



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Seven Deadly Sins

Part 6: Overcoming Greed

Tim Badal | September 11, 2016 | Luke 12:13–21



We're halfway through our series on the "Seven Deadly Sins." These are the seven sins the early church identified as being the particular sins Christians in their day, and ours, need to be looking out for, because in many ways these are the source of all sins.

Today we find ourselves eye-to-eye with a sin that has a stranglehold over us a culture, and sadly, Christians struggle with this sin and might never be exhorted to move away from it. Far too many Christians today find themselves trapped by the sin we'll be talking about—greed.

Again, we need to remember the insidious nature of all these sins. Sin is alive and well, not only in the world, but in our lives. If you would be able to "rewind" this past week and look at all your activities and thoughts, you would see that sin has a way of creeping into your life, sometimes without you even knowing it.

But we also have recognized that this is not God's desire for His people. He doesn't tell His followers to stay away from these things just because He wants us to miss out on something good. Instead, He has provided a pathway to righteousness, because it is in that path and not sin's path where we will find joy, peace and contentment—the abundant life God created us to enjoy (John 10:10).

Our problem is that sin lies to us and deceives us. Sin tells us it is far more pleasurable and worthwhile to pursue it than it is to pursue our Savior. So we need to allow God's Word to speak into our lives, exposing the deceitfulness of sin. While sin may look attractive and appealing, the Bible makes it incredibly clear that in the end sin will always lead to death.

So we're asking God to teach us through His Word, because we don't want to be in the bondage of sin and disobedience. Instead, we want to live the abundant life to which our Creator calls us, so we might know His joy and peace and blessings. Sadly, the sin we're addressing—the sin of greed—has a stranglehold on many of us, even at times on those who are most faithful. Greed is alive and well in our society.

I remember as I was growing up how a commercial would often interrupt a program I was watching, and Ed McMahon would tell me I might be the next winner of the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes. He would show pictures of people holding balloons and another person holding a great big check with so many zeroes I couldn't even understand the amount of money they were getting. And Ed McMahon would say, "Maybe you're the next big winner!"

We love the idea that someone might come to our house with a camera and microphone and tell us we're the next millionaire. We think that would make all the world's wrongs disappear. But in my lifetime greed has now grown exponentially. Right now CNN is doing a series of TV programs on the decade of the '80s. I love looking back, although when I see some of the clothing being worn at the time, I start to feel old. But in one of their programs they talk about the greed of the '80s. We couldn't get enough of the stuff of this world, but wanted more and more. Of course, the great thing about America is that we can actually get all we desire.

In my lifetime, there has been a particular phenomenon that demonstrates America's greed. We call it the "lotto." The lotto took form in my generation. There is no entertainment value in the lottery—unless you like watching a little air chamber pop out ping-pong balls for 30 seconds. If you think that's worth spending dozens of dollars on, then you need to find out what real entertainment is.

The lotto represents the pursuit of greed. "Because I want to get rich fast, I will take my money and feed my greed—hoping and praying and believing that when those little ping-pong balls fly up, my number will be called." But to put it into perspective, the Recording Industry Association of America has done a study, and they tell us that we spend more on lotto tickets than on our music, movies, video games, books and sports tickets...combined. That's a lotta lotto tickets!

Here's the amazing thing. I recently watched a program that shared the stories of some past lotto winners. They featured a couple who had won the Powerball. That's not your regular daily three-pick lotto. This is Powerball. You've got to get a whole bunch of numbers right, and then you've got to get the important number right. The chances of winning are one in some astronomical number.

These winners were an older couple from the Appalachian region in West Virginia or Kentucky. They had won hundreds of millions of dollars. When they were interviewed two years later, they said their life was a complete mess. They lost friends. They lost the ability to understand what was right and important. Their marriage fell apart. They said they had thought that winning would be wonderful, but in the end it led to disaster.

You see, that's what greed does. Now, maybe today you don't feel like greed is that big of a deal. Maybe you would tell me, "I don't play the lottery, so that's not a problem for me." Well, your greed might be manifested in smaller ways. We might start thinking that this sin is somehow benign—that it only involves our disposable income. "I mean, how bad can it be if I spend a little money here or there?"

