

TAKE AIM, DON'T MISS! DEALING WITH THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

– THE “JUST ONE MORE...” SYNDROME –

John D. Rockefeller was presented with that question at the height of his incredible personal wealth in the oil industry. To which he responded, **“One more dollar.”**

How much money is enough for you? How much of _____ is enough for you? Me. Most people have not given that honest thought. And most spend much of their life living out the answer with “I don’t know, but more than I have.”



When we think of “greed”, as when we think of the other seven deadlies, our minds tend to head to the fringes where the extreme cases are: stingy misers, corrupt brokers, wicked pirates. You know, Ebenezer Scrooge, Gordon Gecko, & Captain Barbosa (POTC), These transparent (and somewhat cartoonish) examples of greed gone wild are – truth be known – more self-protective, self-righteous strategies to make us feel at a safe distance from this vice. We tend to focus on the extremes because it makes us look more “normal” [Big J and pants size].

Here’s the problem with greed: *Greed is NOT always obvious, and since it grips our hearts (desires) before it grips our actions, it’s easy to get caught in Greed’s trap.* Greed is an inside operative.

Several Truths help us unmask this sin that catches us in it’s vice grip.

1. The disturbing FACTS about this subtle sin.

➤ Greed is a ROOT sin.

What does that mean? (cf 1 Timothy 6:9-10) *Just as all kinds of weeds spring from roots, all kinds of sin spring from greed (or avarice). Greed is a parent sin w/many offspring carrying her DNA.*

Some venomous children of this “mother” sin? *Fraud, deceit, perjury (false oath), violence, restlessness, lack of compassion – just to name a few. “Every person has his/her price . . .” [You didn’t tell me it was a PRESBYTERIAN dog!]*

➤ Greed is disordered LOVE.

Here’s a helpful definition of greed (from Rebecca DeYoung): *“An excessive love or desire for \$\$ or any possession \$\$ can buy, coupled with a craving for MORE (the word ‘enough’ is nowhere to be found)..” Extended . . . excessive love or desire for ANY material object . . . [GK Word study, Grasping hand “must have!” and clenched fist “will NOT let it go!”]*

Hebrews 13:5 offers an appropriate location for the problem of greed. We are to keep ourselves from the LOVE of \$\$\$. \$\$\$, possessions themselves are NOT the problem. It's the LOVE of them, it's our inordinate affection for them, the drive, the desire, the obsession with \$\$\$\$. EVERYTHING BOILS DOWN TO \$\$\$\$.

The ISSUE of greed lies in: How the HEART drives what we say and do. Again, \$\$\$ is NOT the problem. You can not have much \$\$\$ at all, and still be a greedy person. Follow the \$\$\$, in your language and actions. [...millionaire in Hattiesburg walking, checking parking meters, in the bank line, shutting it down over a penny . . . restaurant owner on Main Street chasing down a patron . . . b/c of ONE PENNY!] What you're OBSESSING over is what is POSSESSING you. Some people are POSESSED by their POSSESSIONS.

➤ **Greed is DECEPTIVE and DESTRUCTIVE.**

No one "owns up" to being greedy. It's usually "what I deserve, what I had coming to me, what is rightfully mine" kind of language.

Pay special attention to one particular word... ENSNARES. A snare is a trap, well camouflaged. People hurt themselves and others over \$\$\$, and every party is claiming to always be getting "what was rightfully mine". Our DENIAL of greed even camouflages our greed, our desire for "just one more . . ." [Death Valley story . . . "Died Rich" . . .]

Biblical examples of people caught in the trap... Judas, Ananias, Demas . . .

➤ **Greed is ultimately UNSATISFYING.**

[Ravi Zacharias tells the story of Guy de Maupassant, a nineteenth-century French author and father of the modern short story. His literary accomplishments brought great success and luxuriant wealth, including a yacht in the Mediterranean and a mansion on the coast of Normandy. But at the pinnacle of his career, his mental health broke down and Maupassant tried to kill himself, cutting his throat with a letter opener. He spent the rest of his short life in an asylum on the French Riviera and died at the age of forty-two, having penned his own epitaph: "I have coveted everything and taken pleasure in nothing."]

This unsatisfying nature of greed is confirmed in the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 5:10; and Peter Kreeft = "Trying to fill our hearts with things is like trying to fill the Grand Canyon with marbles." "A greedy heart always wanting more is a sign of a leaking heart . . . like a leaking cup with a crack at the bottom." We are made for something better!

2. The DELIVERY we need from this subtle sin.

One word, rightly understood, brings deliverance from greed. What is it? And what internal and external factors work against it constantly? The word is CONTENTMENT.

Externally, we live with a cultural pressure to accumulate more and more money, experiences, and stuff. Affluence is often considered the measure of success, and from

childhood we are encouraged by families, teachers, and peers to pursue the American dream, which evidently is buying things you don't need with \$\$ you don't have to impress people you don't even like. Advertisements incessantly barrage us with products and experiences that we "need" or "deserve." Even if Christian virtues of stewardship and generosity were a part of our upbringing or heritage, just living in a culture of wealth has a way of shaping our expectations and desires. Add to this the subtle pressures of social media, where at the click of a mouse we're invited to compare our cars, homes, and family vacations with those of friends, family, and old classmates. Facebook, anyone?

