

We are starting off each sermon in November with a few moments about generosity. You have been so generous to our church and God has been so good to our church. I want to highlight all that's been done over the last 12+ months, and what we hope to do in the next 12 months.

- Previous 12+ months:
 - Safety & security—doors, locks, cameras
 - Infrastructure—roof, parking lot, HVAC
 - Children's space renovation
 - Connecting Place renovation
- Next 12+ months:
 - Chapel renovation
 - Family life center renovation
 - Worship center renovation
 - Community center

We've been able to make over a million dollars of improvement to our building in the last year or so, and in the next year, we are planning to renovate the chapel, the family life center, and this worship center, all to make room for more people. When those renovations are done, we are hoping to build a community engagement center that will be able to serve people in our community seven days a week and help us reach thousands more people. As you begin giving, or begin tithing, or consider a year end gift, this is what you'll be helping make possible! You are not only providing for our general fund, helping all the ministry around here happen, supporting pastors and missionaries and students, but you are also supporting struggling families in our community. You are helping strengthen and resource our church for today and for the next 20-30 years, enabling our church to serve hundreds and hundreds of individuals every single day, and allowing us to grow by more than 1,000 additional people—all so we can connect more and more people to Jesus.

Our generosity truth for today is that *giving brings joy*. A few months ago, we had a special weekend as a church. We baptized ten people that day and had the chance to pray for dozens who came forward. We welcomed about 100 people to our "Welcome to the Creek" lunch. So many incredible things were happening, and as I was leaving our church building, I crossed paths with a successful businessperson in our church, a person who has given hundreds of thousands of dollars to our church. He had tears in his eyes, and he said, "I just want you to know, of all the things I've ever spent money on, or have ever invested money in, giving to the church has brought me more joy than anything else."

We've all had seasons in life in which we've experienced buyer's remorse—shouldn't have ordered that meal, shouldn't have bought that shirt, shouldn't have bought that car, shouldn't have ordered that service. We've all looked back and regretted purchases. We've never looked back and regretted honoring God with our money. When we give, it brings joy! All the social research shows that people who are disproportionately generous with their money are more joyful than those who aren't. The research also shows that it's not the joy that results in more giving, but rather that giving results in more joy. Jesus' words about this prove true: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

To prepare for our time in Scripture today, I want you to think about a time you were overcome with a craving, and it drove you to do something you wouldn't normally do if you were thinking straight. A few years ago, I was out in the woods deer hunting. It was the opening weekend of the season. I was sitting up in a tree all day, sun up to sun down. When the shooting light was gone, I climbed down. I was starving, as hungry as I could remember being in years. As I was driving home, I said, "The very first place I see that serves food, I'm pulling in, no matter what!" A mile or two later, I saw a bright yellow sign for Long John Silvers. I knew I shouldn't, but I pulled in. I ate at Long John Silvers. I texted Keren on the way home—I am not kidding—and said, "If I ever go there again, for the sake of my arteries, stage an intervention!"

When we are hungry, when we are overcome by a craving or a desire, we make decisions we normally would not make. Often, we look back on those decisions with regret. That was the case for the person we are going to learn about today as we continue our study of the book of Genesis. If you have your Bible, turn with me to Genesis 25.

As you are turning there, let's set the scene. Abraham, who we've been learning about the last five weeks, had the son of promise, Isaac, and Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. It would be through one of these sons that God would carry out his plans for the salvation of the world!

When the time came for Rebekah to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:24-34)

There are three words that come to mind when I read this story. The first word is *appetite*. Esau was a man controlled by his appetite. He came in from the open country famished and he said he was so hungry he was about to die! This man's hunger and appetite were taking over his mind and body. He wasn't carried into camp by his friends; he walked there on his own two feet! But his hunger took over and became like a fixation, an obsession. "I've got to have food! I've got to have it now!"