But we need to recognize that greed deeply hurts everyone who is involved. First of all, greed hurts us as individuals. If we're driven by greed, we'll soon learn that greed runs around with two friends: covetousness and envy. We see something someone else has, and greed makes us say, "I want that. I deserve what they have, so I'm going to go after it." Most of the things we buy are based on the two sins, covetousness and envy—the "kissing cousins" of greed.

But we don't want to believe that, so let's do a little scientific study. Think about how you look at your car when your neighbor buys a brand new one. Think about how you feel when you leave your friend's new house with its glorious new smell—with none of the smells of three boys in the Badal home. You see their glorious, fully furnished home, and you go back to your shack thinking, "I deserve more. I want more."

Now that the iPhone 27—or whatever number they're on now—has been released, do we look at our phone as a piece of junk? I mean, whoever would think that having headphones with wires on them would be such a problem? We become envious, coveting something we don't have.

Second, greed not only hurts us through our insatiable appetite for more, it also causes us to disenfranchise, rob and steal from others. This doesn't always happen the way you think, but whether we like it or not, our greed hurts people. Remember, greed, lust and gluttony are similar. Greed longs for material things, gluttony pursues more food than we need, and lust is the desire for pleasure that is not rightfully ours.

We can see how our greedy pursuit of material things has impacted our nation. In 2008–09, this country experienced the single greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. We lost more money as a country, and in fact as a world, than has ever happened before in human history. Trillions upon trillions of dollars were lost in a brief period of time—and the number one reason was greed!

Wall Street marketers were selling what are called "derivatives." They took junky bonds and junky stocks, promising that they would appreciate for those who bought them. The banking industry decided that to stay strong and competitive in the market, they had to sell mortgages to as many people as possible. This resulted in people signing mortgage agreements for houses that were way beyond their budget. But their greedy hearts told them, "I deserve this. I want this. Therefore, I should have it."

We are still experiencing the effects of greed gone wild. But I want you to know that impact greed isn't something new—either to society or to us as individuals. Who can forget Dickens' great story of Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*? His greed led him to lose his joy and lose friends. It stole everything he had—except his money. He had his money. He was a miser who was unwilling to let his money leave his hands.

Or consider the robbery by a guy like Bernie Madoff. Millions upon millions of dollars—lost. People’s inheritances, people’s investments—gone. Because a greedy man said, “I can steal from people without them knowing, and I can make millions.” And that’s exactly what he did. Greed is truly a problem.

But what exactly is greed? You might say, “I’m not Bernie Madoff. I’m not Ebenezer Scrooge.” Yet it’s amazing that every time America asks the question, “Who wants to be a millionaire?” it seems that a lot of hands go up. We want money. We want material wealth. Very simply, greed can be defined as the excessive desire to acquire or possess more than one needs or deserves, especially with respect to material wealth. This isn’t lust—pursuing pleasure. This isn’t gluttony—pursuing food. This is greed—pursuing material wealth or possessions.

So how do we rise above greed? What is a Christian to do regarding greed? What do the Scriptures tell us about overcoming greed? To answer these questions, we’ll look at three things that hopefully will help us find God’s answer and therefore His blessing as we learn to fight against and overcome greed.

## **1. Overcoming greed involves recognizing two conflicting stances regarding it.**

There are two competing worldviews regarding greed. While there may be multiple stances on the issue of greed, they all fall into two opposing worldviews.

### **Gordon Gekko: Greed is good; grab all you can.**

The proponent of the first view is a guy named Gordon Gekko. Not Geico Gecko, but Gordon Gekko. He is the fictitious money-hungry, dog-eat-dog lead character in the 1987 movie *Wall Street*. Played by Michael Douglas, he articulates the heart of most people today in America—and sadly, far too many of us who are sitting in this place. In his view, greed is good—so grab all you can.

In an iconic speech in the movie, he says this:

The point is, ladies and gentlemen, that greed—for the lack of a better word—is good. Greed is right. Greed works. You see, greed clarifies. It cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed in all its forms—greed for life, for money, for love, for knowledge—has marked the upward surge of mankind. And greed—you mark my words—will not only save a particular company, but it will save the malfunctioning corporation called the United States of America.

