to reclaim their independence, mend relationships with friends and family and renew feelings of self-worth."¹

I've watched a few segments of this show. It does a good job of NOT making fun of the people. Instead it documents the real struggles they face. Many have lost their independence. They need others to do shopping for them. They depend on others to drive them around. They are often confined to their own houses or apartments or even bedroom as they try to face this challenge in their lives.

The show has been on air for 7 years. You can look back over its history, to see the names of people featured and where they are today. All weighed around 600 pounds when they first appeared on the show. But some weighed more. One young man named Sean Milliken weighed 919 pounds at age 26. He lost nearly 400 pounds to get to 548 but sadly died at age 29. But there's also a Melissa Morris who at 31 weighed 653 pounds but today weighs 240.

There's some amazing stories.

Yet when I finish my time on that exercise bike I can turn off that show and go back to my life. And I can think "those people's issues are far from mine. That has nothing to do with me."

Many of us might have the same reaction when we hear about the sin we're talking about today – Gluttony. But if we look a little deeper we might discover that the root of this sin shows up in ways we might never have thought about.

This is the second in a series of 7 sins that we will talk about over the next weeks. It continues our focus on God's transforming work in our hearts. I gave you the history of the 7 deadly sins in last week's message if you want to go to our website to catch up on that. We started by talking about pride and God's ability to transform proud people into humble God-centered people. Today we look at gluttony.

¹ <https://www.tlc.com/tv-shows/my-600-lb-life/about>

So today we are going to look at 3 questions. One – What is Gluttony according to the Bible? Two - What is the problem with gluttony or gluttonous attitudes? Three – How do we cooperate with God’s transforming work in this area of our lives?

What is gluttony? Today we think it solely refers to overeating. And we can conclude that if we don’t grossly overeat, this has nothing to do with us. We need to recognize that our eating habits can reveal what’s going in our hearts and minds. An out of control desire for food can lead to major issues. We see this even in the Bible. “Really. Like what?” How about the fall of humankind? Is that a big enough issue? The fall played itself out through the food desire of Adam and Eve. But it wasn’t really the food that was the problem. It was what Eve believed the food promised. Eve saw the food represent much more than satisfaction for her physical hunger. Genesis 3:6 states “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her.” Johnathan Bowers, in his chapter on Gluttony in the little book Killjoys, writes “In the moment of temptation, the fruit embodied Eve’s deepest cravings for pleasure, beauty and wisdom.” Eating the food was the means by which Adam and Eve sinned. But it was the desire for something much deeper that led to sin.

So food can serve as a means to wrongly fulfill a desire. One way this happens is gluttony. A common dictionary definition would say it’s simply “**Excessive eating and drinking.**” But that only deals with one form of gluttony and it only deals with the symptom. One way gluttony shows up is through excessive eating or drinking. Tim Keller argues that gluttony had a much deeper definition that gets to the root of things. **Gluttony is the inability to live a life of delayed gratification** or satisfaction or fulfillment of a desire. Remember a desire is “the feeling that accompanies an unfulfilled state”. We talked about desires back on January 20. We learned that many of our desires are natural but distorted by sin. So we must invite God to reorder our desires and learn to satisfy them in God honoring ways. One common aspect of God-honoring fulfillment of desires is a willingness to delay satisfaction until it’s appropriate to satisfy them.

But a gluttonous attitude says “I don’t have to wait to satisfy my desires. I can satisfy them now. I deserve to satisfy myself now.” When put this way, we quickly see how gluttony involves much more than food or drink. It’s not just excessive eating or drinking. It can be excessive shopping, spending, drugs, escape activities, video gaming, sex, vacationing, TV, partying, gambling, thrill seeking, pleasure seeking. Tim Keller writes “when the love of pleasurable

physical sensation dominates, it is the deadly sin of gluttony.” I would add that when the need for some sort of emotional satisfaction dominates, we can enter into gluttony. This means friends, that in some way, all of us can fall into a form of gluttony.

