

Life's Tough and Then You Diet

Matthew 6:25-34

Series: New Year, New You, Week 3: Nutrition, January 20, 2019

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When we kicked off this New Year, New You series on January 6, Pastor Doug shared this statistic:

“40% to 45% of adults will make one or more New Year's resolutions.” So I'm curious if any one of us here made a resolution? Since eating healthier and/or losing weight consistently appears in the top ten list of resolutions many of us make every year, did anyone resolve to do something with their diet? Show of hands? Don't worry...if Planet Fitness claims that it's a judgment free zone then certainly so is Woodside! Maybe you resolved to eat better, eat less, eat more of this food or less of that food?

I did. I had a check-up at the end of 2018 and blood work revealed that my cholesterol level is elevated. Not alarmingly so but enough for my doctor to want to talk with me about dietary changes to reduce it or at the very least keep it from going higher. And because it's in my heart's best interests I've added a heaping tablespoon of plain cooked oatmeal and frozen spinach to my morning smoothie. I know! But it actually tastes better than it sounds.

Pastor Doug also shared this statistic: “80% of our New Year's resolutions fail by the second week of February.”

Why do we consistently make resolutions to watch our weight and eat better? I think it's because we all have a genuine desire to be the best healthiest selves we can be and eating healthy goes along with that. And that's a good thing. But why do we consistently fail? Is it perhaps we're approaching it the wrong way?

We are in week 3 of our New Year, New You message series. We've introduced the idea of the 3 pillars of overall well-being as 1. The Emotional Pillar, Loving God with your heart and soul. 2. The Physical Pillar. Loving God with your strength and 3. The Relational Pillar: loving your neighbor. Along with exercise, which we looked at last week, nutrition and diet which we will talk about today, and rest, which we will look at next week, are all part of our physical pillar.

Food and human beings have been connected since the beginning of creation.

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

Food is an integral part of our lives. We celebrate with it, we grieve together over it. It 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.

I also have another powerful not so great sandwich memory in which I was forced to eat liverwurst 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, February afternoon in 1971. Not that it scarred me for life or anything.

I’ve heard some people say they were raised as members of the “Clean Plate Club.” I do hereby give you permission to revoke your membership! Not only does cleaning your plate lead to overeating, the law of diminishing returns kicks in. That means your taste buds simply don’t derive the same level of satisfaction from the 20th bite as they do from the first. It suggests that as we consume more, and our palates adjust to taste and flavor, we generally derive less pleasure from each successive bite along the way. So don’t clean your plate or better yet take smaller portions!

Rob Rosenthal, The Food Humorist©, Institute of Culinary Education Graduate, Food Writer/Producer

God knows we need to eat to live. But our relationship with food has become so complicated I wonder if at times we are living to eat?

Because we are bombarded with conflicting messages about food and diet. The doctors at the Minirth-Mercer Clinic, 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.”

Food author and activist Michael Pollan writes: “We Americans suffer from a national eating disorder: our unhealthy obsession with healthy eating. The American paradox is we are a people who worry unreasonably about dietary health yet have the worst diet in the world.”

In Jesus’ day people worried about famine and hunger and whether or not they would have clothes to wear. We worry about calories and cholesterol and fitting into our clothes and how we look in those clothes to others. Both situations arise from emotional issues: worry and fear. So inner drives – worry and fear – and outer reactions – the opinion of others – are what motivate us to overeat or to turn to quick fix fad diets.

Did you know one of the earliest fad diets has Presbyterian origins? Yes, it’s true. In the early 1800s a Presbyterian minister named Sylvester Graham invented Graham crackers. He introduced this snack item as part of his then-radical vegetarian diet which shunned white flour and spices in attempt to cleanse us of immoral behavior. It was actually called the Graham Diet and those that followed it were called Grahamites. (<http://nowiknow.com/the-curious-history-of->

graham-crackers-and-corn-flakes/) Never heard of it? Because fad diets fade. And diets that have you worrying about the minutia of what you should or should not eat – are not sustainable.

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”. The problem is the word diet has negative connotations and is associated with punishment – we must deny ourselves in order to attain earthly goals and earn the earthly reward of being valued for what we weigh or what we look like.

I think Jesus wants us to enjoy food and eating. He himself essentially ate his way through the gospels. He ate with friends and strangers and even those considered his enemy. He fed the 5,000. He spent time with people at the table.

We too should look at eating as something pleasurable to do with others – our friends and family. Unfortunately many of us view eating as just another task on our to-do list.