Here is where this is so relevant. Every one of us has appetites—food, physical intimacy, leisure, entertainment, acceptance, approval, admiration, success, wealth, possessions. We all have appetites for various things. To have appetites is to be human. We have physical needs, emotional needs, relational needs, psychological needs. We crave for them to be met. Appetites are a gift from God, but sin distorts our appetites so that instead of serving us, they rule over us. If left unchecked, like a fire spreading out of a firepit, our appetites break containment and become all consuming! Like for Esau, our appetites can become a fixation, an obsession, something that almost takes over our

body and controls us. Esau's appetite gave him tunnel vision. He could see nothing but the stew. Every one of us knows that feeling—when a desire takes over your brain and blinds you to everything else. When the snow came the other day, I was driving to work the next morning and saw a car on the road that had snow and ice on all the windows, with only a small little one-foot square in the windshield had been cleared. I couldn't believe it. (I won't tell you the gender—that wouldn't be fair to her. I'm kidding; I couldn't even tell who was in there!) That's what an outsized appetite will do to you: it will blind you to everything else!

When an appetite grows out of control, it convinces us we must have it, we must have it now, and we'll never be okay until we have it, and once we have it, we think it's all we'll need. But most of the time, our appetites are lying. Our appetites never stay content for long. You ate so much you couldn't take another bite, but four hours later you crave more food. I have a friend who has done very well for himself. Years ago, he told me, "I've got my dream home. I'll never buy another home." He's bought three more houses since then. Our appetites scream, "If you can just get this one thing, THEN you'll really be living. You'll be happy and satisfied and fulfilled." But appetites never keep their promises. Unchecked appetites evolve into tyrants, and tyrants demand that everything else revolve around them.

Our appetites can become so strong and all-controlling that they devalue everything else in our lives in comparison, which leads to our second word from the text: *apathy*. Very simply, apathy means to lack passion. When we are apathetic, we don't care enough about something; we lack fire, conviction, or appreciation. I have a friend who is very passionate about the Colts. He flew to Berlin last week to watch the game in person. I have another friend that didn't know the Colts were playing in Berlin. One friend is full of passion for the Colts and it drives the decisions he makes. One friend is apathetic about the Colts and they never factor into his decisions. Some people are passionate about the weather. They study the Weather Channel like they are getting ready to pass the bar exam. The Weather Channel is always on in the background. Every time I see them, they ask me, "What do you think about the weather?" I say, "I haven't thought about the weather. I decide what to wear by opening the door." We all lack passion in certain areas and it's no big deal, but here's where this really matters: unchecked appetites breed apathy for what truly matters.

That's what happened to Esau. He became so carnal, so animalistic, so controlled by his physical appetite that when food was set in front of him, he could see it, he could smell it, he was overcome with desire for it, and he was told, "It's going to be so good, so tasty, so satisfying—but it's going to cost you your birthright," what did he say? "What good is the birthright to me?" (Genesis 25:32). This was the one possession he had that mattered far and away more than anything else in his life, but his tyrannical appetite convinced him not to even care about it.

Birthrights aren't very common in our culture, but they were very important in the ancient world. The birthright meant:

- Double inheritance (wealth)
- Family arbiter (influence)
- Divine blessing (favor)

The birthright, specifically for Esau, was of unparalleled value. Not only was his family unbelievably wealthy, but his family was THE family God has chosen to work through to accomplish his plans for the entire world. His birthright meant everything. His birthright outweighed all other possessions in

his life—it was a billion times more valuable than a bowl of stew. But what do tyrannical, out-of-control appetites do to us? Unchecked appetites breed apathy to what matters most. His hunger made him willing to sacrifice his wealth, his influence, his favor, his legacy. It was one of the worst exchanges in history!

There is a reason these stories have resonated with people for thousands of years. This is a window into humanity. This happens to us, too. When our appetites take over, we exchange what we want most for what we want right now! We all want long-term wealth in our retirement years, but we sacrifice it for the nicer cars, the nicer vacations, and the nicer food today. We all want long-term health, but we sacrifice it for sugar over vegetables and Netflix over exercise. We all want a great relationship with our family, but we choose working late or hobbies over time with our children. We all want a great relationship with God, but we choose scrolling over our reading our Bible, youth sports over church. At some point in our lives, every one of us has traded something sacred for something shallow. Maybe not a birthright for a bowl of stew, but we've all found ourselves in that space, exchanging what we know matters most for what we want right now. The result is often catastrophic.