In a nutshell, Gordon Gekko says greed is good.

How much of Gordon Gekko is beating in our chests? As we heard in his monologue, we seek to buy more stuff—not things we need or which will help us live life, but things that feed our appetite that can never be satisfied. This view of greed is alive and well wherever we go.

Now, you can justify greed by saying things like, “I’m doing my part to help the economy,” or “I’m keeping people employed. If I don’t buy things, people won’t have jobs.” Or you might say, “I deserve these things because I work really hard. I work hard, so I should also be able to play hard.” That’s the motto and belief of Gordon Gekko and why he thinks greed is good.

Our hearts tell us, “My neighbors have this, and I’ve got to keep up with them.” While Americans struggle to agree on most things these days, they speak in one voice that greed is good, so grab all you can. That’s why there are shopping malls. It’s why one of the most profitable American companies is Amazon—a website where we can buy to our heart’s content. And it’s delivered to us. It’s our new marketplace.

But against Gordon Gekko’s overwhelming voice in American society, another voice speaks from the fringes, screaming out against culture. It comes from a viewpoint that puts Gordon and many of us in our place. It’s a voice that many of us don’t want to hear. It’s not a voice from the present. It’s not a voice from a movie star.

### **Jesus Christ: Money/stuff can be helpful, but it comes with hazards.**

This is a voice whose words have echoed from 2,000 years ago, words that speak volumes to us today. It is a view we should take to heart—the view of Jesus Christ. Gordon Gekko and Jesus Christ are at odds with each other. While Gordon Gekko says greed is good so grab all you can, Jesus says while money and stuff can be helpful, they come with many hazards—so watch out! You see, money has a way of doing things to us.

As we read the words of Jesus and other words in the Scriptures, we can become pendulum swingers. We are apt to take the Scriptures out of context, even rewriting them. For example, when people are asked what the Bible says about money, many will

respond, "Money is the root of all evils." But that's not what the Scripture says. First Timothy 6:10 says, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.*"

Of course, Jesus had a lot to say about money and material possessions. Let me give you five observations regarding this that you may find helpful:

1. When you examine the words of Jesus and the other writings in Scripture, nowhere does it say it is a sin to have money or stuff. It doesn't even say you should only have what you need, nor does it say being rich is a sin. Jesus Himself used money on a regular basis for life and ministry, and He was supported by the assets of others.

So Jesus is not against money. He's not even against people having lots of money. In fact, many of the individuals who supported Jesus were rich. These supporters also allowed the disciples to have ongoing ministries, leading people into the Kingdom of God rather than needing to do regular vocational work.

2. Many of the people who were faithful servants of God were people of great means. The patriarchs had lots of money. Some of Christ's greatest followers were people who had money and prestige—even kings and queens, people holding great authority. Abraham was a wealthy man. Does that mean that if you're a follower of Jesus Christ you'll be wealthy? The Bible never promises that. But we should be careful not to forget that some of the most faithful people in Scripture were people of great means. God used rich people to do great things for Him.

Yet God also used the poor of the world. Jesus Himself spoke of a widow who gave her two mites—less than two pennies—saying she gave more than all the others. Serving God isn't about being rich or poor. He uses both for His Kingdom purposes.

3. The Bible makes it clear that money can be a hindrance to accepting the gospel. Jesus said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24). Does it mean that you can't be rich and enter the Kingdom? No, it just means you've got a lot more to go through and more things from which you need to steer clear.

That's because pursuing riches is all about the here and now, whereas pursuing the Kingdom of God is about eternity. Those two goals are always going to wage war against each other.

4. We are called in Scripture to be generous in giving back to God through our tithes and offerings. He has given us money and assets, but He wants us to be open-handed with those things—especially when it comes to giving back to Him through the local church and other ministries. We can help further the Kingdom and serve the body by giving tithes and offerings.

5. The Bible reminds us that our money and our stuff don't go with us. Just as we were naked coming into this world, naked we shall depart it (Job 1:21). I've done a lot of funerals in my day, and I've never yet seen a U-Haul truck hooked up to the hearse. I don't ever see a guy taking his big-screen TV into his coffin.

