

You Are What You Eat

Sterling UMC
January 16, 2011
John 6:48-51

I went into Wal-Mart the other day. I know, I know, that's a place I try to avoid, but it was my day off and I needed a few things for some work I was doing around the house. As soon as I walked in the door I noticed that they had one of those special sections set up right as you come in the front door. In this section were all kinds of items that seemed to me to have to do with New Year's resolutions.

As I surveyed the aisles the first thing I noticed was all kinds of exercise items. There were exercise mats, those little weight dumbbells, jump ropes, the stretchy elastic bands. There was even one of these ab cruncher machines along with every exercise DVD known to man.

As I turned the corner on the next aisle I was immediately confronted by dozens of cases of Slim fast. They had chocolate and strawberry and vanilla and any other flavor you could ever want. Next to that were the shelves of diet pills. There were vitamins and countless other nutritional supplements to choose from along with every kind of weight loss product you could imagine.

Right beside that there was a whole section of file folders, file cabinets, shredders, and desk organizers. Next to that there were plastic storage bins and other containers of every imaginable shape and size. There were notebooks and organizers and any kind of gadget you might need to organize the clutter in your office, your closet or any part of your home.

I guess you could call it a resolution superstore. All of those items right there in one section. What a brilliant marketing strategy! And just for me! I mean, how did they know that I have resolved in the New Year to exercise more, to lose some weight, and to get better organized. And they made it so easy, anything and everything I might need, on sale and together in one section, ready for suckers like me to load my shopping cart and to walk out of the store with high hopes of once again using those items to make needed changes in my life. The problem is that the only thing that was not for sale was the willpower and discipline to make them work. That's something that you can't buy in a store. That's why every year at this time, I find myself once again making these same resolutions. And obviously I'm not alone. Or else Wal-Mart certainly wouldn't have set up an entire section just for me.

This morning I want to continue the series that we began last week entitled A New Year, a New You. Last week we looked at the foundation, for you see we cannot begin to make changes without first getting to the core of our lives. I shared with you a formula for making a fresh S.T.A.R.T.

- Stop making excuses.
- Take an inventory of my life.
- Act In faith.
- Refocus my thoughts
- Trust God

This morning we are going to continue this series by addressing one of the most prominent resolutions we make at the beginning of a new year. Often after the holiday season, a time for

most of us when we over indulge, we resolve to eat less and exercise more. We resolve to live a healthier lifestyle. For me this is a resolution I seem to make every year. How many of you have made a similar resolution? How many of you have made this same resolution every year for longer than you care to remember?

I just read the latest statistics from the Center for Disease Control. It says 68% of Americans are overweight. That means if there are ten people in your row, three of you are in shape. Seven out of ten are not in shape. I also read a statistic this week that said 80% of women worry about their weight. I think that's low. Why is it so difficult for so many people to maintain discipline in this area?

Well I believe that it is because we buy into some of the lies of this world.

For example, we fool ourselves into believing that compared to other problems this one isn't that bad. Friends, this is serious. Not only does it hurt us physically, but it also harms us spiritually. After all, remember gluttony is one of the 7 deadly sins. It's just as serious as the rest of them. This is serious.

Then here's another great lie: "All I have to do is..." and you just fill in the blank. I'm so guilty of this. I say, "All I have to do is just have salad for lunch." "All I have to do is get to the gym a little more often." There's no "All I have to do is..." There's no quick fix. There's no instant solution. There's no diet book that's going to talk to you about issues and matters of the heart.

Here's another lie: "I can do this on my own." If you could have done it on your own wouldn't you already have done it on your own? Why do we think that the most defective organ in the body – the brain – is going to lead you out of your mess? My heart works pretty much the same every day. My kidneys, knees, everything. But my brain malfunctions every single day. I mean I go in to order a salad, it comes out a hamburger. Why is that?

So that leads me to the question of the day. How can we begin to overcome this destructive thinking and these unhealthy behaviors so that we can live healthier lives both physically and spiritually? Well I would like you to hear a very powerful testimony from someone who has a great deal of wisdom to share with us on the subject. Would you please welcome Marybeth Quist.

Mary Beth's testimony:

Hi. Some of you know me, and some of you don't, but a lot of you have prayed for me over the years. My name is Marybeth Quist, and I am Joanna Dietz's sister. About three years ago, I weighed 591 pounds, and a doctor told me I wouldn't live to see my 45th birthday. Now, I had been near that weight – sometimes more, a few times a little less – for a number of years, and a lot of doctors had told me it was dangerous, but I hadn't really cared before. However, this time, I had finally grown to a point where I wanted to live – I could see that there was hope for a future, and I wanted that future. How I got to that point is a long story, for another time, but for now, I was ready. So I signed on with the Bariatric Center in Winchester, VA, and set out to lose some weight, and regain my health.

