

If you had to surrender one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Pizza - Mexican food (tacos/burritos) - Hamburgers

I love food. I'm a foodie. I love to cook. I love to experience new restaurants. When my family goes to a new city, I'm always doing research to find out the best places to eat. I want that city's best burger, or best pizza, or tacos. I want to eat at the famous places that have been open for 100 years. I want to know the history, experience the culture, smell the aromas, and even stick to the floor.

I love to cook. I love to experiment with new foods and new recipes. I like to cook for crowds. I get energy in the kitchen. I like to fry foods, grill foods, and sauté foods. I like to make things from scratch. My wife caught my cooking bug early in our marriage. You should taste our homemade hot cocoa, or my made-from-scratch jalapeno-bacon mac and cheese. Food is like a culture at our house.

Last year we made a decision to be healthier. This began with simply cutting out sweet drinks and just drinking water. Then we added exercise. Then we started changing our eating habits. We started counting calories, cooking with fresher ingredients, and eating out less. We decided we wanted ours to be a healthy household with high wellness standards and good, sustainable habits.

As I began losing weight, I got some good advice from some really healthy people. Don't put habits into place that you can sustain until you reach your weight loss goal. Rather, put habits into place that you can sustain for the rest of your life. If you really want to be healthy, we're talking about a whole-life change. A complete upsetting of your apple cart. Or in my case, burrito cart.

I'm talking about changing the way we eat. Changing the way we drink. Changing the way we spend our spare time. Changing the way we move. Changing the way we cook. Changing the way we think about food. I'm talking about emptying ourselves of these pre-conceived notions so that we may be made new! This has been a lifestyle overhaul, but that's the only way to get it to stick! If we get skinny then just go back to the way things were, or we just do the bare minimum to scrape by, it will not last! I'll reward myself with the occasional burrito, and if I'm in a city with a White Castle I'm still getting some sliders, but I'm otherwise committed to this thing. Health is a whole-life commitment.

I want to talk about whole-life commitments today. And I want to talk about health. But this isn't about burritos.

Read Mark 1:16-20

¹⁶ One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁷ Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" ¹⁸ And they left their nets at once and followed him.

¹⁹ A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. ²⁰ He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.

Here we have Jesus walking along the sea and he sees some fisherman. First, the sea is the Sea of Galilee, which is actually a giant, freshwater lake. It's fed by the Jordan river and it feeds down into the Dead Sea. There's significance to this body of water, which we'll get to. So Jesus sees these fisherman. And he has just started his public ministry. He was just recently baptized. We don't have a first miracle, a first healing, or anything. We have a pronouncement from God, letting everyone know that Jesus is his son, and we have an announcement from Jesus that the good news has finally arrived. That's it.

So it's not like his fame necessarily precedes him with these working-class fishermen on the lake. First, he calls Simon and Andrew, who were fishing from the shoreline. If they were fishing from the shoreline, it means they couldn't afford a boat, which made them a lower class of professional fishermen. Chances are, being that they didn't come from money, they were really relying on that day's catch. Living paycheck to paycheck.

Then Jesus calls James and John, who are out on a boat with their father. Fishing is the family business, and they've been successful at it because they can afford a boat. They've probably been fishing with their father their entire lives. He has taught them everything he knows and they will someday take over his successful fishing business.

Jesus calls these men away from their nets. In both of these cases, the men dropped everything to follow. One set of brothers dropped the nets that they were probably depending on to feed them through the week. One set of brothers dropped the nets that represented a promising future and success.

These were the first disciples to be called. There is something to be said, first, about a calling from God. They were in a pretty different position than we were. They didn't know who Jesus was. They couldn't Google him. I got a phone call the other day at the office and the guy told me his name. In a flash, while we were talking, I looked for him on Facebook. I quickly saw his picture, what mutual friends we had, and where he was pastoring. 10 seconds into our conversation, when we were still exchanging greetings and niceties, I was downright snooping into his life. "Oh, this guy had soup for dinner last night."