You see, the cradle and the coffin are the same. They only fit us as individuals—not our extra stuff. The Bible tells us what our money and stuff can do. They can be helpful—but they also come with many hazards. The Proverbs are full of descriptions of the fool who runs after riches.

## **2. The convicting story regarding greed.**

Jesus articulates what we need to do by telling a story regarding greed. Our text today is in Luke 12. In the beginning of the chapter Jesus is teaching the crowds, telling them to be wary of the Pharisees, yet not to be afraid of what can happen in this world. Rather, they should be more fearful of God. He then says they need to acknowledge Christ, not only before God but also before men.

As He's teaching these things to the crowd, someone comes up to Him. Let's read verse 13. "*Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'*" I should probably read this with a whiny voice. "Teacher! Tell my brother to give me the money that my dad left me."

Jesus stops and says, "*Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?*" Essentially He's saying, "Don't get Me involved in things that run contrary to My Kingdom. I get that you may feel that you've been let down by your brother. Your brother may be stealing from you. Listen, the Kingdom of God is not about the accumulation of wealth. It's about something greater than that, so I'm not going to waste My time trying to settle this dispute when you should find your blessing, not in the abundance of your possessions or money, but in a true and right relationship with God."

Jesus says, "I'm not going to bite. I'm not going after that. That's not what My Kingdom is about." He turns to the crowd and says, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Right away He tells us that the heart of money issues is a heart of covetousness. How many of us have fallen into the family money issue, where a parent or grandparent, or an aunt you've never met, leaves a little more money as an inheritance to someone else than to you, or someone gets more than you thought they should get? We throw up our arms, "How dare that happen?"

Jesus says that as Christians, we are not to have any part in those arguments. This life is not about the abundance of possessions. But these problems rise out of a covetous heart. "I want something I believe I deserve, and I'm going to get it—no matter what I need to do." We need to be careful. Jesus warns us—and this should be on our bumper stickers—"Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he tells a story that falls in line with that thesis:

*16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

As a master Teacher, Jesus tells this story immediately after the man brings up his issue with his brother about not sharing their inheritance. We would do well to allow the Holy Spirit to use this story to impact our own lives, to challenge the way we live—the way we spend money and the way we pursue possessions.

We can learn several things from this story. First, it is a story about a man who has some good news. According to the text, his land "produced plentifully." That's something good to rejoice about. This man is a farmer with an overabundance of crops at harvest time. That's a good problem.

Let me make a few observations here. This is a farmer who has worked long and hard doing his job. Doesn't he deserve an overflowing crop? Doesn't he deserve some level of riches? He's worked hard! This isn't the schlub who asked for part of his dad's inheritance: "Give me something I didn't work for!" This guy is a hard worker. Jesus uses the occupation of a farmer because they were some of the hardest workers in His day.

Second, nothing says it was greed that forced this man into farming. This is a man who is working hard without any expectation that he's going to have any good fortune at harvest time. But then, instead of getting 40 bushels an acre, he gets 200. What a great thing! He wasn't looking for it—it just happened.

Third, we are told that while he was a farmer who worked hard and who had a bountiful harvest, Jesus gives no hint that there was any foul play, corruption or even an evil desire. We're told that he was rich even before this windfall—which in the first century meant he had more than he needed. And if we use that definition, all of us are rich as well. So this story probably preaches better to the 21<sup>st</sup> century than the first. We are rich farmers who have more than we need, and by God's grace we have been given an overabundant harvest. So the question to us is this: what are we going to do with our wealth? What would God call us to do?

We know that God looks at this man—who has begun tearing down his barns to build bigger ones—as a fool. He is going to lose his life, and God asks him, "Who's going to get all your stuff after you're dead?" You see, he was greedy, keeping his wealth to himself. He never had a thought about the worship of God or the needs of others. We see in this story some symptoms of greed that apply to our lives.

### **The story reminds us that greed comes from the sin of abundance.**

If you go to the streets of Calcutta, India, you won't find greedy people there. Why? They barely have enough to keep them alive—if they're lucky. They're not thinking about more, more, more. They're looking for just enough. They're content with some clean water and some food, and whatever clothes they can put on their backs. You won't find greed in Calcutta. But you'll find it in Chicago. Because in America we have an abundance of stuff. We have an abundance of money and time and resources. We have an abundance of stores where we can get whatever we want when we want it and how we want it. This is true because we live in a land of overabundance.