But these external pressures would have little pull without *the internal desires of our hearts*. Our hearts are never neutral. They are spring-loaded with desire. Like a needle to a magnet, our hearts move constantly towards the achievements, possessions, and experiences we believe will make us happy. Contentment, by contrast, is being satisfied with what you have. Anyone can experience a measure of contentment on a temporary basis. But Christian contentment is something deeper, richer, and more enduring. Let's now consider three features of Christian contentment.

Here are three features of what delivers us from greed, 3 features of CONTENTMENT.

➤ **It (contentment) isn't dependent on CIRCUMSTANCES.**

Insight from a jailed Christian, *Philippians 4:11-12... in fact, contentment TRANSCENDS circumstances.*

➤ **BUT . . . it's (CONTENTMENT) something we must learn to CULTIVATE over TIME.**

The encouragement we have and challenge we're faced with...

"In any and every circumstance," wrote Paul, "I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." I find this very encouraging. It shows that contentment was something Paul didn't always have. It didn't come naturally— he had to learn it. This gives me hope that I can learn contentment as well. I also find this verse challenging, because it shows that contentment is something we have to learn by experience. Paul learned contentment in any and every circumstance by going through all kinds of difficult circumstances. So let's embrace this difficult but unchangeable reality— the only way to learn contentment in difficult circumstances is to live them: to be brought low, face hunger, and experience need.

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom recounts how she learned to thank God in every circumstance, even in the horror of Barracks 28 in the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

The living conditions were inhumane. Fleas infested their barracks, and Corrie and her sister Betsie were just trying to survive and hold on to some fragment of faith, some little scrap of hope. One day Betsie remembered 1 Thessalonians 5: 18, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus,” and suggested that they should thank God for every single thing about the Barracks. They thanked God that they were together, that they still had a Bible, and even that they were in such crowded barracks, since this meant many could hear the Scriptures read aloud. But Corrie would not thank God for the fleas. “There is no way even God can make me grateful for a flea!” she told Betsie.

“Give thanks in all circumstances,” Betsie replied. “It doesn’t say ‘in pleasant circumstances.’ Fleas are part of this place where God has put us.” “And so we stood between piers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas,” Corrie writes. “But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.” She continues: One evening I got back to the barracks late from a wood-gathering foray outside the walls. A light snow lay on the ground and it was hard to find the sticks and twigs with which a small stove was kept going in each room. Betsie was waiting for me, as always, so that we could wait through the food line together. Her eyes were twinkling. “You’re looking extraordinarily pleased with yourself,” I told her. “You know we’ve never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room,” she said. “Well— I’ve found out.” That afternoon, she said, there’d been confusion in her knitting group about sock sizes and they’d asked the supervisor to come and settle it. “But she wouldn’t. She wouldn’t step through the door and neither would the guards. And you know why?” Betsie could not keep the triumph from her voice: “Because of the fleas! That’s what she said, ‘That place is crawling with fleas!’” My mind rushed back to our first hour in this place. I remembered Betsie’s bowed head, remembered her thanks to God for creatures I could see no use for.

➤ **It (CONTENTMENT) comes from the strength of CHRIST.**

Philippians 4:13, and the balance of Scripture.

Contentment is a GRACE, but we are to learn and cultivate, strengthened by Christ, who strengthens our hearts. We work, Christ works in us. Our effort is empowered by Christ, HE gets the credit and glory, WE take the blame when we fail. [somewhat like a GOOD Head Coach!]

AND THERE’S A PROMISE IN HEBREWS 13:5-6 THAT SETS US FREE FROM GREED . . .

It's the promise of THE LORD'S UNCONDITIONAL, CONSTANT PRESENCE in our lives.

Two observations:

- **It's the promise of God's PRESENCE.** God will ALWAYS meet your GREATEST NEED: Is to have GOD PRESENT W/YOU IN YOUR LIFE! What more do you NEED? *Psalm 73:23-26*. Would someone, upon observing your life, conclude that GOD was ENOUGH?!? Would they conclude that the HS living in you filled your life, or that you were an empty glass of water needing to be filled or a bottomless pit of need?
- **It's the promise that frees us from FEAR.** Greed is often rooted in a desire for security and control. And the opposite of security is fear— the fear of not having enough; the fear of losing control. But this kind of fear comes from looking to people or things for what God alone can give. If my contentment is dependent on my circumstances, then anything that threatens the stability or security of those circumstances can become a source of fear and anxiety.

But God's promise that he will never leave nor forsake me assures me that God is on my side—that he is my helper; that I will not be abandoned to the whims of people or the power of situations beyond my control. The Lord says he will be with his people, period.

It's also the promise of the argument from the greater to the lesser in *Romans 8:31-32*.