“Sixty five percent eat lunch at their desk. Twenty percent of meals are eaten in the car. What other things do people do while eating? Walking, riding the subway, talking on the phone, reading a magazine or book, putting on makeup, and walking the dog are common pursuits of those who eat while juggling other tasks.”

My family is part of the multi-tasking meal eaters. We have a bad habit of watching Jeopardy during dinner.

What’s the problem? At least two dozen research studies have shown that eating while distracted leads to overindulgence. And according to a recent study (2014) published in a journal called *Psychological Science*, eating while multitasking also dampens our perception of taste. Food tastes blander, we crave stronger flavors (like salt and sugar), and we end up eating more. The bottom line: when it's time to eat, it's time to eat. Turn off the computer, the iPhone, and the TV. Enjoy the meal, savor every bite, family and friends. Light a candle, put some flowers in a vase and use cloth napkins. Not only will it taste better, you'll eat less.”

Here is a simple 7 word formula for overall healthy eating penned by that Michael Pollan: “Eat food, not too much, mostly plants.”

Jesus also has a simple formula for our overall health and well-being:

“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. I think a lot of our resolutions are born out of worry. We worry we’re not loving enough, or smart enough or healthy enough. We worry that if we don’t change we won’t be valuable enough.

Worry divides our minds. The biblical word for worry is Merimna which is a compound of two Greek words: merizo which means divide and nous which means the mind. Worry splits our energy between today’s priorities and tomorrow’s problems.

(Max Lucado: Traveling Light)

Which is another reason I think resolutions fail - that they draw a proverbial line in the sand – “I’ll do this or that or make that change when that day, when New Year’s Day comes - tomorrow.” And then we worry that tomorrow is coming!

Get rid of the mentality that Life’s Tough and THEN you (fill in the blank) diet, make that change, etc. Focus on today.

And worry is worthless when it comes to changing yourself. And it won’t change how much your heavenly Father values you.

“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?” (Matthew 6:27)

Jesus is telling us we are precious and valuable in God’s eyes right now. Just as we are. Today.

He goes on: “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (Matthew 6:27)

Not only is worry worthless and accomplishes nothing it won’t extend your life. In fact, just as unhealthy eating habits stress our health, worry is linked to high blood pressure, heart trouble, migraines and thyroid dysfunction. It can take years off your life.

So Jesus tells us “...do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:34)

There is a reason that 12-step programs that focus on one day a time are so successful. The core philosophy is that things are mostly out of our control. So focus on the changes we can make right now, today, and turn all that tomorrow stuff over to a Higher Power, in our case God.

Dorothy Englert resolved to make a change. She shares this:

“I have struggled with my weight all of my life and have tried practically every program out there: Weight Watchers, NutriSystem, Medi-Fast, Atkins, South Beach you name it, she says, I tried it. All were temporary fixes but I never really felt that I had control of my self-diagnosed eating disorder never really having a healthy relationship with food. Then my doctor informed me I was pre-diabetic and had high cholesterol. I knew I needed a life style change not a quick fix.

“Woodside member Karen Wentworth was starting a group based on Rick Warren's book The Daniel Plan. I was attracted to the program as it was rooted in overall wellness: physical health, nutrition, spiritual health, emotional health and support.”

The tenants of the program are:

Faith: It is through God’s power that we make change, gaining strength from being rooted and grounded in His love. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13

Food: whole foods; food grown on a plant, not man-made products created in a plant. "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank..."Daniel 1:8

Fitness – Exercise benefits your physical, emotional and mental health! “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit...Therefore honor God with you bodies.”¹
Corinthians 6:19a, 20B

Focus –Transforming your mind will reduce stress, improve your decision making and memory, help you think clearer, feel better and ultimately help you to live a healthier life. “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” Romans 12:2

Friends – God created us to thrive in relationship, and together we are crucial to each other’s healing and success. “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.”
Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NLT)

“Developing a lifestyle that takes care of your body mind and soul has been instrumental in getting me on the road to better health. Relying on God's power rather than will power has been freeing.”

The Daniel Plan group meets every Wednesday 7:30 at Dorothy’s house and she invites anyone who’s interested in learning more about it to attend. If you are, write Daniel Plan on the back of your Connection Card and someone will follow up with you.

Jesus demonstrated that food is the way we celebrate with each other and share our love for one another and offer thanks to God for providing it. It ties all 3 the pillars together. So resolve every day to eat food, not too, much, mostly plants with people you enjoy.