To meet that goal, I had to come to terms with the fact that I was, and am, a food addict. That is not always an easy thing to admit, and it is a REALLY hard thing to deal with. With most other addictions, the addict can choose to leave the temptation behind – to change his or her lifestyle in such a way that whatever the addiction is, it is no longer available. For example, an alcoholic can stay out of bars and liquor stores, and tell friends not to offer them alcohol at parties, or not go to parties where alcohol is served. They can refuse the wine list at restaurants, or ask for virgin cocktails. They can keep liquor out of the house. With food, that is not an option. I have to eat something several times a day; I have to have food in the house, and sometimes in my car; even my purse. When I volunteer at my church, there is often something in the office to tempt me. When I go to the grocery store to pick up the foods that I CAN eat, I am inundated by foods that I SHOULDN'T eat. When I am out and I get hungry, the fast food menus have a lot more things on them that are bad for me than are good for me – and the bad things are cheaper than the good things, did you ever notice that? Food is EVERYWHERE!

So how does a food addict recover? With a lot of prayer, a lot of scripture study, a lot of support, and a lot of forgiveness! Long before I started this journey, many people were praying for me, and a lot of people were really eager for me to succeed – but no one, even at the Bariatric Center, had ever done what I was trying to do. I had to lose almost 200 pounds before I could have gastric bypass surgery – they won't do the surgery unless you are under 400 pounds. No one at their office had ever done that before. No one I knew had ever done that before. You don't get to the weight I had attained without being a hardcore addict, and no one in that office or in my circle of friends could quite understand what compelled me to eat. So I was on my own. But what I quickly discovered was, I really wasn't. Christ was right there with me, if I asked him to be. I had to ask Him – He doesn't come unless we ask. But do you remember when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? "Father, if it be possible, take this cup from me." Christ knew what suffering was. He knew what it was to ache for something, and still have to endure it. Remember when He was in the desert, and Satan tempted Him, saying "turn this stone into bread, and You will no longer be hungry"? Jesus knew what it was to be hungry – to want food so badly that his stomach roared, that his mouth watered just thinking about it. He became human so that He could experience the same things we do – so that He could understand what I, Marybeth, was going through when I tried to face my demons.

So when I wanted to eat, I prayed – sometimes. Sometimes I knew that I should, and I refused to do it – because I knew that Christ would help me, and I didn't want help. I wanted my addiction. And you know what? Christ forgave me – His grace was so great that, when I came back to Him, guilt-ridden and ashamed and hating myself, He lifted me back up, and loved me, and gave me the strength to get back to my goals. Just like David in Psalm 51, which is my favorite passage in the Bible. In this passage, David, king of the Israelites, with all the women he could want, has seen the wife of his general bathing on the roof next door, and decided he

wants her. He seduces her, gets her pregnant, and when he can't convince her husband to sleep with her to try and pretend the baby is legitimate, David sends her husband to the front lines of the war to be killed. After all of this, in Psalm 51, David cries out to the Lord. "I know my sins", he says. "You are right to judge me." And yet, "Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." "Create in me a pure heart, O God... grant me a willing spirit." David knows that he has faced temptation, and has succumbed, and yet he also knows that God can make it right again. This passage always brings me great comfort and great hope; God wants to help me be willing to have a relationship with Him; He wants to meet me halfway. I just have to ask. He is there.

