

I. Set Up<sup>1</sup>. Video (Candy Bar) // Introduction<sup>2</sup>

A. I don't think you are going to like this sermon. That's probably not the best way to start. But that was my thought when I read over my notes earlier this week.

B. Because of the extra things we include in the fall series – the videos, small group materials, book, daily devotions, etc. – I have to finish most of my work in the spring. The sermons are not finished, but they're ninety percent. On Mondays I've been pulling out what I wrote back in May, rereading them and going from there. This past Monday my first thought was, "hmm, I probably need to dial this back just a bit." The gap between what this Book advocates and how we think and live today is big. The gap between a belief that greed is a sin – a deadly vice – and the belief that greed is acceptable, a given – to quote Gordon Gekko, "Greed is good. Greed is right. Greed works" – is too great to try to close in one sermon.

C. Think about it. On this hand we have: The voice of Adam Smith and Milton Freedman arguing that greed is the expected, necessary, even helpful fuel for a capitalist and consumer economy. A view that argues that the only responsible thing to do is maximize our 401K contributions. And on the other hand we have: a book filled with warnings and cautions about money; a book that speaks against our efforts to fill the God-shaped void in our life with money or the things money can buy; the story of a God walking among us, living simply and modestly, and saying things like: "Blessed are the poor," and, "if you have two coats give one to the person who doesn't have any."<sup>3</sup>

D. We even have a story he told that sure questions the wisdom of maximizing our 401K plan. I'm referring to The Parable of the Rich Fool. It's found in Luke 12. There Jesus says:

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<sup>1</sup> Today's topic hurts. Greed is about money and the things money can buy. We look to these things to try to be happy and secure. That's understandable but risky. Money can foster a self-sufficiency that is both contrary to reality and harmful to the life of faith we've been called to. It's often easier to have money than to serve God. But we are here to remind ourselves that we serve God and that He alone is worthy. Please join me now ...

<sup>2</sup> Quotes: 1) Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko, The film Wall Street, 1987; 2) The world has enough resources for people's need but not for people's greed. Gandhi; 3) For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his soul. Jesus, Mark 8:36; 4) Ambition can take you far, but who are you when you get there. Garrison Keillor; 5) Considering the full sweep of the Christian tradition, one would have to conclude that the most profane word we can utter is the word, mine. Willimon; 6) Greed tends to be solitary, miserly, because there is something about Greed that puts us in competition with our neighbors and ultimately in alienation from them." Will Willimon; 7) I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer. Jim Carey

<sup>3</sup> And "it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Mt. 19:24, Mk 10:25, Lk 18:25; see also Amos 5:11; 6:1-6; Jer. 5:28)

1. “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”
2. Twenty-first century Western culture says, “Good job! Way to go. That’s what you’re supposed to do!”
3. “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’
4. “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

E. As noted, the gap between what the Bible advocates and the views found in the air we breathe and – more troublingly – in our heart, is wide. I briefly thought about dialing it back. (I also briefly thought about assigning this sin to Garth or Syler.) And then I reminded myself, the views found in this Book are the way life works. They are the way forward. What we find here is the path that shapes us in the ways God wants us shaped – which are also the ways that are best for us. Vices are habits that mold us in the wrong way. Virtues are habits that help us become who we were made to be.

F. Hearing how bad greed is may mean that we realize we’re off the path – we have to make changes, we’ve been driving in the wrong direction for a long time. But the sooner we figure that out the better. We’ll start with a definition and then I have five points and three next steps.

## II. Greed Defined

A. **Greed, like envy, starts with “disordered desire.”** It’s an attachment to a good thing gone wrong. It is not wrong to have desires – we were made with ongoing needs. But greed is “an excessive love of or desire for money or for any of the things money can buy.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is the definition developed by Thomas Aquinas.

B. Some lists use the word *avarice* instead of *greed*. *Avarice*, which comes from the root *aveo*, which means “to crave,” is to care too much about stuff – about money (which buys stuff) and the stuff itself.