One of my struggles is later evening snacking. Sometimes, it will be around 930 or 10 at night. And it’s nearing bed time. But all of sudden I feel like I need to eat something. I look for crackers or Doritos. I love Doritos. Or some other snack. But Lori knows about this tendency in me. So do you know what she does? She hides the Doritos. I know that she’s doing it for my good but at that moment I am not very happy about it. Sometimes I find the Doritos stash or crackers and then eat a bunch. But why? I’m not really hungry. It’s almost become a routine of celebration or reward that I came through another day. But the next morning when I wake up, my stomach feels a bit off because this food sat in it all night. Gluttony is an inability to delay gratification. So in that case, I am a glutton. I act like a glutton.

But you might still say, is it really that big of a deal? If it were such a problem, the government would make buffets illegal. Well let’s turn to the Bible for some answers. The first passage is Proverbs 23:19-21 (Page 471).

Proverbs 23:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ Hear, my son, and be wise,
and direct your heart in the way.

²⁰ Be not among drunkards
or among gluttonous eaters of meat,

²¹ for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,
and slumber will clothe them with rags.

What is the problem with gluttony?

It can lead to economic (financial) instability which leads to many other problems. The drunkard and glutton will come to poverty. A person who spends a lot of money on food and drink can cause financial problems for themselves or family. This can especially happen with excessive drinking. You can do a lot of damage when you’re drunk. You can cause accidents that lead to lawsuits. You can harm relationships that lead to family break up. All have huge financial costs. So excessive eating or drinking can lead to financial hardship. But it can also show up in other areas. Excessive shopping or spending can put families in debt for years. Excessive pursuit of entertainment or vacation can burn up savings or rainy day funds. Gluttonous behavior can lead to unnecessary financial hardship.

Another problem is it seeks happiness directly but often results in us feeling worse later. Proverbs 21:17 states “He who loves pleasure will become a poor man. He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.” So in this verse we again see the financial impact. But notice the person “loves pleasure.” So they aim to do something for the sole purpose of experiencing pleasure or happiness. They may take whatever short cut is necessary to get there. This almost always comes with a negative cost. So say you want to experience happiness and you go to one of these six to get it. Drinking, going to a party, having sex, watching TV or gaming late at night, snacking and buying something. So you go to one of these six with the purpose of experiencing pleasure or happiness immediately.

So you get a drink and you might experience some immediate happiness or pleasure. But things are not going well in your life. So the next time you get 2 drinks. Then you get 3 and 4 and 5. You get immediate “happiness.” But you might lose your job because you can’t show up to work. Or your family has to deal with the consequences of your behavior when you’re drunk.

Say you’re in school. It’s hard. There’s a big test coming up. But you want to experience pleasure. So instead of studying, you decide to go to a party. You get some immediate happiness. But this becomes a pattern and you fail the course or degree.

You see on movies and you hear about friends who are sleeping around and having so much fun. So Instead of waiting until marriage, you decide I’m going to do it now. You may experience some immediate “happiness” or “gratification. But then it doesn’t work out with that person. You carry that intimate experience or brokenness into the next relationship and the next one and into your marriage. Or you don’t quite go to the extent of actually sleeping around but you mess around with porn. It’s like you have multiple fantasies. Then you have to deal with the fallout from all of that if you get married.

Instead of shutting off the TV or Computer or Device you game or watch TV late into the night. You experience some immediate happiness. But then you’re sleep deprived the next day. You don’t function well. You have a lack of patience for the daily irritants of life

Instead of saying no to snacking, you say yes. You may get immediate satisfaction. But you may feel worse later – or gain weight that was lost. Or you’re out shopping and you see a TV, Couch, car, coat or dress on sale and buy it on

credit. You get immediate “happiness.” But you couldn’t afford it. It turns out to be not as “great” as promised. Yet you have to spend 6 months paying it off, or 6 years.

