

## **Life's Tough and Then You Diet**

Matthew 6:25-34

Series: Soul Care, Week 6

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I have a problem...with liverwurst. What is that stuff anyway? Think about it – even the name makes me queasy: Liver *Wurst*. Who wants to eat something made primarily of pork butt and pork fat? If you're a liverwurst fan you're welcome to it. I don't like to even be in the same room with it. My disdain for it stems back to a powerful memory of being forced to eat liverwurst sandwich, on rye bread with yellow mustard which I later threw up behind the Dress & Drape fabric store on Route 30 in Devon, PA on a cold, but sunny, February afternoon in 1971. Not that it scarred me for life or anything.

We are in week 5 our current series Soul Care. So far, we've looked at how we can nurture our souls with healthy spiritual methods like spending time with God, resting and letting God refresh us, but also that resting in God's presence doesn't necessary mean sitting and not engaging in healthy activities and regular exercise. Last week Pastor Doug talked about how focusing our eyes on money takes our focus off God. Today we are looking at how we can honor God and have a spiritually healthy relationship with food, eating and ultimately our self-image.

Food and human beings have been connected since the beginning of creation. And it's been a complicated relationship.

After God created man and woman in his own image we read:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground— everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so." Genesis 1:27-30

Then just a few short chapters later Eve throws it all away for what? A piece of fruit. It's become to be known as an apple, we don't know for sure, but we know Eve and ultimately Adam's choice to eat this fruit isn't about the fruit itself at all. The fruit represents an alternate reality: separation from God. It represents the belief that God was holding something back from humanity. That satisfaction can be fulfilled outside a relationship with God.

Food is an integral part of our lives. We celebrate with it. Last Sunday in the Vineyard Woodside hosted a lovely luncheon for me as I retired after working here for sixteen years. I was so very touched that people planned and prepared and that we all spent time together. I will remember it always as a very special day in my life. Thank you. We grieve together over it. We grieve together over food - it is almost always a part of a memorial service. Food can evoke powerful memories. When I make meatballs, I remember my mother and the wonderful recipe she shared

with me. I think of her from-scratch pie crusts and the tuna fish sandwiches she made me for lunch. When I think of liverwurst...enough said.

Here's something else I have a problem with - the way we are bombarded with conflicting messages about food and diet and our appearance. Doctors and Christian counselors who specialize in eating disorders write: "Never before in history have so much time and energy gone into urging people to eat and yet at the same time demanding that they be slim."

It's not surprising, then, that a study found 42 percent of 1st-3rd grade girls want to be thinner. 81 percent of 10-year-old girls are afraid of being fat. 70 percent of 18-30-year-old American women don't like their bodies, and 60 percent of women in middle age still remain unsatisfied with their bodies. Nearly 20 million women will suffer from an eating disorder at some point in their lives.

Body Confessions, is a website that gives people the chance to anonymously confess their true feelings about their bodies. Thousands of people from all over the world have responded. The following quotes represent some of the posts that have received the most "been there" clicks:

- I want to lock myself up until I'm thin again.
- I constantly compare myself to others weight, skin, hair, clothes. More often than not, I find myself lacking in most areas.
- I continually base my worth on what other people look like .... I don't know how to feel comfortable in my own skin.
- I just want to look in the mirror and feel happy.

In Jesus' day people worried about famine and hunger and whether they would even have clothes to wear. Is our relationship with food so complicated because it's tied up with so many conflicting messages and worries about calories and cholesterol and fitting into our clothes? Worries about how much we weigh, what we look like, and how we compare or measure up to the way others look? Is it because we believe the lie that what we look like is what makes us worthy? When we look in the mirror do we look at ourselves through the world's eyes or do we look at ourselves through God's eyes?

Lady Gaga is pretty much a household name. Her accolades include 12 Grammy Awards, 18 MTV Video Music Awards, 16 Guinness World Records, awards from the Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Council of Fashion Designers of America, and recognition as Billboard's Artist of the Year (2010) and Woman of the Year (2015). And yet, in an interview she confessed that she still struggles to maintain her weight and feel good about her body:

"Weight is still a struggle. Every video I'm in, every magazine cover, they stretch you—they make you perfect. It's not real life. I'm gonna say this: The dieting has got to stop. Everyone just knock it off. Because at the end of the day, it's making us sick.