C. It is not wrong – it’s not *greedy* – to: 1) appreciate nice things. God does not expect us to be indifferent to the pleasures and joys of life; 2) it’s not wrong to work hard in order to earn money; 3) it is not wrong to have money.<sup>5</sup> Hard work is celebrated and the Bible speaks of wealth in both positive and negative ways. It’s quite clear that few can handle being wealthy. Money tends to turn us away from God. “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” but money itself is not evil. In fact, it’s quite useful.

D. What is wrong is: trying to fill the God-shaped vacuum in our life with something other than God; trusting in our bank account instead of God; and holding onto things we don’t need when others have great need.<sup>6</sup>

E. Don’t miss this last part. It’s not simply that greed elevates aspects of the creation to the spot only the Creator should hold, and comes with a “me-first” component to it, greed is wrong because it is callousness to the needs of others. If envy is, “I want what you have,” greed is, “I really don’t care what you have. In fact, I don’t care much about you at all. I just want what I want.”

F. Of course, greed is also a deadly sin – a cardinal vice, a position it holds because it’s a problem that leads to lots of other problems.

G. Let me come at this from a slightly different direction.

### III. Five Things You Need to Know to Think Rightly About Greed

A. One: **Stuff is not bad.**

1. It was Plato, not Paul, who discounted the material world. The Bible tells us that God looked at what He created and it was good. We do acknowledge that this world is broken, but it is not inherently bad. In fact, by God’s design we have material needs. We need things like: food, water, shelter and clothing. Having these met is good. We all should have them.

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<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 13:11 promises financial ruin to those who cheat to grow rich. But Proverbs 14:24 speaks of wealth as a “crown” for those who are wise. On the one hand it is held up as a blessing from God. On the other, the Bible warns us that wealth can undo us. It becomes a curse that enslaves us – in large part by taking our mind off of God. We trust in our financial resources not in him.

<sup>6</sup> Greed expresses “a do-it-yourself method of finding happiness, instead of the contentedness of receiving the good that God has to give and depending on his provision.” Rebecca DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, Brazos Press, 2009, p. 101.

2. And not just the bare minimum! I'm not suggesting that we should only have the least possible to survive. Yes, Jesus lived simply, but it was thoughtfully as well. He fasted but he also feasted! He wasn't an ascetic. His teaching was radical but He did not say that the material world was evil or that stuff is bad. The problem is not the stuff it's us.

B. Two: **Stuff is never enough.**

1. Greed is insatiable. It persuades you that the glass isn't ninety percent full, it's ten percent empty. Or you need a bigger glass. And so we keep acquiring stuff trying to find a lasting sense of well-being that the stuff cannot ever deliver. Again, it's not that stuff is bad, but we were made for God – an infinite, amazing, holy, almighty God. Without him front and center, no amount of anything else will ever ultimately satisfy us. They may satisfy us for a moment. We may be at peace for a while.<sup>7</sup> So what happens is that we keep acquiring more. We keep resetting the bar. Initially we initially think, "I'll be happy when I make \$X per year. X will be enough. I will be happy with X." But X comes and goes and we set our sights on \$2X. Then 3X. Then 10X. And we keep wanting more. That is the way it will always work because you were not made to find lasting joy in money or the things money can buy. You were not made to find happiness in a new pair of shoes or a hot car or a remodeled kitchen. No thing can make you whole.<sup>8</sup>

2. Augustine nailed this point 1,700 years ago when he wrote, "We will never be able to satisfy our deep, human need for an eternal good with any amount of temporal, imperfect goods."

3. Aquinas added to this discussion about 900 years later by making a distinction between natural and artificial wealth. Natural wealth is what we need to satisfy our natural desires for genuine human goods. Artificial wealth is what we need to satisfy desires that are artificially created and inflated. Well, we have problems being happy with natural wealth. It's the nature of artificial wealth to never be satisfied.