We might say, “Yes all of that is true. But at least we experience some happiness for a few moments or days or weeks. That’s better than nothing.” But living God’s way promises a much deeper happiness than the passing pleasures of a moment or a day. God’s way involves living responsibly and then enjoying fruits of that. So happiness is not an end it is a result of living rightly. You show up for work at your best can lead to job promotion, progress and further opportunities. Instead of going to the party, studying hard generally leads to passing courses and going to another level which can bring more opportunities. Waiting for intimacy until marriage which can lead to the deep gift of truly saving oneself for only your spouse. Turning off the TV, computer or phone and getting a good night’s sleep can lead to the deeper happiness of good relationships, alertness at work/school, productivity and the patience to bear with life’s irritants. Saying no to snacks at night can lead to better overall health. Waiting to purchase until you have saved the amount can lead to the happiness of taking the time to make a good purchase that will last. It doesn’t carry months or years of debt that burdens you. Gluttony pursues happiness or pleasure directly often leaving us feeling worse later or guilty. God-centered responsible delayed gratification living can lead to lasting happiness that helps us feel better as time goes on, without guilt.

But we are encouraged to seek happiness directly everywhere in our culture; advertisers; TV, movies; music; restaurants; social media. It is equated with freedom and being true to self. Tim Keller writes “There has never been a society like ours where the powerful forces of media, marketing and culture urge us to gratify our desires for comfort and pleasure immediately.”

So gluttony can lead to financial instability. Gluttony takes the shortcut to happiness that often leaves us feeling worse later.

It presents a disguised solution to stress, anxiety and unhappiness that leads to more problems. We learn this from Proverbs 23:29-35.

Proverbs 23:29-35 (ESV)

²⁹ Who has woe? Who has sorrow?

Who has strife? Who has complaining?

Who has wounds without cause?

Who has redness of eyes?

³⁰ Those who tarry long over wine;

those who go to try mixed wine.

³¹Do not look at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup
and goes down smoothly.

³²In the end it bites like a serpent
and stings like an adder.

³³Your eyes will see strange things,
and your heart utter perverse things.

³⁴You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
like one who lies on the top of a mast.

³⁵“They struck me,” you will say, “but I was not hurt;
they beat me, but I did not feel it.

When shall I awake?

I must have another drink.”

This Proverb portrays the sad image of a drunken person. Verse 29 warns of the danger. “Who has woe, sorrow, strife and complaining?” That doesn’t sound like much happiness. But the person seems to want happiness. The Proverb again warns in verse 31 and 32 that drink can bite you. It’s not saying, you may never have a drink of wine. But it does say don’t spend a lot of time staring at it as if will provide for your deepest needs. According to verse 32, an overindulgence can bite and sting us. Then verses 33 describes the experience of the drunk person. “Your eyes will see strange things and your heart utter perverse things.” Some drunks experience delirium tremens or a d.t.s. where they have tremors that they can’t control. Golfer John Daly had this happen to him on national TV during a golf tournament. In talking with people whose family members struggle with alcohol, they testify to the truth of verse 33 – where the heart utters perverse things.

Then in verse 35, we see the drunk person describe their experience. “They hit me but I’m not hurt. They beat me but I didn’t feel it.” It almost seems like they’re trying to convince themselves that getting drunk was a good thing. Yet they don’t realize they would likely not have been hit or struck if they weren’t drunk in the first place. And they seem unable to help themselves for when they sober up, they want another drink.

Tim Keller writes “Drink or any other food can become a deep consolation, a way to find relief from anxiety. The insatiable need sharpens over time, but the addict is helpless. Overcoming addiction is never simple and can take a life time. But Paul was right when he pointed to the ultimate consolation we need. Ephesians 5:18 – “Do not get drunk on

wine . . . Instead be filled with the Spirit.” Being filled with the Spirit means to see Christ vividly and joyfully.” This joy makes it possible to cast other disguised consolations aside.

This leads us to the biggest problem with gluttony. **It replaces God with something else as the supreme treasure in life.** Now we might think that’s an overstatement. But listen to what Paul says in Philippians 3:17-19. ¹⁷Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” Gluttony is no joke. It can lead to people going to Hell. This text teaches us that we can put food or anything else that we turn to excessively for comfort and hope in the place of God. When we treat them like an end in themselves, we ruin our appetite for fellowship with God.