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/may/4050911.html>

Are you on a diet? The truth is every single one of us is on a diet. Anything we partake in eating on a regular basis is our “diet”. I’m not here to offer diet advice, to tell you what to eat, how much to eat, the benefits of avoiding overeating or having a body mass index of a certain number. We all know those facts. I would encourage you to remove the word diet from your vocabulary because the word diet has negative connotations. It can lead to fad diets which are almost always impossible to maintain and therefore unsustainable. Dieting is associated deprivation and therefore punishment. I try to follow a simple formula – eat food, not too much, mostly plants that was penned by author Michael Pollan. It’s not a diet but a philosophy around food consumption. Taking care of our bodies with a healthy lifestyle including healthy eating should not be viewed as punishment. It should be considered an act of gratitude to God thanking him for the body he gave us to take care of and uniquely designed to use for his purpose.

The apostle Paul writes: “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

If we believe we must deny ourselves to attain the earthly reward of being valued for what we weigh or what we look like we can’t honor God.

I don’t think Jesus was worried about what he looked like. The fact is we don’t even know what he looked like. The Bible says almost nothing about the physical appearance of Jesus. What it does say is far different than the image we’ve become accustomed to: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2).

And I think Jesus wants us to enjoy food and eating and celebrating together. He himself essentially ate his way through the gospels. He ate with friends and strangers and even those he considered his enemy. He purposefully ate with those considered sinners to illustrate his desire to meet everyone right where they were. He fed the 5,000. He spent time with people at the table. He wants us to spend time with and invest in and love people for who they are.

At the beginning of this message, I read the passage from the first chapter of Genesis, the story of creation, and the fact that after God created the world and everything in it, he created man “in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female, he created them.” Genesis 1:27

Think about that: God shaped each person. God created us. God didn’t accidentally make people. God had a purposeful plan in creating each one of us. We are created in his image.

We are image bearers of God. Not just me. Not just you. Every person is an image bearer of God. Which is what makes us so precious to him. We are valuable precisely because we are so rare. There has never been a you before you, and there never will ever again. You are a one-in-a-universe masterpiece.

So most of all I think we want us to love ourselves for who we are without worrying what we look like because we are the precious workmanship of a God who loves us unconditionally.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus addresses this worry. He advises his listeners:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?” (Matthew 6:25)

Worry is destructive to us in many ways. It drains us of energy and saps our strength. Worry causes us to miss out on the present joys of life and the blessings of God’s provision. It becomes a mental burden that can even make us physically sick. A wise person said, "Ulcers are caused not by what you eat, but by what is eating you."

Worry also breeds self-doubt. In the next verse Jesus says:

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Worry is worthless when it comes to changing yourself nor will it change how much your heavenly Father values you. Jesus is telling us we are valuable to God. Just as we are. Today. So as part of caring for our souls, let’s focus on today and get rid of the mentality that Life’s Tough and THEN you (fill in the blank) diet, start exercising, quit a bad habit, so you can be good enough. Life is tough! Jesus told us we would have trouble. But he also told us to take heart, he will go to the cross for us and conquer the grave for us and make us perfect in God’s eyes.

Not only is worry worthless and accomplishes nothing, it won’t extend your life.

Jesus asks the listeners “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (Matthew 6:27)

It’s a rhetorical question but the answer is no! Just as unhealthy eating habits stress our health, worry is linked to high blood pressure, heart trouble, migraines and thyroid dysfunction. It won’t extend it and in fact can shorten it.

Worry also contradicts trust. Jesus says:

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?”

The energy that we spend worrying can be put to much better use in prayer. Live one day at a time and handle each worry as it comes--through prayer. Most of our worries never come to pass anyway, and those that do can only be handled now and by God's grace.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7, NLT)

So here's a another simple formula to remember: Worry replaced with prayer equals trust.

Kimberly Taylor says she struggled with her weight and maintaining a healthy lifestyle for 25 years. She tried every fad diet she could find: some two or three times over nothing helped her.

She says: I settled for less than God's best, using emotional eating to numb myself to life. Although I smiled on the outside, I was self-loathing and depressed on the inside. But one day, everything changed. On December 11, 2003, I had an extreme chest pain that I thought would kill me. As I stood in my apartment with my hand over my heart, afraid to move because I thought I was going to die, God spoke to me. He said, "It is not supposed to be this way." Rather than condemnation, God's voice was full of love, kindness, and compassion. I realized that, instead of living God's truth, I was believing and living the enemy's lies. That's what kept me in bondage.

After struggling for so long she says: my success in adopting a healthy life style was implementing spiritual disciplines in my life. I lay my concerns before God and ask Him to give me wisdom to make wise health choices. She stopped believing the lies and started Take Back Your Temple, based on the scripture I referenced earlier 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Friends, take back your temple. Don't compare it anyone else's. Free yourself from the ridiculous earthly idea that your worth is determined by what you look like or what you weigh and know that you are uniquely and wonderful made by a loving God. Take back your temple and ask God to take control of your body and your life so He can use them for His purpose. If you do, I bet you won't even have time to worry.