

Matt. 11:16-19; *Philippians 3:17-21

“*Misplaced Hunger*”

[PRAYER]

Maxie Dunnam tells about the first weeks in his new position as President at Asbury Seminary in 1994. As he and his wife were getting settled he wanted to attend the Southland Christian Church between Lexington and Wilmore, one of the most dynamic churches in the area.

Dr. Dunnam wanted to hear their senior minister, Wayne Smith, before they sought a United Methodist congregation. The Sunday they attended Rev. Smith was preaching on lust, as a part of a series on the seven deadly sins. It was an outstanding sermon, but Dr. Dunnam was intrigued to know what Pastor Smith would do with the next Sunday’s theme on gluttony. Rev. Smith weighed 265 and his people knew that weight was a constant battle for him.

Dr. Dunnam didn’t get to attend the following week, but he did call the Church office to request a copy of the sermon. Pastor Smith demonstrated a healthy sense of humor as he told the following story in that sermon:

“My secretary received a phone call. The caller said, ‘I’d like to speak with the head hog!’ She said, ‘I know Wayne is overweight but no one has ever been that disrespectful.’”

“Well,” he said, “let me apologize. I’m a hog farmer over in Scott County. I raise hogs and I just sold some of them for \$5,000. I watch Wayne on television and I really like him. I don’t go to church anywhere. I thought I might send \$500 to Southland Christian Church.”

She answered, “Wait just a minute – I think the big pig just walked in.”

Wayne told that story, but he didn’t hide behind that sense of humor. He went on to say: “Does being 120 pounds overweight bother me? Yes, mentally and spiritually. Does it hurt my witness? Of course it does! It’s hard to sell a product you don’t use and religion that you don’t live. Am I a hypocrite? Yes. How then can I preach if I’m a hypocrite? If only the perfect bird sang in the forest, it would be all quiet there. And if only perfect preachers stood in the pulpit, we wouldn’t have a message. (The Bible says) ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ Is that an excuse? No, it’s a statement of guilt and it’s also why I’m preaching.”

Isn’t that the honesty we need, for we’re all guilty in one way or another – guilty of gluttony. And when we talk about gluttony we’re not just talking about the consumption of food. We’re talking about *self-indulgence*.

We’re not simply addressing the issue of being overweight and obesity. We often think of gluttony only in terms of weight. We know there are complex chemical factors in our bodies when it comes to weight, and many people cannot control their weight simply by consuming less food. Nutritional scientists aren’t in agreement on why people get caught in cycles of weight gain.

Gluttony extends beyond the arena of the buffet bar. We can be gluttons with food, alcohol, tobacco, and sex, and with virtually anything else – self-indulgent with shopping, work, soap operas, exercise, video games, gambling, computer gadgets, and on and on. You can name some, too, can’t you?

Gluttony is the sin of excess. And we busy ourselves with “excessive” *stuff* in order to keep from being bored! Oh yes! Boredom is an epidemic in our culture! And we won’t live long enough with our boredom so that our emptiness might lead us to discover greater meaning. Did you hear that? So we are constantly *entertaining* ourselves, *stimulating* ourselves with

whatever's *exciting*, trying to keep ourselves satisfied! And because we fail to find some greater purpose ...we submit to obsessive eating, ice-cream therapy, drinking, smoking – which becomes habitual through extended practice!

To me, the real crime is how uncomfortable we are with quiet, with boredom. We don't practice listening to our own voice, our own conversations (our thought-life) and memories, nor do we practice listening to God!

Is there anything about which you are obsessively preoccupied? You think about it all the time? Your thinking about it interrupts other goals or activities, demanding attention that should be placed somewhere else?

I don't want to downplay the value of hobbies and entertainment, because we all need diversions in order to relax and ...bring balance to our lives. But we can "stuff" ourselves with the latest drama on "Days of Our Lives," or the calendar of games on ESPN – we become too busy to reflect on life's most precious purposes. The devil employs so many tools to stress your spirit and agitate your mind.

In the quiet – are you discovering greater purpose in the will of God?

Steve Farrar (in *Men of Integrity*, 8-30-02): "We get up and go to work so that we can provide for our children's physical needs. But I'm also to provide for their *emotional* and *spiritual* needs. These don't require money. They require time – in large doses."

"Most of us dads talk to our kids about resisting peer pressure. But peer pressure never goes away, even for us dads who are tempted to (compete and match what the other dads in our circle are accomplishing.) So why should I let them pressure me? I've only got 18 years to see my girl become a godly woman, to see my two boys become godly men. I'll think long and hard before I give up any of that time to the pressure of screwed-up peers. Life is too short and my kids are too precious."

