Expanding Waistlines, Shrinking Jesus

Euan MacRae 15 January 2016



I love the Christmas season. Family, friends, kids off school, nights in front of the fire playing games, movies, long sleeps, and so much food! As my waistline expands, somehow, my Jesus seems to shrink!

I read a recent article in the New Scientist magazine that intrigued me and caused me to think, 'Perhaps this is part of my problem?!' 'Enlarging waistlines may cause brain shrinkage' certainly caught my attention, particularly following two weeks of lazy mornings and exotic puddings! The article claimed a direct correlation between obesity and poor cognitive function.

> ...when the flesh is 'well fed', there is an inevitable decline in spiritual health.

The Flesh and the Spirit

This made me think about a term the Bible uses called 'the flesh', which is the self-serving part of man that operates independently from God. Throughout God's Word, a ferocious battle is depicted between our flesh and spirit (that part of man which is in tune and co-operates with God's Spirit). These two natures are set in opposition to each other, and when the flesh is 'well

fed', there is an inevitable decline in spiritual health. Paul writes, 'For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do' (Galatians 5:17).

This inner conflict of our carnal, natural desires and spirit, although painful, is an important facet of free will. It is only in battling my flesh that I can assess the strength of my 'spirit man'. It is only through daily victory over those desires that I can know the wonder and reward of obedience to God. Jesus said, 'Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them' (John 14:21 NLT).

- **How can you know you truly love Jesus?** Obedience!
- **How do you walk in obedience?** By starving the desires of the flesh (saying no to sin) and feeding the desires of the Spirit.

> Unless I am intentional, I will continue in the flesh-feeding, spirit-starving patterns that so often creep in during holiday periods.

For me, holidays, and particularly Christmas holidays, pose a threat to my spiritual health. As any church leader will tell you, rest is essential – we need to refill the tanks, renew our vigour and prepare for another year of Kingdom adventures. But unlike Jesus, who rested by withdrawing to quiet places to be in the presence of His Father, our rest often resembles a decomposing bag of bones lying in a vegetative state on the sofa, absorbing yet another tragic Christmas film in which Santa saves the day!

The outcome is that, on my return to "work", I discover that the good habits I have spent years developing, have suddenly changed and my whole system needs a reboot. Unless I am intentional, I will continue in the flesh-feeding, spirit-starving patterns that so often creep in during holiday periods.

Expanding waistlines shrink Jesus! You see, if we simply feed the flesh, then our desires begin to serve the flesh, and the presence, significance and permitted influence of Jesus communicated to us by our sensitivity to God's Spirit shrinks.

A.W Tozer said: 'When the psalmist says magnify the Lord, he doesn't mean that you are to make God big, but you are to see Him big. When we take a telescope and look at a star, we don't increase the size of the star, we only see it as larger. Likewise, you cannot make God bigger, but you are only to see Him bigger!'

> Reach for your ‘Faithbook’ first.

How Can I Magnify Jesus in the New Year?

1. Make Jesus Your First Conversation of the Day

I don’t know about you, but the hour before school is a crazy time in our house. Conversations revolve around who finished the Coco Pops, where on earth Conor’s PE kit is, and why Skye has drawn all over Holly’s homework. Often those first conversations can set the tone for the day. That’s why I need to get up at least two hours before school so that Jesus is my first conversation. I want Him to set my course and direct my steps before my attention is stolen by the practical concerns of the day.

2. My Encounter Begins in His Word

The first port of call for me is the Word of God. Recently our great friend, Brad Verreynne, preached a moving challenge, expressing concern that time spent with Jesus was being destroyed and diluted by the magnetism of social media apps like Facebook. How many people wake in the morning, reach for their phones, and before you know it, a rabbit warren has opened up and some meaningless event has consumed 20 minutes of your day?

Reach for your ‘Faithbook’ first.

3. The Word is Most Effective Inside, Not Outside

In a recent blog, R.T. Kendall writes: ‘A melancholy fact: Most Christians do not read their bibles regularly. Some Christians do not read their bibles very much at all, and… some church leaders do not read their bibles!’

God’s Word is the staple diet for a healthy spirit. Too many Christians have dust-covered Bibles adorning living room shelves and bedside tables. The Word is intended to reside in your heart, not on paper.

In the book of Proverbs 4:21-22 (NLT), God said it this way: ‘Let them (the words of God) penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body’. The Word was made to be seated in the depths of your heart. That’s why the author of Hebrews noted that it is alive and penetrates between soul and spirit, joint and marrow.

A New Diet

I need a new diet! If well-fed flesh obscures my view of Jesus, then I need to starve it.

At Living Hope Community Church, we regularly fast. We follow the example of Daniel who fasted ‘for three whole weeks. All that time I had eaten no rich food. no meat or wine crossed my lips’. At the end of this period, vision came to Daniel. Fasting disconnects our bodies from worldly appetites and demonstrates to God that we see Him as our only sustenance. Fasting stimulates intimacy.

Every year, we make endless resolutions about exercise, diet, academic goals, employment opportunities, new aspirations for our children. If you’re anything like me, you probably start well and fade over time. In the New Year, I want to make one resolution, and that is to have a shrinking waistline and an expanded view of Jesus.

John the Baptist set eyes on Jesus and said, ‘He must become greater, I must become less’. That really should be the resolution of every Jesus follower, but in order for that to happen, maybe a new diet is necessary: a flesh-starving, spirit-feeding diet that sees a reversal of our expanding waistlines and shrinking Jesus.

This article was reviewed on 8 December 2021. It was originally published on the Four12 Global website on 15 January 2016.