As I wrestled with my addiction, I grew stronger in His grace. The times when I refused His help became fewer, and less frequent, and I relied more on Him. When I was tempted, I remembered to pray first, instead of halfway through eating whatever had tempted me. And I lost weight. When I was exercising, and it was hard, and I wanted to quit, I asked for His strength – and He gave it to me. Not so much that I could move mountains, but enough to finish the task in front of me. Enough. And a little more than I thought I could do. That isn't to say that I always get it right. I am an addict, and like any other addict, I am in a constant struggle for recovery. Unlike an alcoholic, I can't say, "I have been clean for x amount of time" – because I eat every day. Sometimes I stick to a healthier eating plan than others. Over Christmas I struggled. The Wednesday before Christmas, I was volunteering at my church office, which I do every Wednesday. Like a lot of church offices, people brought in food to share with the minister and the staff – cookies, candy, and other treats. Lots of sugar. Since having the gastric bypass last June I can't digest sugar – they bypassed the part of my stomach that processes it, and if I eat too much, it will make me really sick. However, it is not immediate – it takes about 6 hours for it to affect me. So I have to be able to tell myself no without immediate consequences. This particular Wednesday, there were lots of people in and out, but there were also lots of times when I was the only person in my part of the office – and that is where the food was. And I prayed. Let me tell you, I prayed hard. And I ate a piece of candy. An hour later, I had a cookie. Now, if I stopped there, I would be okay – that amount of sugar would have been within acceptable limits, and I would have been fine. But my addiction was so strong – it pulled me toward the food. Homemade treats – things I loved, just there for the taking. No one watching. No one to know if I took just one more. My parents weren't even going to be home that evening, so no one would know if I got sick. I ate another cookie. And I prayed some more, but I was out of practice – since the surgery, I hadn't often asked God for help; I had little appetite, so I wasn't usually tempted – so why ask for help? Why worry about the addiction part of the process when I was barely eating enough anyway? So, as I helped myself to a fourth treat, knowing it was too much sugar, knowing it would make me ill, knowing it was my addiction, and that it was bad for me, and that I was driving a wedge between myself and God, and knowing that it was dangerous, I prayed a different prayer. I asked God to not only grant me a willing spirit, willing to turn my desires for these treats over to Him, but I asked for the strength to endure the consequences, and I asked that He help me not to complain, that He help me keep the consequences of my actions from causing any discomfort to anyone else. Like David, I couldn't control the initial sin, but I could control the outcome. I could keep it from separating me from God. And since that day, I have been able to come a little closer every day to handling the addiction better. Once again, when I am tempted, I pray first. And I am working harder to avoid temptation, even though I have little appetite. I am trying to eat healthier, and get more exercise, even when it is hard and painful. I am asking God to go with me, to shower me with His grace, and to keep my spirit willing.

In April of 2010, I turned 45 – the birthday I was never supposed to see. And in June of that same year, as you may have guessed, I accomplished the impossible, and reached 390 pounds – and had my gastric bypass. Since then I have lost another 60 pounds, and continue to lose. I

still struggle with food addiction; I always will. But if I keep Christ in the picture, and remember to ask Him to be with me, it is easier. I am not alone.

Thank you so much Marybeth for sharing your powerful testimony with us this morning. You are such an inspiration. We will all continue to pray for you and for your continued progress toward your ultimate goal.

I want to close this morning by sharing a couple of Scriptures with you that I believe provide us some biblical guidance and encouragement in this area.

First, 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, *“Don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God.”* Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Your body is to be treated as a temple. In other words, it’s a matter of stewardship. Our bodies are tools that enable us to love and to serve God and others, and to continue the ministry of Christ on this Earth. Therefore, the way that we treat our bodies is important. Think about it this way, we call this place, the house of God. Would we treat this building, God’s house, like we treat our bodies, the temple of the Spirit? No. We respect it. We maintain it. We keep it clean. We don’t allow things in here that we know the harm and destroy it. Why would we do anything differently with our own bodies?

Secondly, Titus 2:12 says *“And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct and devotion to God.”* God expects us to have discipline and self control. So many people *want* to do better and they’re *going* to do better. But as the old saying goes, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” We must have self-control. How do we develop this? Well as Marybeth so powerfully reminded us, it happens through prayer, or as Titus just said “devotion to God.”

Thirdly, Romans 12:1-2 says, *“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind He will accept. When you think of what He has done for you, is this too much to ask?”* God wants us to live as a holy sacrifice. You see we so often give in to the god of comfort. We have a little bit of anxiety, a little bit of struggle or fear and rather than go to God and connect with the true God or connect with other people, we go to our little friend *food* for our comfort. And comfort becomes the thing that rules our life and we feed our god. And what do we sacrifice in the process? We sacrifice our body. Not to *the God*. But we sacrifice our body and what it looks like and represents to the god of comfort.

Finally hear the words of our Scripture lesson. In John 6:35, Jesus declared, *“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”*

Friends your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions. Your life is more than food and drink and clothing and pleasure. There’s something more.

So when you’re stressed out, fear has got you in its grip, problems are weighing you down, anxiety is consuming every ounce of your being, and you find yourself reaching for that half-gallon of ice cream, that bag of chips, that bar of chocolate, ask yourself, “Is that what I’m hungry for? Is it really food or something else?”

Instead of reaching for that can of beer, that bottle of liquor ask yourself, "Is that what I'm really thirsting for or is it something more? Is that what I'm really craving? Or is there something better?"

That's the way to a make the changes you need to make. That's the way to keep your resolution. That's the way to a new you. We must recognize what we are really hungry for and eat what truly satisfies.

There is one who can make you truly happy. There is one who will satisfy your deepest longings. There is one who will sustain you when things don't seem to work out. There is one who will strengthen you when you feel you can't go on. There is one who will give your life real meaning and purpose. There is one who will feed your soul. His name is Jesus. He is the Bread of Life and when he sits on the altar of your life what you begin to find is that you're no longer empty. You find your heart satisfied. And friends, he offers you more than just bread. He offers you life. He offers you strength. He offers you himself. And Jesus is all you need. Jesus is enough.