There is something about a calling from God that we call divine. It stirs us at our innermost. It's something we can't shake. These men didn't have all the information they needed, but God in human form was literally standing before them saying, "Come with me." They obeyed. It may have been reckless, but if you've ever felt God tugging on your heart to do something, you know how strong that can be. Imagine him standing in front of you giving him the same advice. The first disciples didn't choose Jesus because of his resume. They didn't interview him for an hour to see if he was a worthwhile Messiah. They followed because of a divine call on their lives.

But they still got to choose to follow. They weren't forced. And when they made the choice, they made a whole-life decision. A complete change. Laying down their nets meant they were leaving behind everything they knew. A full upsetting of their apple, or burrito, carts.

A call to follow Jesus is not just a heart transformation. It's a life transformation. Jesus said he would send them out to fish for people. If you grew up in the church, you might know the song, "I will make you fishers of men..." Jesus didn't call them over to a huddle on the shore to give them advice about how to live their life. He called them to give up everything they knew and follow him with their whole selves. From fishermen to fishers of men. From physical labor to spiritual labor. A seismic shift.

What does that seismic shift look like for you and me, today? A call to be a Christian, to follow Jesus, to put down our nets still looks like a whole-life transformation. Too often, we try to change as little as possible, skating by doing the bare minimum. We do just enough to still be called Christian. We pray before meals. We try not to cuss when we stub our toe. We share Christian posts on social media.

True disciples of Jesus are not just people who come to church, put some money in the plate, and attend the occasional prayer meeting. A call to discipleship is a radical uprooting. And it's not just about what you're giving up. Those men put their nets down, but they picked up a calling. They picked up a purpose. They learned how to be gracious, how to put others first, and how to live a life full of meaning and intentionality. They were skating through life, trying to make a buck. What they got was a life with Jesus that lived fully into who they were created to be. They found their full humanity, their reason for living. They also found a life beyond death.

But to answer such existential questions, they had to be willing to lay down the nets that represented their whole lives. If we're willing to lay down our nets, our future, our finances, our own desires, completely emptying ourselves, we can be filled up with a more abundant life than we ever could have imagined.

Let me teach you a word: kenosis. It's a Greek word that means "emptying." Actually, we already talked about it earlier this morning. Remember the Scripture I read during the music? Philippians 2:5-11?

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶ Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

In theological circles, this is called the Kenosis Hymn. This is a beautiful sampling of Scripture that gives us a clear example of a life emptied and filled up by God. Jesus did this. He was very God, in heaven. He was creator. He was all-powerful and ever-present. In becoming human, he gave this up, emptied himself, and allowed himself to become the most vulnerable kind of human there is: a newborn baby. He even obeyed the laws of humanity by succumbing to death. But look at verse 9 to the end again. Therefore, because of this emptying...

Jesus modeled kenosis for us by coming in flesh to live as he did. Then, when he asked the disciples to lay their nets down because he was going to make them into something completely new, he asked for this kenosis, this self-emptying.

If we can agree that God is perfect, without flaw. If we can agree that he is the ultimate good. Why do we so badly want to hold on to parts of ourselves instead of letting them go to be filled up by him? A complete self-emptying, a total abandonment to our relationship with Jesus, says, "God, I am whatever you want me to be. Completely yours." If we agree he is perfect, wouldn't we want as much of him as we can get?

But we don't. We hold on to things that matter to us. The disciples didn't say, "OK, Jesus. We'll come with you, but can we just bring our nets in case we need to do some fishing?" or "Well, how about this new fishing rod, it folds up and fits in my pack, can I at least bring that?" No. They left their nets and they followed him. But we keep a tight grip on things continue to shape us. We empty parts of ourselves, but keep other parts.

Some examples that aren't going to make me any friends. We ask the questions, "is this good for my business?" or "is this good for my bank account?" or "is this good for my family?" These are healthy, appropriate questions to ask. But if we ask them all BEFORE we ask the question: "Is this good for the kingdom of God?" then we have priorities issues. Actually, we have kenosis issues. I'm not saying that our businesses or our families aren't important. Obviously they are. But being disciples, nets laid down, completely poured out and sold out to God first asks the kingdom question.