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<sup>7</sup>In addition to material possessions being unable to ultimately satisfy us, they have a few downsides. For instance, they occupy our time. Stuff is a hassle. The more stuff we have the more stuff we have to insure, store, clean and worry about. As our old friend Evagrius Ponticus pointed out, "A monk with many possessions is like a heavily laden boat that easily sinks in a sea storm. Just as a very leaky ship is submerged by each wave, so the person with many possessions is awash with his concerns." Evagrius Ponticus, *On the Eight Thoughts*, 3.3

<sup>8</sup>We need to recognize – and rise above – the endless "cycle of desire" the market creates in our heart. All desire ultimately is a desire for God. We will never have enough stuff to fill the hole.

4. As I have said many times, smart people wake up every day trying to persuade your life is not complete because you don't have something that they are selling. And they are very good at what they do.

5. I did a wedding years ago for a young couple. I knew the bride pretty well. Not the groom. And when I met him I thought he was a bit much: big dreams, lots of confidence, lots of ambition. He had just started a company and was going to change the world. I didn't pay much attention, until a few years later when I heard he'd just turned down \$30M for his then four year old company. And then a couple years after that I heard he had sold it for \$150 million. He was 31. A couple months later he hired me (I was working as a management consultant at the time) to help him figure out what to do next. He had assembled a small team – a family office – and he wanted me to lead a two day planning retreat, which was to include figuring out where to give a lot of this money. (It can be hard to give money away well.) Well, after a day and a half of meetings I pulled him aside to say, “Clearly, your wife is excited about giving some money away. You, not so much. How much do you want to keep?” He said, in essence, “I need a billion. I'm glad to give some away now – and that will help with taxes. But what I'm after is a billion. We need a billion.” I was a little surprised by that. Didn't see it coming. But I remember asking, “What makes you think a billion will be enough?”

6. Now, lest you feel smug, “I'd be happy with half a billion!” Let me remind you that compared to the rest of the world, we have a half a billion! Fifty thousand dollars a year puts you in the top .3 percent of the world's wealth.

7. And if you are carrying any debt, that debt likely suggests that we can't get by on what we have. I'm not talking about our national debt. The government's had a bad few weeks. Let's leave them alone for now. I'm talking about consumer debt – the distance we live beyond our means. In many cases it's staggering.

a) The average household has \$16K in credit card debt.

b) The average college student has four credit cards. The average household has fourteen.

c) Parade magazine recently did a special feature on a family that had no debt – that lived only on what they had. They were presented as odd freaks.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bettag Konferenz, *The Institutionalization of Greed*.

8. Look, I'm not against all debt. Some people are. I'm against most of it, but not all. But this message isn't on debt it's on greed. The point I'm trying to make here is that debt is often a measure of greed. Most debt is an index of our desire to have more than we can afford – more than God has provided.

9. We need to learn that greed is insatiable. “Stuff is never enough.”<sup>10</sup> Contentment – lasting contentment – is never achieved by material things, only by a changed heart. Most people never learn this. Some do. Some learn by being reflective. Others learn by having so much that they get virtually everything money can buy and are still incomplete.

10. King Solomon – whose net worth easily eclipsed Bill Gates – was one. He went through a phase where he bought everything he even thought about wanting, only to eventually write: **The one who loves money is never satisfied with money, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. This too is futile.**<sup>11</sup>

11. Jim Carey – one of the great theologians of our day! – recently echoed the same thing. “I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.”<sup>12</sup>

12. Greed is a heart problem. Greed is not about quantity. “It puts us on a conveyor belt with no stop button and tells us there is no such thing as ‘enough,’ only ‘more.’”<sup>13</sup>

C. Number Three: **Stuff is never ours.**

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<sup>10</sup>When J.D. Rockefeller's wealth is adjusted for today, his net worth significantly surpasses that of Bill Gates. And yet, when he was asked, “How much is enough?” he said, “A little bit more.” (It's also worth noting that when his accountant was asked, “How much did Rockefeller leave behind?” his response was, “All of it.”)

