

Three months ago, I was prepared to deliver a speech to you about food. It was a nice speech. Wasn't very serious. Didn't contain any powerful messages. But instead of giving that speech, I spent the afternoon before having my first asthma attack, vomiting a lot, and spending several hours in the emergency room. I was pretty bummed to miss my speech for several reasons. Mostly, though, because I really don't like public speaking and was ready to get my speech over with.

Today, I am here to deliver a speech to you about something different, something more meaningful than food. When I woke up the morning after my emergency room fiasco, I realized that I wouldn't be giving my speech for another three months. I immediately relaxed, knowing that I could put it off a little longer. As the weeks passed, I thought a little about my speech. I thought, I have this one opportunity to speak to my entire high school...do I really want to spend it talking about food? Isn't there something bigger I would want to share with everyone?

I don't want to waste my life. In ten years, I don't want to look back and think, "I talked about food in my senior speech because I was afraid to share something bigger." We have this one life to live and it's too important to simply talk about the weather and food. I don't want to look back with regret. In order not to do that, I need to know what I'm living for. I need to know who I am and where I'm going.

Don't we all want answers to these questions?

Blaise Pascal, a 17th century French philosopher, who was also searching for meaning, concluded that, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same

desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.” Thomas Aquinas reiterated this sentiment when he said, “There is within every soul a thirst for happiness and meaning.”

When we can't find answers to our questions, we feel as though we're wandering. *The Beatles* understood this feeling. In their song “Nowhere Man,” they sang, “He's a real nowhere man/ sitting in his nowhere land/ making all his nowhere plans/ for nobody/ doesn't have a point of view/ knows not where he's going to/ isn't he a bit like you and me?”

Isn't there something bigger to live for? Something bigger than college or a career or a plan for future success? Isn't there something that will fulfill us permanently? I'm here to tell you where *I* have found happiness, the kind of happiness that is so much greater than the happiness I get from food. It's the kind of happiness that fills you up from the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. It's the kind of happiness that brings true contentment and peace of mind. It may come as a surprise to you, but I have found my joy and my purpose in Jesus.

I know that Jesus is not the usual reason people give for their happiness. But I wish He were. With Him, I have peace knowing that no matter my circumstances, I still have a reason to be joyful. I can rejoice in Jesus's death, knowing that my faults have been erased and I have been given life after death. With Him, I am free. I am free from all of the mistakes I've made, all of the dumb things I've done and am going to do. Through Him, I know that all things work for good.

I want to be clear. I didn't say that Religion or Christianity is what brings me happiness. I said that Jesus brings me happiness. In the name of religion and even Christianity, horrible things have been done to countless people. I think religion evokes ideas of strict rule following, punishment, and judgment. But Jesus came to knock down religion and free people from its rules. He came to show them true life. He came to love.

This kind of love is everlasting. It exists despite of all of our mistakes and deficiencies.

I think everyone is searching for this kind of love—this sense of security and fulfillment. Again, Pascal said, “There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” We all have holes in our hearts we are seeking to fill.

Some look to fill this hole with marriage. They get married to have companionship and fulfillment. They want that love that conquers all. But in America, 50% of marriages end up in divorce. I suspect that that 50% thought they would find ultimate joy in marriage but didn't. Maybe this is more than just a statistic for you. Maybe you have been affected by divorce, a broken home, or a “dysfunctional family”? So, I ask you, does marriage satisfy that thirst for happiness and meaning? Maybe a little, but even the happiest couples aren't always happy. When the marriage doesn't provide the happiness needed to fill the hole, it ends. But people keep searching for fulfillment in marriage—I mean, Larry King just ended his eighth marriage.

While some look for joy in marriage, others look for it in their careers. Does a successful career equal happiness? Actor Owen Wilson, who has appeared in dozens of hit films, was dealing with such severe depression that he attempted to commit suicide or at least mask his emotional pain

through cutting his wrists and taking drugs. Chris Farley, hilarious SNL cast member and actor, overdosed on cocaine and morphine and died. I don't think these people found the fulfillment they were looking for in their careers.

Others put their hope in their financial future. But finances are never certain. And as we know, our economy took a significant hit in the past couple of years. The effects of this fall are present all around us. In the U.S., the unemployment rate in March was a staggering 10.2%. And for many who are still employed, incomes have dropped significantly.

Still, others place their hope in politics. They rally around the person who they think will fix all of our problems. They put all of their hope in one human being. Let's be clear: no president can solve all of our problems. But if you ask me, there are some who probably could have solved more problems than others. But in all seriousness, has any president, Republican or Democrat, ever fixed all of our problems? Eventually, a president will let us down, defeating our hope. And when our hopes are not fulfilled, when things still remain broken, approval ratings plummet and the hole in our heart remains.

There is nothing wrong with the pursuit of a good marriage or a successful career, and, of course, I think it is our duty to vote for those who we think will serve our country best, but we can't depend on these things to bring us true fulfillment.

It's incredible to be able to put my hope in someone who will never fail. Even when I fail and let Him down, He will not fail me. He remains faithful and committed to me. This is the love that

fills the hole in the heart. This is the love Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 13, that is quoted in almost every wedding ceremony: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Over the past few days, I’ve been trying to think of a story that illustrates this kind of love. Two days ago in my Art of Comp class, we were making a list and Ms. Thompson compared it to the movie *A Walk to Remember* when Jamie, played by Mandy Moore, makes a list of everything she wants to do before she dies. As soon as she mentioned that film, all of the girls around me, and probably some of the guys too, reacted with an “Awww...I love that movie.” I think this movie is so well liked because of the kind of love it portrays. In the film, soon after Landon and Jamie start to get to know each other, Landon finds out that Jamie has been diagnosed with terminal leukemia. Even though he knows that she will die soon, Landon strives to get to know her. He gives her fullness of life and loves her more than seems possible.

Isn’t this the kind of love that we all want? The kind of love that exists, even when we don’t understand how or why. The kind of love that is unconditional—meaning that it exists regardless of what we do. Jesus’s love is like this. His love is patient. It never “insists on its own way” and is never resentful. God sent Jesus *to die* on the cross. If anyone had a reason to be resentful, it was Jesus. But he responded with patience. While He was on the cross he asked God to forgive the people that put him there. He said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” I want to follow someone like that. I want to know this kind of love.

I remember in Dr. Alison's class freshman year, she wrote a question on the board—a question that she didn't want us to answer yet but wanted us to think about throughout the year. She wrote, "What is the meaning of life?"

I have found meaning through Jesus. The love he gives is overpowering, and I want to live my life responding to this love.

With Jesus, I will still suffer. There is no doubt about that. My life will not be perfect; it will still have conflict. But with Jesus, I can cope with the hardships and I can endure the suffering. With Him, I can know that everything will be okay.

I agree with the Beatles when they sang, "All you need is love." But I believe in the epitome of love. I believe in Jesus. The hole in my heart has been filled and I am living for him.

That's the meaning of my life.

Thank you