

## URGES

The TVs and newspapers ring out with the names. People whose “god is their stomach” – that is, those whose urges and desires have so overtaken their sense of right and wrong that they have sacrificed their honor and their better judgment to go after the urge.

This last week we heard that some people, who had the deep drive to get their kids into good schools, did it. One of them, Jane Buckingham, was a motivational speaker and author who writes and speaks on parental integrity! But she paid someone to take her daughter’s ACT. Then there’s the professors and actors and business people and college coaches. I think we’ve only scratched the surface on this one. Much more yet to come. Keep your eyes open. The college industry has many hidden scandals waiting to come to the surface. People’s urge for success has led them to do so many, many things.

Then, of course, there are those who had a different drive – you know -- the one we don’t like to talk about so much in church cause it’s just a little PG rated. It’s what creates marital intimacy as well as babies, but it’s also the drive that, when misguided, leads to adultery, prostitution, pornographic addiction, and every manner of sexual aberration. In the last few years the names have been striking. Again, famous actors, doctors, coaches, corporation heads, journalists, reporters, presidents, pastors. Their names are splattered across the screen over and over again as the stories of their captivity to the “drive” leave a trail of injured and damaged folks.

Then there’s this. Wrapped in this little box are so many urges. Social media and the urge to be connected. Opinions expressed and the urge to respond. We are voyeurs about the faults and failings of others. We are anxious for the instant gratification that we can get.

I recently read a funny piece, “how to know we’re addicted to our phones.

Instead of kissing your girlfriend, you kiss your girlfriend's home page.

Your eyeglasses have the GOOGLE letters engraved in on them.

You spend half of the plane trip with your iPad on your lap and your child in the overhead bin.

You step out of your room and realize that your family has moved and you don't have a clue when it happened.

You check your mail. It says "no new messages." So you check it again.

You tell the cab driver you live at <http://123.elm.street/house/bluetrim.html>

Your wife says communication is important in a marriage, so begin to initiate more text conversations at the dinner table.

You start introducing yourself as "Jon at gmail dot com.

Then there's the artificial stimulants and pacifiers. The opioid crisis is striking in its scope and sad in its ability to ruin lives. Similarly with other drugs. And yet, the euphoria that it creates is so enticing and alluring that it just sucks the innocent right into the stream like a rip tide in the ocean.

Urges, drives, desires. What is your poison? What appetite wants to grab you? Is it anger -- materialism -- popularity? Is it a craving for a drink -- the lure of lust -- greed -- envy -- jealousy -- bitterness. -- is it the thrill of the dice, the enticement of a relationship, the hunger of over-indulgence in food or fashion or frivolity?

Paul warns, <sup>18</sup>“For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.”

And “stomach” there, I believe, clearly refers to these urges.

Paul knows where all this leads, if left unchecked. It's a downward spiral that has its natural end in someone's demise. And, because of that, Paul says he weeps for those so consumed, for they are like snowmen in the heat -- slowly, gradually, they are melting away -- and they don't even realize it.

You have to wonder, why did God even give us these urges? Couldn't he have created a people who never yearned for anything: who didn't have a drive for food, or a yen for material things, or an innate desire to be popular, -- who didn't have to have a sexual drive, a weakness for drugs that help us escape reality, who weren't drawn in by the video games, the television shows, the smells and tastes and sounds and sights that draw us away from our good senses and into an artificial world that revolves around us.

I'm certain He could have. But so many of those things are part of the spice of life that He has designed for us to enjoy. I don't know about you, but when I go on vacation one of my favorite things is the food. I also enjoy competition, relaxation, a good game, a TV show, my phone. They're great blessings from God that were meant to enhance our lives not to detract from them.

But the Tempter is very clever and he knows very well how to twist and turn the good things of God into urges and passions that can control us.

Here's the good news. Paul doesn't leave us without an answer to our struggle. Instead, he reminds us that our God is a God of transformation -- a God who takes that which is broken, lost, failing, hopeless, stuck in a rut, and, by His mighty power, makes it something new and grand and beautiful.

Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son is a great example. Here was a boy who couldn't control his appetites, and, when given his share of the estate early, squanders it all in wine, women, and song. Soon he finds himself wallowing with the pigs and fighting with them for their food. But the hero of the story is the father, who keeps searching and reaching and praying for his son until he finally comes home. And then he takes this broken boy and, with his forgiving grace, renews and restores him.

That's what God also wants to do for us who are stuck in our appetites. He wants to make us new. He wants to lead us home. He wants to restore and renew us so that we are no longer consumed. He began the process right away when Adam and Eve indulged their passion for power and fell from grace in the Garden of Eden. Like the Father in the Prodigal Son story, he went out in the field and searched after them, and, in grace, right away, He promised a Deliverer -- a Savior.

2000 years ago, that promise was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. He, the Son of God, came into this world of appetites and was, Himself, consumed by them. The greed and selfishness of mankind took Him to the cross, where he was crucified. It was horrible end to a beautiful life.

But that death opened up a whole new world. For, God made His sacrifice the key to salvation. Jesus carried our sin upon His shoulders on that Good Friday, and by paying the price for it, unleashed the floodgate of God's strength and help. And when He rose from the dead, He secured a heavenly home for all those who place their trust and hopes in Him.

So now, who are we? We are a people who have been bought with a price by a God who refused to give up on us. We are a people who have been sent the Spirit of God as a deposit, to

move in us to live and think and act differently than we once would have. We are a transformed people.

Paul talks about the appetite people this way: “Their mind is on earthly things.” And then he says, concerning those who have been transformed by God, “but our citizenship is in heaven.” As God’s people, then, we remember who we are. -- not a people who anchor themselves in the things of this life -- not a people whose appetites and cravings and passions control us, but a people who see beyond the confines of this globe to the glory of eternity. And so, we set our minds on the goal, on the prize, on the citizenship that is ours in heaven and serving the God who loved us with His own blood.

COMFORT DOG EXAMPLE. How they must be trained, carefully and deliberately to focus on their purpose. They must learn to “leave it.”

And as we do, the Spirit of God breathes into us something that battles against the appetites that tempt us so much. It’s call, the “fruit of the Spirit,” and is defined as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Does that mean our appetites will magically disappear? No, certainly not. They will dog us at every turn and we may even sometimes need outside help to deal with such struggles. The Tempter doesn’t give up that easily.

But when we wage our battle, we know that we are not alone. Armed with the forgiving love of God’s Son and the transforming self-control of the Spirit, we go forward with hope and confidence with His defense and His armor leading us.

That’s how God works when we trust in Him. He leads us away from our passions and toward his loving compassion. May God also work such miracles in you and me. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.