

Wrestling with Appetites

Genesis 25:19-34

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: In the chaos of college football season, most folks miss another “sport” that’s quietly thriving: **Major League Eating**. Yes, it’s real. Yes, they have a governing body. Yes, it’s exactly what it sounds like. A few record holders caught my eye:

- **Matt Stonie** once put down *82 strips of bacon* in five minutes.
- **Patrick Bertoletti** demolished *almost eleven pounds* of Key Lime Pie in eight minutes.
- **Micah Collins** inhaled *84 ounces of pork and beans* in under a minute — which makes you grateful you weren’t in the car with him on the way home.

But there’s one man who towers above them all: **Joey Chestnut**, the undisputed heavyweight of human hunger. He holds the world record at the Nathan’s Hot Dog Contest — *76 hot dogs and buns in ten minutes*. And that’s just the beginning. Apple pie. Asparagus. Chicken wings. Shrimp. Tacos. Twinkies. If you can name it, Chestnut has probably set a record for inhaling it.

Now, you would assume a man becomes that dominant by *starving himself* before a contest. But according to one of the legends of the sport, **Takeru Kobayashi**, success comes from the exact opposite approach. Kobayashi says, *“The more you eat... the more you want to eat.”*

In other words, ***the way to strengthen an appetite is to feed it***. You stoke it, stretch it, satisfy it — and it grows.

That is exactly what Esau discovered far too late and what every believer has to learn early: **If you don’t pin down your appetites, your appetites will pin you down.**

CONTEXT: If you remember, when we began this study of Genesis, we pointed out that the major divisions of this book were indicated by Genealogies. We find one comes to another genealogy, thus another division. Genesis 25 begins with a listing of those Abraham fathered by other wives and concubines. But then states abruptly that...

Genesis 25:5 (ESV)

⁵ Abraham gave all he had to Isaac.

Isaac, though not the firstborn (that would be Ishmael), would have had all of the rights of primogeniture. Isaac would hold Patriarchal authority over the family. The covenant promises would belong to those who worship the God, not only of Abraham, but now of Abraham and Isaac.

The genealogy continues with Ishmael's offspring through verse 18. Then in verse 19, we see the introduction of a new section.

It begins as a problem, as most good stories do. Rebecca, the woman that the text had gone to great lengths to describe, was the chosen bride for Isaac, the bride elect of this covenant people. She had been married to Isaac for 20 years but had produced no offspring. Isaac is now 60 years old, and we don't know Rebecca's age, but we can assume she's at least in her late 30s or early 40s. And still no offspring. Which, for most women, would simply mean that God intends to use you in another way. But when you are married to the son of Abraham, it is a problem. God's word hangs on your ability to bear a son. But as we know, where God guides, God always provides.

Genesis 25:21 (ESV)

²¹ And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

And did she conceive - two eggs were fertilized within her womb. Two sons began to grow. There is something precious about a baby growing to a size that you can feel the baby moving about for the first time, but when these babies moved, there was something troubling. It was as if there was a border war taking place in her uterus.

Genesis 25:22–28 (ESV)

²² The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

We are not told how Rebecca inquired of the Lord. The Midrash, a Jewish commentary on the OT as well as (Genesis Rabbah 63:6), Rashi (11th-century commentator), say Rebekah went to the bet midrash (**house of study**) of **Shem** (Noah's son) and **Eber**, who were still alive at that time and were regarded as righteous prophets or sages through whom God spoke. However it was, God gave her an answer.

²³ And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."

So three truths were given:

1. Two Progenetors are within Rebecca
2. One will be stronger than the other
3. The Older would serve the Younger, or in other words, the Younger child will rule.

The conflict of these two boys is the first instance of wrestling from which we drew the title of this third section of Genesis - ***“We who Wrestle”***.

²⁴ When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field,

Esau was a man's man. He drove a 4-wheel drive. He liked to hunt. He had a mullet. Wore a lot of denim. Had a Gadsen flag on his truck. Dipped Copenhagen.

27b. while Jacob was a *quiet* man, dwelling in tents.

Esau was out in the woods, and Jacob liked to stay home sipping a nice chai latte, watching HGTV, and experimenting with baking recipes.

The Hebrew word for quite meant self-contained, solid, together. He was in full control of his faculties. A trait that at its best would cause him to excel in righteousness and at its worst would cause him to be devious and deceptive. The text shows that he liked to cook.

²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Favoritism among parents and children never ends well. Isaac favored Esau because he liked to eat the meat he brought in from the field. Rebekah favored Jacob, perhaps because she knew the prophecy over his life. Either way the stage was set for disaster.

Genesis 25:29–34 (ESV)

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. ³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore his name was called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.”

Now, remember earlier we said that although Abraham had other sons, Isaac received all that Abraham had? Well, that same right of Primogeniture was now to be passed to the firstborn son of Isaac, which would be Esau - that was his right by birth. All that belonged to Abraham and Isaac was to be passed on to Esau. Financially, he was set, not only that – God had promised to unfold the plan of redemption through the lineage of Abraham. Esau was to be the man through whom the Messiah would enter the fallen world to redeem it.

But what did that matter now... look at verse 32...

³² Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”

The word in Hebrew means **weary**. Esau had likely risen early, been out all day, most likely stalking his prey. Now he returns, and he’s wiped out.

³³ Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau **despised** his birthright.

That’s the essence of what I want to talk to you about today – The Danger of Unchecked Appetites.

An Appetite is a natural desire to satisfy a bodily need. An appetite is an internal compulsion.

- Generally, we associate it with a compulsion for food.
- It can also be an emotional appetite for connection or intimacy.
- It can be an appetite for achievement or success.