"Sometimes we have to be smart enough to say no to the job promotion because, when weighed on the balance, a promotion often comes out as a demotion – when it comes to our ultimate purpose. Few of your peers have what it takes to make that kind of decision. But the good fathers do. God will honor them."

Gluttony connects us neither to others nor to God. Gluttony is a selfish act that defeats rather than enriches the community gathering. Gluttony is when you treat yourself to excessive pleasure and satisfaction at the cost of ignoring others.

The Bible lesson comes from the writings of Paul, as he warns us again that Kingdom people cannot live like the people of the world.

READING Philippians 3:17-21

¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, imitate me, and pay attention to those who live by the example we have given you. ¹⁸ I have often told you, and now tell you with tears in my eyes, that many live as the enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ In the end they will be destroyed. Their own emotions are their god, and they take pride in the shameful things they do. Their minds are set on worldly things. ²⁰ We, however, are citizens of heaven. We look forward to the Lord Jesus Christ coming from heaven as our Savior. ²¹ Through His power to bring everything under His authority, He will change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body

The Bible reminds us that it's easy to misplace our pride on worldly things. "Emotions" can be our god! And listen to that. We may constantly try to feel something more, and so – in the pursuit of happiness – we look for extreme experiences! And that desire to "feel" more can take us far off the path designed for us. [That was the same lure in Eve's desire for the forbidden fruit; she was promised something more; something greater.]

Other translations express this sin differently: **"...their god is their belly..."** [NRSV] OR **"...their god is their appetite..."** [NLT] helping us understand that any misguided "passions" can replace the natural appetite for the divine, loving Father! We can place our energy and efforts in all the wrong things!

The Church is less concerned with the amount of food on your plate than it is with the way people eat, the way people love, the way people share, the way people give.

The miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude with a few loaves of bread and some fish started when a few people were willing to share their meager gift of fish and bread.

People had arrived hungry for an experience with God. Jesus taught them and fed them. Those who were physically hungry and spiritually hungry discovered our deepest needs are met in Jesus. Our darkest fears find comfort in God's love. Our longing for acceptance are fulfilled with Him! Our purpose is revealed through His will. Patience and understanding are formed by His Spirit.

Are we not people with great hunger? Isn't there a need ...to fill some deep desire within you? Is it to know if there is something more beyond this life? Maybe it's the frantic need to know you can be forgiven. Maybe it's the compelling need to be closer to God, or to know whether you really belong to God and are accepted by God.

Do you cover that desire and *hunger* with activity – with shopping or food and entertainment? We eat out of boredom or frustration. We eat often times in order to repress the longing for something deeper or more meaningful.

What our hearts and minds are trying to tell us is that we are "wired" for deep love and deep relationships, including the relationship with your Maker! We need God! We need His love, and God is the One who loves you and accepts you – right now, just as you are! In His grace we have hope for today, hope for tomorrow, and hope for life beyond our dying!

Do you want to know – without doubt – that you are going to be with Jesus when you die? You can know! Paul declared it boldly, "We are citizens of heaven! We look forward to the Lord Jesus Christ coming from heaven as our Savior."

On what is your mind set?

The danger with gluttony is what you're putting at the center of your desires. We feast on so much of the world's attitudes, popular but misguided opinions and prejudices – without the virtues of faith, hope, and love. We can adopt some pretty selfish and impure appetites.

[INVITATION] Is there anything about which you are obsessively preoccupied? You think about it all the time. Your thinking about it interrupts other tasks, or demands attention that should be placed elsewhere, or takes time you should be giving to other people.

Has the world seen your best yet? How long will your children wait to see ...your best? Has your partner seen God's love in you? Have your friends seen that greater quality?

Do you understand how obsession or gluttony ...affects your life?

I was recently challenged to pray: "Whatever it takes, Lord, make me like Jesus."

Do you understand how to come to Jesus?

Quiet time. Daily quiet time with God. [Describe what to do in that time: read the NT; reflect on what you've read; allow that reflection to move you into prayer, whether is a prayer of confession or thanksgiving or praying for some specific need. Daily time; quiet time with music or another devotional book; Disciple Bible Study; connecting with other like-minded people in small groups; practice forgiving others, trusting in God, and love!]

You're looking for quiet time away from the chatter and demands in the world. How can I help you with this?

"Come," Jesus said. "Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest..." (Matt. 11 :28)