That leads to our final word from this passage: *anguish*. Can you imagine what is going through Esau's mind? After his brother gave him the stew and the bread, "He ate and drank, and then got up and left" (Genesis 25:34). So anticlimactic. So unfulfilling. About fifteen minutes after he ate that stew, all the endorphins and dopamine wore off and he was left wondering, "Why, why, why did I do that? What was I thinking!" The next line tells us, "So Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34). His birthright went from being a treasured possession to a thorn in his side because there was nothing he could do to fix the damage he had done. The book of Hebrews describes this moment and says after his mistake, "Esau sought the blessing with tears, but could not change what he had done" (Hebrews 12:17). What incredible anguish and heartache.

Unchecked appetites cause damage that is often impossible to repair. You know this because you've suffered from this in other people's lives. Some of you have no relationship with one of your parents because they chose a tyrannical appetite for alcohol, or a pill, or gambling over their relationship with you. Some of you grew up in a broken home because one of your parents succumbed to the tyrannic appetite of lust or approval or excitement and cheated on their spouse. No one in their right mind would ever choose a pill or a fling or a casino over their kids, their spouse, their family, their legacy. No one! But appetites seduce us out of our right minds and cause damage that cannot be undone.

I recently read the true story of a father who was driving home in his truck with two his sons in the back. He saw a bar, pulled in, left the engine running, and went to have a few drinks. He had more drinks than he intended, the engine ran out of gas, and the young kids were stuck in a freezing truck. They had frostbite on their ears and each had to have several fingers amputated. Some of you still carry scars from someone else's appetite—a parent, a spouse, a friend. Jesus came to heal what's been severed, to restore what's been lost, and to redeem even what feels beyond repair.

The aftermath of being ruled by your appetite is catastrophic, and there are some things in life you simply cannot get back. That's the tragedy of Esau—he wasn't evil, he was just impulsive. Most of our deepest regrets don't come from malice, but from moments when we stop thinking clearly. I want to give you the clearest, strongest, simplest tool possible for you to take a hold of when an appetite takes over, no matter what it is. When that appetite takes over, realize you are in the throes of

spiritual warfare. There are spiritual forces that want to destroy your life, your legacy, your family, and your eternity. In the spiritual battle, these simple words from Jesus are one of the most potent and powerful weapons you can ever have at your disposal: “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Matthew 16:26). Remember what’s at stake and remember that not even gaining the entire world is worth it.

If I had to summarize the takeaway from this passage, it would be simple: God has great plans and purposes for your life. There are wonderful, magnificent, impactful things God wants to do in you and through you to bless you and bless others through you. This isn’t self-help, pop-psychology, feel-good religion. This is biblical fact! “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). More than you can imagine, God has great things he wants to do in you and through you.

But here’s what we also know: God has great plans and purposes for your life, but if you let your appetites rule over you, you’ll miss out on many of them. No one wants to miss out on the promised land because they were chasing instant gratification, yet many will. Psalm 24:3 asks a critical question: “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?” Who can draw near to God and receive the blessings of God? The answer comes in the following verse: “The one who has clean hands and a pure heart.” The entry-level requirement to step into God’s plans and purposes for your life is to rule over your fleshly desires and live a consecrated life.

That’s the life we want to live, and Jesus is the example we can follow. Esau hadn’t eaten in a day and sold his birthright; his is a cautionary tale. But Jesus, our ultimate example, was in the wilderness without food for forty days, and he too was tempted to compromise his birthright: “If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.” Satan said, “You’re hungry; listen to your cravings and give into your appetite.” Jesus said, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Esau gave up his birthright to satisfy his appetite. Jesus gave up his appetite to secure our birthright. All throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus could have taken the easy way, the shortcut, the path of least resistance, but rather than doing what felt right in the moment, he trusted God, even to the point of the cross. He is now our perfect example, our great high priest. We can rely on him for mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.