Well that’s enough on the problem. Let’s focus on a solution. I was trying to think of the opposite of gluttony. Last week, we looked at pride and it’s pretty obvious that humility is the opposite. But coming up with an opposite to gluttony is not so simple. When you look up antonyms or opposites of gluttony, I found the following – nibbler, picker or dieter. It doesn’t quite deal with the depth of what’s talked about here. God can transform proud people into humble people. God can transform gluttons into nibblers; pickers; dieters. No it has to be something deeper. So here’s my best shot. **God can transform instant happiness seeking gluttons into deeper happiness experiencing worshippers by His Gospel.**

So how do we cooperate with God’s transforming work in this area of life?

Ask for Jesus’ help for self-control. Jesus is our biggest and greatest help. Did you know that Jesus was called a glutton? He was talking to John the Baptist’s disciples. Things have not turned out like they expected. John is in prison. Maybe he and his disciples thought John would get a place of recognition in Jesus’ victorious new kingdom. He thought maybe everyone would recognize Jesus as Messiah. But now he’s in prison with little hope of release. But Jesus reveals that though the kingdom has come, it will be realized or fulfilled in a way very unlike their expectations. Few will recognize it. Then he says this in Matthew 11:18-19. “For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say “he has a demon.” The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say “Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

They called Jesus a glutton and drunkard. He wasn't a glutton though He did eat and drink with those rejected by the religious leaders. But he knows what it's like to be called a glutton. And He died and atoned for gluttony. When we cooperate with Christ, we can ask the Holy Spirit to grow His fruit of self-control in us. We pray to one who Jesus was the very embodiment of self-control. He put Himself in an environment where gluttony and drunkenness were the usual outcomes. Yet He never sinned. You and I can overcome the spiritual hold that some of these areas have on us by the Spirit's power.

Sometimes God delivers us in an instant. A life is turned around. But remember we've said that the Scriptures teach us that the parts of the person are interrelated – Physical, Spiritual, Psychological and Emotional. Sometimes God brings spiritual healing that can contribute to an overall healing. But we can at least start by praying for the Lord to grow that fruit of self-control in our lives.

Ask God to help you Identify the needs behind your gluttonous behavior. You can start this by praying Psalm 139:23-24. ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" Pray that prayer and then maybe sit down with a piece of paper and write down anything that might qualify for this lovely label of gluttonous behavior. So what do you do to excess that might feel good in the moment but leaves you to feeling worse or less human later? Ask the Lord to help you identify that. So it could be something like excessive drinking or eating; excessive time on TV or video games or your phone. It could be excessive shopping or vacationing. It could be obsessively following a celebrity.

Then ask the Lord to reveal to you the motivation behind your behavior. What need or desire drives that behavior? It could be for security or escape or consolation. It could be an attempt to make the pain stop or to feel accepted or to satisfy at least something after a day of frustration. But then we need to realize that each of those needs can find deeper satisfaction in Jesus.

Find satisfaction for these needs in the Lord. Psalm 62:1-2 states "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken." When we need security the Lord is our rock and our salvation. When we think we need to escape, we don't. He stands right beside us through whatever we're facing.

When we need consolation, the Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. When we're in pain, we remember He experienced pain that no one else will ever experience – the pain of carrying our sins; the pain of absorbing the wrath of God; the pain of crucifixion even though He was innocent. When we need acceptance, God is the only one who know everything about us and still accepts us. When we need satisfaction after a day of frustration, The Lord constantly pursues us with goodness and mercy. And the Psalmist prays “Satisfy me in the morning with your unfailing love.” We need to grow in finding satisfaction in God’s unfailing love for us no matter what else happens.

These are the pieces of the battle against gluttonous behavior in our lives.

Today we find one more opportunity to make war on gluttony and its deception with the Lord’s Table. We can view the table today as a training ground for self-control. For it reminds us that food is not an end in itself. We are reminded of our soul’s need for Christ.

God can transform instant happiness seeking gluttons into deeper happiness experiencing worshippers by His Gospel. As a fellow glutton, I invite you to join me now at His table to celebrate that possibility and reality.