Notice that seven times in verses 17–21 we are told that this farmer has more than he needs. Verse 15 speaks of the abundance of his possessions. In verse 16, we are told his harvest was plentiful. Verse 17 says he has more than he can store: "Where am I

going to store all my grain and all my goods?" Verse 19, "I have ample goods laid up—enough for many years." He's not praying, "Give us this day our daily bread." He's thinking, "I've got enough for years to come." Verse 21, "I have so much I can lay it up."

This is also true for Americans. We struggle with the sin of too much. Our kids have too many toys. We have too many clothes. We have too many gadgets. All of which leads, not to vibrancy, but slothfulness. "I can sit back. I can eat, drink and be merry. I can live the good life. I can eat off the fat of the land. I don't need to think about God. I don't need to ask God to give me my daily needs, because my bank account says I already have more than I need." Or we might be saying, "I will run and pursue until I get to that point." We have to be aware that in a country that has so much, the sin of greed is abounding.

### **The story reminds us that greed comes from a selfish heart fueled by uncontrolled appetites.**

Twelve times in our passage you will see the farmer use personal pronouns. He thought to himself, *"What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years."*

Over and over again we see the heart of greed in this man. We can see this same heart in our own lives any time we put the spotlight on what we want or what we have. It's all about me. It's all about Number One, as the country music song says. It's about us.

This heart is fueled by uncontrolled appetites. Do you know the difference between a need and a want? A need is something that, when it is taken care of, you don't have a hunger for more. A want remains ongoing: "I need to have it. I need to have it. I need to have it." If my hunger is simply a need, I can be filled. A want says, "I'm going to want more." Every year at Christmas we think we need the newest thing, just because it's different from what we wanted the year before. We're never satisfied. There is never enough.

Greed draws us away from thinking of others or thinking of God. It never occurs to the farmer that his neighbor or those people down the road could use some grain. He doesn't think to give it to his children or friends. We don't see him thinking any of these things. He also never asks, "God, what would You have me do with this?" Greed most affects our hearts when we spend our money without first asking God, "What would You do with this money?"

Based on that litmus test, how many of us are greedy to the core? Week in and week out our paychecks are deposited into our accounts, and we never ask God, "What would You have of this? How do You want me to use this money? Are my neighbors in need? Is there a family in need? Have I given back to You?" No. Over and over again we say, "It's about me. I need more."

The farmer only thinks of himself, and Jesus tells us in verse 15 that we believe life consists in the abundance of things. Or in 21<sup>st</sup>-century slang, "He who has the most toys wins." We begin to think we deserve this. "I've worked hard, so I should have it. I shouldn't be the guy driving the oldest car in the neighborhood. I don't want to be the one with the old flip phone. People will make fun of me. I deserve better, I need it, and for the sake of society I'll get it."

This attitude is idolatrous, because it makes you god, and your money becomes worship. You give your money to the god who is yourself, saying, "I deserve this, because I'm glorious and I'm most important." So all the money you acquire is used to feed yourself.

### **The story reminds us that greed leads to a set of activities.**

You might say, "Tim, I have those thoughts, but I don't allow them to affect my life." But greed always leads to a set of activities. You can't just think greedy thoughts, because greed never stays in the heart alone. The man in the parable has a conversation with himself, which is weird. "And I asked myself, 'Soul, you have ample good laid up for many years. Relax. Eat, drink and be merry.'" He doesn't just think it. What does he do? He moves to action. "I'm going to tear down my old barns and I'm going to build bigger ones."

Let's think about this. At some point in his life he had built the smaller barns, and at that time he considered them to be ample for his purposes. But something happened that led him to believe he needed bigger ones. We never see that his wife had quadruplets and thus they would have more mouths to feed. It doesn't say his mother-in-law moved in and therefore they needed more storage. The only thing that changed was the amount of resources he had at his disposal. But it caused him to say, "If I'm going to have this amount in my bank account, I've got to have all these things." It wasn't out of need, but out of want. What he had been okay with for a season was no longer good enough.