There are a few things we know for sure about our appetites:

1. **They are a God given**, – They are not bad. As a matter of fact, they remind us to eat, to procreate, to survive.
2. **They are Amoral** – Appetites in and of themselves are not sinful. Don’t ask God to take them away; they can serve you, but they can also destroy you.
3. **They are a part of life** – As long as you are on this earth, you will have cravings; they will never be satisfied completely on this earth.
4. **They tend to be driven by “More”**.
 - **Food** is the one we think of first - Have you ever eaten so much that you thought – I’m never going to eat again. Next day, a little whisper, eat a little.
 - **Stuff** – The next new phone, a new car, a new house.
 - **Relationship** – Desire to get engaged, married, and parent,
 - **Status** - all I want is a job, all I want is to get out of the cubicle, I want a corner office. Ect.

5. The Enemy Seeks to Hijack our Appetites To Control Us - at first it’s a whisper, eventually they scream until.... You do something Stupid, irresponsible, unhealthy, and sinful. That’s what happened in our story.

How Does The Enemy Hijack our Appetites?

1. The Enemy Uses Appetites to Pervert Our Perception

³² Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”

Was he really about to die? I mean, he walked in the door. He was able to speak. All of the evidence points to the fact that Esau was not literally at the point of death.

What was happening here? Scientists call it “**Impact bias**” – The Theory of Impact Bias states that *when we think about an emotional event, we tend to overestimate how good we will feel and how long it will last, thus it clouds our judgment.*

One of the most helpful lessons I have learned is to never trust my emotions after about 9 PM.

Have you ever considered that Satan tempted Jesus at the end of a 40-day fast when he had been wiped out physically and emotionally?

When you are exhausted, don't make any major decisions. Emotions are like muscles; they can fatigue.

Examples of Impact Bias:

- **Freedom** - I remember at 16 thinking, if **I could only get my license**, I could drive over to my friend's house and truly be free. Then, at 18, if I could move off to college, I would have a real sense of freedom. Then, if I could only get out of college... and on it goes.
- **Relationships** - If I could only get a **girlfriend**, then get engaged, then get married, then have a child.
- **Pornography** – I'll never forget a friend telling me his first experience with pornography. He had the deep sense that **if he would only look at that girl**, he would be fulfilled, but he was never satisfied.

That is the effect of impact bias – it perverts our perception of reality.

2. The Enemy Uses Appetites to Minimize Consequences

How could Esau believe that the stew was more valuable than his birthright?

He was guilty of what scientists call **Focalism** – the tendency to focus on one event to the complete blindness of other events or effects. Esau allowed his appetite to so focus on the meal at hand that he lost focus of all the repercussions.

ILLUSTRATION: KING DAVID. It was the time that the Kings went to war, but David went for a walk. He saw a beautiful woman bathing, and he became so fixated on her that he forgot what it would cost him.

- He forgot that to cover up his sin it would cost the life of her husband, one of his faithful mighty men, and his troop.
- He forgot that it would cost him the life of his child.

Why? All he could see was what his appetite craved.

Your appetite will always whisper:

- “This one thing will fix everything.”
- “You deserve this.”
- “You can repent later.”

But you’re trading something priceless for something pointless.

The same thing happened to Esau. All he could see was the bowl of stew. That, coupled with his Impact Bias, leaves him with no sense of reality.

Impact Bias, Focalism...

3. The Enemy Uses Our Appetites to Make Us Fools

ILLUSTRATION: The biblical definition of wisdom is the ability to see the cause and effect of decisions. Ultimately, wisdom is seeing things from God’s perspective - who can see the eternal impact of each decision.

Foolishness is the opposite. It is seeing only the immediate impact. Seeing only what is right in front of you. How will you feel if you do this or that?

Oh, that someone would remind Esau at this very moment of the promises God made to Abraham, and the faith of Abraham that caused him to leave the security of his family and to step out on faith that God was able to provide.

But **Chuck Swindoll** was right: “God is never more unreal than in a moment of lust.”

All of the promises, all of the prophecies, now fade into a distant echo. He was certain if they were real anymore - perhaps it was simply the delusions of a crazy old man. Besides, what good had it done him... he was starving.

- He forgets that Abraham experienced famine as well, which was more severe, more extensive.
- He forgets that his mother, Rebekah, left everything because she believed God’s word to Abraham.

HOW TO BREAK THE POWER OF APPETITES:

1. Make Big Decisions from a Place of Emotional and Spiritual Health

If you are in a situation where you HAVE to make a decision, let your answer be NO until you have time to be well-rested and focused.

Fatigue clouds judgment. HALT when you feel - Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired. Delay decisions until you are rested and rational.

2. Identify Your “Bowl of Stew”

- What are you talking yourself into? You already know what you would tell someone else in your situation, but we think our situation is unique – it’s not, you’re just in the moment.
- What are you contemplating that your spouse is uncomfortable with?
- What are you doing that’s not illegal or immoral, but you hope nobody finds out about? Esau’s stew looked harmless—but it was a spiritual landmine.

3. Reframe and Refrain

What if we could reframe your appetite? What if we could bring a clear and simple picture of what is most important to you when you need it most?

Is that not what Jesus did in Gethsemane, at the moment that his appetite to live was screaming to be heard?

Heb 12:2 fix our eyes on Jesus, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross.

Jesus reframed his appetite by focusing on a God centered future.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: 10 Years from Now... write whatever comes to mind.

- What do you want to see God do?
- What do you want to see God do in your family?
- Through your small group?
- In your business?
- The clearer, bigger, and more defined the frame, the less grip your appetites will have on your lives.
- Properly reframe your appetites; they always want more.
- What do you want God to do in your marriage? In your children?
- In your ministry?
- In your character?

When you see the future clearly, the stew loses its shine.

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE GOD DESIRES FOR YOU AND RECOGNIZE A BOWL OF STEW FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS.