

**MONEY, GREED & GOOD SENSE Part II****Deuteronomy 6:10-12; Philippians 4:12**

**Intro:** In Luke 12 Jesus told a parable about a rich man who had a big harvest that went like this *“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.’”* Luke 12:16-19 (NIV)

The consequence of such self-centeredness follows in no uncertain terms, *“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?’* Why the harsh response? It’s clear, *“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.* Luke 12:20-21.

This is the danger of affluence. We forget to be rich toward God. But surely we’re not as bad as this guy, right? Wrong!

In June of 2005 we moved here to Ashland from Pennsylvania. The property we had in PA was large enough that we had room for an orchard, a large garden and about an acre of pasture for Sheila’s horse. Owning a horse required a barn and so we set about planning its construction. I consulted with my friend Jim about what size pole barn I should have built. His response was, *“Well, Pastor, no matter what you build, it will not be big enough for long.”* He was right! I soon needed a bigger barn. Unlike the rich man in the parable I did not build a bigger barn, I just “suffered” through its inadequacy.

I also remember when I got the bright idea that my motorcycle wasn’t the right kind for proper ministry to lost bikers. I mean, what validity would I have with them riding a little Honda when a big Honda, or if I lowered my standards a bit, a big Harley would be much more effective? It was pure greed, and discontentment, and certainly not necessity.

Now, think back to the picture we had of Judas two weeks ago. Remember his indignant concern that Mary’s extremely generous gift of anointing Jesus with pure nard was wasteful in light of how many people could have been fed? Instead of genuine concern, Judas’s response revealed his greed.

A good way past that is to. . .

**Never forget**

- As you can see by my own struggles, and no doubt yours too – it can be a problem for us too. We might not live in mansions or drive luxury cars, but compared to most of the world, we are rich. It’s important that we never forget where we come from and whose we are.
- In Deuteronomy 6, which Wayne read earlier, Moses warned the people not to forget God when they entered the Promised Land and became prosperous with . . . *be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.* Deuteronomy 6:12b. Prosperity can dull our spiritual vision more than poverty ever could. This is because it tends to make us self-sufficient and also eager to acquire still more of everything—except God. The most contented people I have ever met have been monetarily dirt poor, yet persistently delighted, disciples of Christ.
- In 1999 I was part of a Mennonite Central Committee study trip to Central America. It was exactly a year after Hurricane Mitch had devastated the region and people were still suffering greatly. Despite the suffering, I saw a resilient people. Specifically two experiences from the trip stand out in my mind:
- The first came as we drove through a little village in Honduras. As we passed one particular house the people living there saw our group and noticed that our leader was someone they knew. It was midday and they insisted we stop and come in for a meal. Actually there was no other way around it, we were to stop under no uncertain terms. So we did. Our group of about 10 people got out of our vehicles and went into the home and there were served a wonderful meal of chicken, bread and beans. Meanwhile the family sat in the living area as we ate their meal. That had little, we were rich (in comparison) North Americans. Yet there we sat, eating their food. And all the while, it gave them great joy.
- The other experience was the day I spent with a Mennonite pastor on his farm in the Nicaraguan countryside. Neither of us spoke much of the other’s language but we shared a bond of calling and our common Lord. He showed me his bean field and his banana grove. He showed me another field that had been prepared for a crop

I cannot recall, and he told me he had plowed it with oxen. He suggested that I would use a tractor. I agreed, but knew of people who worked their fields with animal drawn plows. He was extremely satisfied in his situation and made me feel completely at home.

- Almost 15 years later I stayed with my friend Ilam and his family in their mud home in Western Kenya. Each day Francisca would go into town to buy food for the day – they had no refrigeration or even a stove to cook on. But they shared generously what they had with the man from the land of plenty.
- All these situations and more have been imprinted on my mind. They help me never forget that many have far less and have much more gratitude. They also help me remember my God from whom all blessings flow. And it puts me on a quest to learn . . .

### **How to move from Greed to Good Sense?**

- First, we need to realize that everything we have, in reality, is not ours. It's all God's! When that becomes a core value of our lives, it has profound implications for *how* we use our resources.
- Second, we need to prayerfully seek what and how God wants us to give of ourselves and the resources he has placed into our care. While everything we have is God's, he provides us the resources to take care of our families and ourselves, and he provides us the resources to further his ministry around the world.
- The third one is another core value. We need to learn to live contentedly. Whether you have much or little, learn to be content. Paul wrote, *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* Philippians 4:12 and he wrote to Timothy *Godliness with contentment is great gain.* 1 Timothy 6:6. This is something in which my pastor/farmer colleague in Nicaragua was lightyears ahead of me. The late playwright, Neil Simon, wrote a many great works we have enjoyed over the years. His talent made him a rich man and so he was speaking from experience when he said *Money brings some happiness. But after a certain point, it just brings more money.* In other words, good sense is knowing that contentment comes from God and not from stuff.
- Fourth, we need to understand that giving is a spiritual discipline. It involves trusting God enough to allow him to be in control of what is really his anyway. As a spiritual discipline, giving is essential to our spiritual growth because it helps us trust God more.
- Finally, God expects giving to be done within the context of investment in the local body of believers, and from there it spreads to the world. The portion of our Old Testament reading from two weeks ago was a dare from God. He says, *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,* says the Lord Almighty, *and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.* Malachi 3:10. He's saying "support the temple" with your tithes and offerings. The modern equivalent of the temple is the local church which is the body of Christ. If there is anything we should be extravagant with, it should be the body of Christ. It is imperative that Christ followers invest in the local church and then watch God throw open the floodgates of blessing. The Church is the hope of the world.

**Conclusion:** It would seem that the best way past greed is to not hold back. Better yet, the solution to greed is generosity. But that move is not an overnight phenomenon – but you must make the move – it's one or the other. As we heard in our talk two weeks ago, Jesus said, *No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.* Matthew 6:21. Serve God! In the end we will find what we say over and over again here at ABC – you cannot out-give God. Next week we will finish up this study in Money, Greed, and Good Sen\$. Amen.