<sup>11</sup> Ecc. 5:10. King Solomon figured this out. A man rich beyond Bill Gates, wrote the following in Ecclesiastes 2: “I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees... I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got singers, both men and women, delights of the flesh, and many concubines. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem... Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity [vapor] and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” At first read this sounds pessimistic, but if you read the entire letter that's not Solomon's point. He does not say, “give up – I did all I should have done and I'm still empty.” Instead, he says: “stuff is never enough.”

<sup>12</sup> Others: 1) Steve Jobs: Being the richest man in the cemetery really doesn't amount to much; 2) The Romans had a proverb which suggested that money is like sea water – the more you drink the thirstier you become.

<sup>13</sup> Jared Wilson, *Seven Daily Sins: How the Gospel Redeems Our Deepest Desires*, Threads, 2012, p. 62.

1. I'm not suggesting that stuff has a mind of its own, or that sometimes we don't own things, things own us.<sup>14</sup> I'm going in a different direction. My point is that everything everywhere belongs to God. In order to think rightly about greed, we need to start from the vantage point of Scripture. That means we must understand that everything belongs to God because He is the Creator and He retains all rights. We do not own things, we are temporary stewards of his stuff.

2. Matthew 25 – the Parable of the Talents – is one of many parables that suggest that: 1) we have been given things: gifts, talents, time, resources; 2) we are expected to invest these gifts in ways that reflect the values of God, the ethics of the kingdom; and 3) we will be held accountable for what we do with what's been temporarily entrusted to us. We are stewards not owners. The stuff is never ours.

3. C.S. Lewis makes this point brilliantly in *The Screwtape Letters* – the fictional dialogue between a senior demon (Screwtape) and his understudy (Wormwood). In talking about this point Screwtape says:

a) The sense of ownership in general is always to be encouraged. The humans are always putting up claims to ownership which sound equally funny in Heaven and in Hell and we must keep them doing so.

b) He goes on to argue that “much modern resistance to chastity comes from men's belief that they ‘own’ their bodies.”

c) He says, “we produce this sense of ownership not only by pride but by confusion. We teach them not to notice the different senses of the possessive pronoun—the finely graded differences that run from "my boots" through "my dog", "my servant", "my wife", "my father", "my master" and "my country", to "my God". They can be taught to reduce all these senses to that of "my boots", the "my" of ownership.”

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<sup>14</sup> One of the problems with stuff is that it often ends up owning us. We want things only to learn that things take time. In ancient days when the king of Siam had an enemy he wanted to torment and destroy, he would send that enemy a unique gift – a white elephant. These albino elephants were considered sacred in that culture, so owning one was an honor, but caring for one was exhausting. The elephant required inordinate amounts of time, resources, energy, emotions and money. Today we buy season tickets to the Bulls game, or a summer cottage – or a boat! – and then end up spending a lot more time (and money) carrying for what we have. We end up doing less with our neighbors, or in ministry, because we need to attend the games, use the cottage, justify the boat.

d) And all the time the joke is that the word "Mine" in its fully possessive sense cannot be uttered by a human being about anything. In the long run either Our Father (Satan) or the Enemy will say "Mine" of each thing that exists, and especially of each man. They will find out in the end, never fear, to whom their time, their souls, and their bodies really belong—certainly not to them, whatever happens. At present the Enemy says "Mine" of everything on the pedantic, legalistic ground that He made it: Our Father hopes in the end to say "Mine" of all things on the more realistic and dynamic ground of conquest.

D. Number Four: **Some of the stuff we have “belongs” to others.**

1. I’m about to get personal. I’m about to meddle. Most people are far more comfortable talking about their sex life than their income and how they spend it. But the Bible asks whether some of the stuff that’s in your closet really belongs to the poor.<sup>15</sup>

2. Basil put it this way: It is the hungry one’s bread that you hoard, the naked one’s cloak that you retain, the needy one’s money that you withhold. Wherefore as many as you have wronged, you might have succored.”