Returning to what I said in my introduction, we love our cars until we see newer ones, right? The worst time in my life is when I have to drive a rental car, because they don't give me the jalopy. They give me the brand new one. It is a Ponzi scheme by auto dealerships. When I drive those cars, I discover that everything works. The last time I got into a rental car, it said "Hello, Timothy Badal." Do you know how your self-esteem is raised when a car talks to you? I felt like I was Knight Rider. Then I return home to my old rusty car and I realize it's not talking to me. It can't tell me where to go. It's as lost as I am. I need something better. This isn't good enough. Well, did my needs change? No. I don't have any more people to put in my car now. But my wants changed.

So this guy tears down what he has. Think about the idiocy of spending a lot of money to tear down what was good enough for him the day before. But now that something has changed, he needs to tear down the old and build something new—just to keep it all for himself. This man is greedy, and not just in his heart. He's greedy in action.

How often do we spend money so we can keep things for ourselves? How much time and energy are we wasting keeping track of money we may never need in the future? I'm not against investing or saving. Only a fool would consume all he has. But how much time and energy do we spend on taking care of ourselves out of greed?

### **3. The clear solution regarding greed.**

Jesus tells us there's a better way, and He offers us a clear solution. We can skim right by a very important point in this text. There's a reason Bible translators put a break between verses 21 and 22. At that point, Jesus is no longer speaking to a crowd, but to His disciples. After giving a discourse about the problem of greed, He turns to these men whom He loves and with whom He has an intimate relationship—men who are going to be called to proclaim the Kingdom of God—and offers them a solution, an antidote, to greed:

*<sup>22</sup> And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn...*

Do you think He's bringing up barns for a reason? He just called the guy a fool because he's building greater storehouses. The ravens don't have barns, yet God feeds them.

*"Of how much more value are you than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>26</sup> If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. <sup>30</sup> For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*

*<sup>32</sup> "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

### **God's solution means we must guard against all forms of greed.**

What is the antidote to greed? What is God's clear solution? It begins by us guarding against greed in all its forms. We live in a world of overabundance, so Jesus says, "Take care. Protect yourself. Guard yourself against greed." The word "guard" is a military term, referring to the way a city would build a wall so it would be nearly impossible for an enemy to enter it. Beyond just building the infrastructure, they would also set sentries around the wall to be on the lookout 24/7 for any enemy activity.

How different our spending would be if we would build walls in our lives and place guards on those walls who would question our decisions. I can assure you, I've never bought a car or any large item without first talking with a couple close friends. Why? The heart is deceitfully sick, and who can understand it (Jeremiah 17:9).

One of these people I seek counsel from is my father—and he doesn't like to buy anything. He especially doesn't want his son to buy anything. I'll say, "Hey, Dad, I'm thinking about getting a new car." "Really? What's wrong with the old car, son? How much are you going to spend? Wow, that seems like a lot of money. Back in my day..." He always goes back to his day.

Why do I go to him? So I can get a pound of flesh knocked out of me? No, I do it because I recognize the difference between I want and I need to have. But I know if someone else doesn't have that fire burning in their belly, they'll say, "Wait a minute. Let's check some other options. What's in your savings? Have you thought about what you'd do if something happens here, or something happens there? Have you been faithful in your giving to the Lord?"

You see, when we invite guards into our lives and build walls against greed, a lot of the greed is going to be kept away. We're going to be protected from it. You might ask, "Why do I have to build those walls? Who am I really hurting?" The Bible makes it clear in 1 Timothy 6:9: *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction."*

I can't tell you how many times as a pastor I've seen couples in my office whose marriages are falling apart, telling me their hardship cases because money has created all kinds of problems for them. So many people are struggling and not finding the joy of the Lord because they can't find a way to pay for the things their hearts were set on and they bought. We need to guard against that.

There are all kinds of greed around us. Something I struggle with more and more as a pastor is the idea of greed as it applies to churches. Because we live in a greedy society, we come into church as consumers. "I'll go to this church because it has this and this and this." We choose based on greed, not on worship, not on God's calling, but what it does for me. Greed is all over the place, and we have to guard against it.