Our friends moved into a new house in a nice neighborhood with a less-than-desirable school. Most of the kids from this affluent neighborhood were shipped out to other schools in the area. Private schools. "Better" schools. Most of the kids at church all went to the same school together, a public school that was largely populated by Nazarenes, both students and administration.

This left our friends' local, neighborhood school with mostly low-income children, many from single-parent households, many from non-English speaking households. Our friends had a decision to make.

On the one hand, they had to ask themselves, "What's our responsibility to our kids?" They had to ask what would keep them the safest, get them the best education, etc. All the questions we ask as parents. After all, this school wasn't as safe as others. The school had lower test scores. The school's programs didn't have the quality of some other area schools.

But before they asked that question, they had to ask another: "What's our responsibility to the kingdom?" They wondered where their family could have the most impact. In the end, they chose to stay in their neighborhood school. It wasn't an educational decision. It wasn't a financial decision. It wasn't even a traditional parenting decision. It was a kingdom decision.

Or here's another way for me not to make any friends, you ready? If you identify as a Christian but you're so committed to a political party (any of them) that you're not willing to point out un-Christlike characteristics of its leaders or platforms, you might identify more as a Democrat or Republican than you as a Christian. This becomes a kenosis issue. We'll pour out most of ourselves, but there's no way God would ever call me to vote any differently than I do, so I don't need to offer that part of me to him.

If we want to be like Jesus, then look at his kenosis story. He went from the highest possible position – the God of all creation, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present – to the lowest, a baby born out of wedlock in a barn full of animals. It was only by this total emptying could we really see his story unfold. He didn't say, "Ok, I'll go be a little baby, but just keep my omniscience so I still know everything" or "I'll just keep my omnipresence in case I need to be in two places at once." No, he emptied himself. It was only from this lowest of positions could he be raised up to the highest.

Let me offer something that you may not have thought of before: fishing was all those disciples knew. It was their world. A person's job was a defining characteristic. Those nets represented their livelihood. For Simon and Andrew, it represented a table with more than just bread and water on it. For James and John, it represented a family legacy and a life of continued success. We all need to understand the gravity of them laying their nets down. That lake, the Sea of Galilee was all they knew.

And Jesus called them away from it. I'm not going to gloss over how difficult this must have been, or how difficult it would be for any of us today. We get our identity from our jobs, or our families, or our political parties. Being asked to lay them down would be so hard. But think about this: the disciples didn't leave that lake forever. No, they followed Jesus and he began to train them and teach them and show them how to live a full life. In the midst of that, they ended up back at that very same freshwater lake. Except, next time they were out on it, Jesus fell asleep in the boat and a storm blew in. As fishermen, they were familiar with the storms. The Sea of Galilee falls between the Mediterranean Sea to the West and mountains to the east, and the differences in elevation and climate cause very strong winds

and storms on that lake. Not a storm you want to get caught in. These men likely had a healthy respect for a Sea of Galilee storm. So when their boat got caught in one, they genuinely feared for their lives. And this man who had called them away from the sea, got up from below deck and spoke the wind and waves into submission. The lake they knew, feared, and respected, obeyed the man who had called them away from it. Oh, and the next time they were on it? He was walking on top of it.

Jesus isn't necessarily going to call you away from what you love. Rather, he may just give you a brand new perspective, so you understand it in a kingdom way. This perspective comes when we empty ourselves so that he can fill us with his own nature. There were probably days on the road when the disciples longed for the sea. Now, they were the best friends of the man who controlled it.

What are your nets? What do you need to put down, to be emptied of? What's your Sea of Galilee, the only life you know, that you could never see yourself walking away from? What are you struggling to let go of? An emptying of these things so that you may be filled and see them like Jesus sees them may surprise you in ways you couldn't possibly imagine. Lay down your nets. Prepare for a seismic shift.