3. Or, as Rebecca DeYoung paraphrases it: “the second donut you ate today belonged to the child who went to school without breakfast. The winter coat hanging in your closet next to four other winter coats (now out of style) belongs to the homeless person you passed on your way downtown last weekend.

4. Let me pause to acknowledge that this is not the way economics works. It’s not a zero sum game. We can make more bread and more winter coats. We can make enough for everyone. And I believe that there should be upsides for those who take the risk to organize the enterprises that make more bread and winter coats. But: 1) there are some systematic iniquities in our global economy; 2) and God has a heart for the poor; and 3) according to the ancients, it’s not just the virtue of generosity that counters greed, but also justice. We need to proactively work for a just society.

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<sup>15</sup> St. Basil said: It is the hungry one’s bread that you hoard, the naked one’s cloak that you retain, the needy one’s money that you withhold. Wherefore as many as you have wronged, you might have succored.” Or, as Rebecca DeYoung paraphrases it: “the second donut you ate today belonged to the child who went to school without breakfast. The winter coat hanging in your closet next to four other winter coats (now out of style) belongs to the homeless person you passed on your way downtown last weekend, and the money you have saved for retirement is the difference between subsistence and starvation for the sweatshop workers who made your favorite hiking boots (worn only twice). Wherefore as many as you have wronged, you might have aided.” (DeYoung, p. 108).



5. I think they are right to suggest that some of the stuff in my closet or your garage or the storage locker that no one has checked on in 18 months belongs to those with greater need.

E. Number Five: **Greed is dangerous.**

1. Stuff is not bad, but it's never enough. Everything everywhere ultimately belongs to God. Some of the stuff we have in our closet should be in someone else's closet. Number five: Greed is dangerous.

2. Some even argue that it's the most dangerous of the Seven Deadly Sins.<sup>16</sup> I would not go that far, but I do see the problems it causes. Greed opens up a Pandora's Box of sins. It is parasitic. It's like cancer. Its objective is growth. Growth for growth's sake is the policy of a cancer cell even though it does no good.

3. I was thinking of this as it relates to my father's cancer. He is doing much better than they told us to expect. And they have started to say that he may start to think about years not weeks. (He was given six to eight weeks six weeks ago). But he has Leukemia, and Leukemia is a lot like greed. Leukemia cells do no good. They are immature, defective blood cells that keep multiplying without doing any work, and eventually they crowd out everything else. Greed is like that. It expands and takes us down.<sup>17</sup>

4. Greed is grounded in a belief that leads us away from God. It leads us to think we will find what we most want somewhere other than in a relationship with him.

IV. Let me pause here to make a radical claim.

A. An odd, counter cultural suggestion: God often keeps those He loves poor – or at least suggests that as the right path – because those who are poor tend to stay closer to Him. Think about this.

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<sup>16</sup> I know, I have argued that Pride is and that Sloth could be. But for the record, some misquote 1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil" and declare greed to be the root of all evil. I don't think it is, but...

<sup>17</sup> William Willimon said it this way: If I were making a list of Deadly Sins, Greed would be at the top of my list. Maybe this is just personal, or maybe it is the result of living in this society... Greed has a way of turning everything that's gold into dross. As James Ogilvy says, 'Greed turns love into lust, leisure into sloth, hunger into gluttony, honor into pride, righteous indignation into anger, and admiration into envy. If it weren't for greed, we would suffer fewer of the other vices.' Willimon, p. 103f.

1. Think about where He has them live. God moved Abraham out of the Fertile Crescent – the Silicon Valley of the ancient world – and directed him to the undeveloped backwaters of Hebron – which was poor. And later, God directed Moses to lead his people out of Egypt – a land of wealth – back to the arid ground of Israel. Both of these moves seem designed to limit their wealth and keep them dependent upon him.