### **God's solution means we must be grateful for all of God's goodness.**

How do we guard against greed? By being grateful for all of God's goodness. Jesus tells us to look at the lilies and the birds. They're small in the grand scheme of things, yet God takes care of them. They're not trying to figure out where they're going to get their next meal. They're not trying to figure out where they're going to park their third car. They're not going to the storage place asking for a bigger unit because they have so much stuff. They don't have any of that to deal with—and God takes care of them.

And how much more does God love us than ravens and lilies—amen? He loves us way more. How do we know that? "For God so loved the world—us, the people—that He gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16). Jesus didn't die for the lilies. Jesus didn't die for the ravens. Jesus didn't become a lily or a raven. He put on flesh and made His dwelling among us so that He might save humanity—you and me—from our sins. He loves us way more than He loves those things.

And He provides. We have what we need and we need to be grateful. Contentment destroys greed. When you are satisfied in the things God has given you, you will not be greedy for more. So the next time greed begins to well up in your heart, ask the contentment question: "If I never get that new car, am I content with the car God has given me? Am I content with the house God has given me? Am I content with the clothes God has given me? Am I content with the life God has given me?" If you're not, you will never be content. You will never have enough. So we need to say to the Lord, "You've been so good to me."

Years ago, when Sammy Sosa was asked what he was looking for after breaking the home run record, he would say over and over again, "Before I talk about what I'm pursuing, I want to remind you: baseball has been very, very good to me. I'm living a privileged life. If I never hit another home run, where I've come from and where I'm at today—my goodness, God has been so good."

To each of us, God has been so good. If He never gave us another thing, we are a blessed people. We need to be grateful for that goodness. We teach our children that, don't we? "Be grateful for what you have"—and then we ourselves live totally differently.

### **God's solution means we must go after Him, not after riches.**

So what should we go after? We should go after God, not riches. Verse 31 says, "Seek. Seek God first. Seek God best. Seek God most." In essence, we should be greedy for God. You want to be greedy for something? Be greedy for God and His Kingdom. Have an insatiable appetite for God and His work. Get fired up when the new things that God is doing are not in the showroom—not the new car or new house. Oh, we look with great admiration at the lifestyles of the rich and famous instead of looking at the life of the God Who gives riches. So pursue that.

What would your neighbors say if they looked at your checkbook today? Do you go after things, or go after God? Would they be able to tell? Because the Bible says where your treasure is, there your heart is also (Matthew 6:21). So as they look at your spending, would they be able to say, "Man, this guy loves God. He's on fire for God"? Or would your neighbor see the same



purchases as those of one who is on their way to hell, who gives no thought to God? Greed can be found just by looking at the ledger of our checking account. Are we going after God and eternity, or are we building up things for the here and now? What makes it absolutely inexcusable is that we know, at the end of the day, all of this will burn. Go after God, not riches.

### **God's solution means we must give generously to both God and others.**

How do we do that? We give generously. Do we believe Psalm 19:10 when it says the Word of God is worth more than gold, more than fine gold? Do we believe the gospel is greater than that? I know we talk about giving at this church, and I know it becomes second-hand to you. You may be asking, "Why do they talk about money every week?" Because every week we come in as greedy people—and your pastor is included. I have to be reminded first that God is the Giver of all that I have. He doesn't require all of it back, but He does require a portion. He says it's better to give than to receive. And we need to consider each morning when we wake up that the atmosphere didn't impale us. God gave us another day. God gave us the sun and life and breath. He gave us the resources necessary to live our lives. None of us came to church naked this morning, and that's not a joke. He gave. He gave. He gave.

What God requires of His people is that we give as well. If that statement gives you a guilt trip, that's a problem you have with God, not the preacher. God says, "Do you want to be like Me? Then be a giver. Give to church. Give to hurting people. Give to the poor. Be generous." God wasn't stingy with us. He was very generous!

But the problem is our hearts are filled with greed. It's about us—it's not about God. And that's why Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also." So today, if you want to know if you're a greedy individual, where is your treasure? What's most important? Is it how you look in your home? How you drive in that car? What you wear? God says, "Don't worry about those things." But seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness, and He says, "The rest will be taken care of."

What a great reminder for us that above all else, Christians should treasure God. I pray that as you study and work through this, God will convict you in the right places and the right ways, as He's already done in my life.

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