2. Secondly, God's Law seems designed to reduce their income once they were there:<sup>18</sup> 1) in contrast to the surrounding nations, where people worked seven days a week, the Hebrews were only allowed to work six days. That is a 14 percent disadvantage; 2) in contrast to surrounding nations, who could farm the land fifty years out of fifty, God's Jubilee Laws limited the Jews to 42 out of 50.<sup>19</sup> That is a 16 percent disadvantage; 3) in contrast to surrounding nations, where people could, if they wished, keep expanding their land holdings, every fiftieth year families were required to return the land to those to whom it initially belonged. This meant that no capital accumulation was possible in this society!; 4) in contrast to the practices of those around them, God required farmers to not harvest all of their land in order to provide food for refugees and other poor people; 5) in contrast to the people of surrounding nations who could keep all of their wealth, or donate at their temples as they wanted, the Jews were expected to make freewill offerings on top of the ten percent they were required to give. The net effect of these rules reduced a Jew's wealth by well over fifty percent. It sure looks like part of what he was doing was keeping them dependent.<sup>20</sup>

3. And then Jesus took things one step further. Just as he turned laws against adultery into prohibitions against lust, Christ changed laws against usury and the suggestion that we forgive all debts every fiftieth year into a command to give those who ask both our shirt and our coat – i.e., to love, give and not count the cost because our reward is in Heaven. Paul says the same thing, as does James and other New Testament writers straight through to the Book of Revelation.

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<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to a 20 September 2008 presentation by Bettag Konferenz for many of the observations here.

<sup>19</sup> God instructed the Jews to let the land lie fallow every seventh year, and then again not on the fiftieth year.

<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the people were prevented from going into debt. Debt – the attempt to use future purchasing power to obtain goods or services now, before they are earned – was frowned upon. Loans were to be made to fellow Jews without interest. (Loans made to outside nations were allowed to be made with interest, but this is likely only because this was the practice of other nations already. The Jews would have been overrun with loan requests if they were the only ones not charging interest). But even this was limited, because every fiftieth year not only the interest was to be forgiven, but the principal (sp?) as well. Clearly, God was not setting up a culture of debt. It sure seems clear that God was not particularly interested in the material prosperity of any one person. He wanted to build a healthy culture and foster their dependence on Himself.

B. Now, His followers have seldom followed this teaching. The Jews seldom followed the Law as it relates to the year of Jubilee. And as Christ-followers we find it very difficult to do what we are told here. But what we are told here is the way forward. It is in our best interest. We need to recognize greed as a default response and work hard to be about generosity and justice instead.

C. Thinking that we are “self-made” sets us on a path that will not end well.<sup>21</sup>

V. So, what do we do?

A. Stuff is not bad but it’s never enough. It’s not ours, it’s God’s, and He wants to be sure the poor are cared for. And we are accountable for how we steward his resources. So, what do we do? How can we break the grip of greed that lies deep inside of us? Let me briefly suggest three steps:

B. Be More Reflective.

1. We need to move through life a bit more thoughtfully. We need to be aware that even though we have more than 99 percent of the people who have ever lived, we will keep wanting more until we find a deeper sense of contentment in God. After our natural needs are met, more stuff is seldom the path to greater joy.

2. We need to ask ourselves: How am I doing? Am I greedy or generous? If someone had access to my financial records, if they could follow me around – look in my closets, the basement and garage – would they say that I’m being a good steward or that I’m being selfish. Am I greedy or generous?

3. There is no formula for this. I think the fourth century Desert Fathers – the ones who gave us the list that became the Seven Deadly Sins – I think they got it wrong. They were quite consumed with trying to get by on the least possible.<sup>22</sup> We’re not called to that. But we are not living that way either! In a culture as crassly materialistic as ours can be, we have to be disciplined and discerning.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> To say someone is “self-made” is considered to be a comment. The truth is, it’s a joke. No one is self-made. We are all utterly dependent upon God.

<sup>22</sup> The Christian ascetics of the fourth century maintained a solitary existence in the deserts of Egypt. About their only interaction with others were there trips to the market where they sold the baskets they made so they could buy bread. The spiritual directors of that community counseled these men to sell their baskets below market prices and give alms with any money left over. They were not to bring any profit home lest it tempt them to put their trust in money not God.

<sup>23</sup> Very few hoard out of malice, but many people hoard out of thoughtlessness. And in today’s global economy this is easier to do. Two hundred years ago we knew all of the people we did business with. If the cobbler’s kids were

4. At some point we do not need bigger closets we need less stuff.<sup>24</sup>

5. We need to be more reflective.

C. Give more away.

1. This is not a stewardship message per se, but as I have said before, the path forward is: Give, Save and live on the rest. Giving comes first. I believe we should be giving more than ten percent of our income away. I think – and have set this challenge before you – that we should give ten percent back to the local church and give more away besides that.

2. During the last two falls I've issued The One Percent Challenge. I've asked you to increase your giving to the church by one percent. I am not going to preach that sermon this fall because it doesn't fit in the schedule. But the challenge remains in front of you. If you are not yet giving ten percent, figure out what you are giving and decide to increase your giving to the church by one percent and give generously in other directions as well.

3. This will mean you live with less. You can expect greed to throw a tantrum. But, it is the right thing to do. It will shape you in the directions you need to be shaped. Generosity will help break the choke hold of greed. And in light of eternity being generous – radically generous – is what you will wish you had been.

4. It has been Sheri's and my practice to give at least ten percent to the church and more besides. We started with ten percent – back when we were making \$16,500 and paying off school loans – and as we have earned more we've been able not just to give more away but to march up the percentage we give away. And there is great joy and freedom there.

5. Men and women, the values of the Kingdom of God do not line up with the values of a broken world or a broken heart. In God's eyes, the winners are not those who accumulate the most stuff, but in some ways, it's those who distribute the most.<sup>25</sup>

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going hungry we willingly agreed to pay more for our shoes. Today we are unaware of the living conditions of the workers making our shoes in another country.

<sup>24</sup> Why not decide right now to not allow your life-style to change over the next year (or two or five) even if your income rises?

<sup>25</sup> Be imitators of God – Eph. 5:1-2

6. Give more away. If greed has a grip on your heart, give more away. If you give less than ten percent to the church, take The One Percent Challenge, and give more away besides.

D. Finally, Know God More Fully.

1. Some religions suggest that we die to want. That's not the message here. It's not that want is wrong, it's that our desires are too small.<sup>26</sup>

2. As C.S. Lewis brilliantly said:

a) It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

E. We do well to focus less on stuff and more on God – to seek our meaning and joy through a relationship with the Creator not the things he made.

F. I have given you plenty to think about and talk about in your small groups. Let's pray.

VI. Announcements and Benediction:

A. The kingdom of this world is ruled by scarcity and death, consequently greed and self-aggrandizement make sense. Yet those of us who embrace another kingdom – an eternal kingdom swelling with abundance and ruled by love – are expected to live by a different set of rules – to live today in light of the love and grace of a God who never runs out because He can always make more! The joy we are after is found in God and giving not in greed.

B. If you would like to pray with someone about finding strength to overcome greed – or anything else – there are people up front ready to pray.

C. Chili Cook Off (Sat PM only)

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<sup>26</sup> We need to learn to take more joy in the riches of God's grace and glory and live today empowered by the joy of heaven to come. In Romans 2:4, Paul speaks of the riches of God's kindness, restraint and patience. In Eph. 3:16 it's the riches of His glory; In Eph. 1:7 it's the riches of His grace; and in Eph. 1:8 it's the glorious riches of His inheritance

D. The bulletin has other announcements about lots of other things: people interested to sing in the upcoming Gospel choir, help with special needs children during Sunday School; this is the last week of the winter coat drive.

VII. Extra:

- A. The Song, All of You is More than Enough (Tomlin and Giglio);
- B. Readings from Amos 5:10-15; Mt. 26:1-16;
- C. Milton Friedman interview on Donahue;
- D. Steve Martin Saturday Night Live clip: Don't Buy Stuff You Cannot Afford;
- E. Play "spot the lie" with commercials;
- F. Challenge people to be radically generous this week.