

Greed and Generosity for Gulf Gate Church / 07.27.08

hat; water and cup; PPT slides; 2*script;

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Proverbs 4:23]** Good morning! In case you have forgotten me since last week, my name is Will Groben. Jeff and Shari will be back next week.

- † You might be wondering about this hat. We are going to discuss greed and generosity. Those of you who golf know how it is: when you are lining up your approach shot to the green, you assume you are going to execute it well, you aim so as to leave your ball right at the pin. Well, I am assuming God is going to use my sermon to speak into your hearts and minds today, to root out all the ugly greed and to implant his own generosity.
 - So to help you begin being generous right away, I brought the hat: you can put your money in it... you can put in it your watches, jewelry, car keys, whatever signifies generosity to you. I will just leave it here and you can take care of that as you leave!

- † We are in a series based on Proverbs 4:23 [NIV]: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”
 - Last week, we discussed the problem of jealousy and its antidote of gratitude, especially thankfulness for our salvation. In some ways, today’s talk will build on what we discussed last week, so if you missed last week you can pick up a recording at the resource table out front. I say this even though I do not get any royalties.
 - **[Slide 2: Greed and Generosity]** Today, we are going to talk about greed, and I think we are going to find that every one of us struggles at least a little with this sin, though right now you might be in denial about it!

Are We Greedy?

- † I don’t think I have ever heard a churchgoer admit to being greedy. People out in the world, sure, they know what they’re about, but we in the church like to put on our Sunday best... even in a church where our dress is casual. You might admit that you are not super generous, but would you admit that you are greedy?
 - Like jealousy, greed can be difficult to see in ourselves. We tend to mask it as something else. We consider ourselves careful, frugal, good planners, and it never occurs to us that we are really a little greedy. Greedy? why that is someone like Scrooge, we tell ourselves, and surely we are not hard hearted like him!

- † **[Slide 3: Luke 12:15]** Today, we are going to look at a passage in Luke, in which Jesus teaches about greed. Let’s begin with Luke 12:15 [NET]: “Then he said to them, ‘Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed, because one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’”
 - Note Jesus warns us about “all types of greed.” There are more than one type, so you might not notice the symptoms of greed in yourself if they are different than you expect.

- † Jesus also said life is not about our abundance of possessions... hmmm. that hits home a bit, doesn’t it? We do tend to live life like it is all about accumulating more, don’t we?
 - We are forever upgrading our technology, trading in our cars, remodeling our houses or moving up to a better neighborhood... We buy new clothes even though our closets are

- full, more food than we need even though our storerooms [guts] are full, and we think we have made it when we can own a vacation home up north somewhere...
- Jesus warns us, “Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed.”
- † We even collect things we don’t use much, don’t we? I have 1,339 books at home. I counted them for you. My wife came out of the bedroom all ready for work one day and found me still in my pajamas, counting...
- 334 of my books are ministry related, but almost the same number, just one less, are about subjects like history, science, and mathematics, which I am not likely to revisit anytime soon, and I own 672 novels!
 - If I used the library, I would be able afford that new truck I talked about last week! You laugh, but I know some of you have a collector car in your garage, or coffee cups from all over the world, or tea pots, beer cans, stamps, coins, video games, CDs or DVDs... People collect just about anything and everything. Do you know there are at least thirty-seven magazines for collectors? People collect antiques, memorabilia, maps, teddy bears or dolls, comics and games, lunch boxes... I have one friend who collects anything with a cow on it. My favorite – which I did not even know existed until this week – has to be the hobby of collecting air sickness bags. I found nine websites dedicated to this hobby!
 - It is not a sin to have a hobby, it is not a sin to have a few luxuries – which by definition are anything we do not need – but of our passion for accumulating stuff, Jesus might warn us, “Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed!”
- † We buy even when we don’t have the money, don’t we?
- We take out loans and use our credit cards. And this is not always for necessities, right? We are buying bigger tvs, smaller cell phones, different color shoes... tacky souvenirs, superfluous tools, and all kinds of entertainment, from \$100/m cable to \$50 video games to \$20 novels, we spend and spend for no better reason than to entertain ourselves.
 - But then, when someone asks us to give to a worthy cause, what do we do? We don’t borrow to give, do we? ... no! we check our ready cash and say, “Oh! I am so sorry, I just don’t have enough to give right now!” Even if we consider our overall income or cash flow, we realize it is all going to service the debt, so – sorry! – we cannot give this year.
 - Jesus said, “Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed!”
- † We are not like Scrooge; we have some feelings for a good cause.
- Our hearts go out to the poor, the needy, the orphans! We hope our relatives will benefit from Hospice or Easter Seals, we’re glad someone is working toward the cure for cancer or AIDS! We admire those who give up so much to become missionaries or full-time local pastors, and we are glad our community has programs for children and teenagers...
 - But when it comes time to give them some money... we find we cannot, because there is none available. That didn’t stop us from buying stuff for ourselves, right? that is why we never can give: we spend like crazy on ourselves, but we find reasons not to give...
 - And I am sure Jesus would say, “Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed!”

It is a heart issue, not a financial one

- † This is not a financial issue for us, you know, it is a heart issue. Maybe some of you doubt that, thinking you have not accumulated enough. I tell you, everyone in this room is among

the most wealthy people in the world. We tend to lose sight of that because we live in the US, where there is always someone more wealthy than us.

- **[Slide 4: wealth]** The USDA estimated this month that there are almost a billion people in the world who do not get enough to eat. No offense, but most of us look pretty well fed. If you eat when you want, have your own place to sleep, own a car, you are wealthy by world standards.
 - According to the World Bank, 75% of the measurable countries in the world have a per capita income of less than ½ of that in the US; 61% have less than ¼ of that in the US!
 - Even in the US, 12.3% of Americans, 36.5MM people, are classified as being impoverished. For an individual, that means living on less than \$10M/yr; for a family of four, less than \$20M/yr. In contrast, most of us are rich, and we must accept the truth that our ongoing sense of *need* is actually a desire for luxury.
- † **[Slide 5: heart issue]** It is not a financial issue, it is a heart issue. I want to make clear that this talk is not about increasing the church's collection. Maybe it is good that I am giving this talk instead of Jeff, for you know I have no vested interest in the finances of this church. We are talking about the condition of your heart, about your ongoing spiritual health and growth.
- You know, we are immersed in a multimedia environment that is constantly telling us what we should want next. This causes us to focus on what we do not have instead of what we do, and thus we are filled with desire instead of contentment.
 - So, when we are blessed with more money, we have already spent that money in our minds, already planned out what we want to buy next. And so, despite being relatively wealthy already, we still would rather buy more and more, than give to others.
 - What would Jesus say about that sort of attitude? "Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed!"
 - We all know this greed is a sin, right? If you want to look up some lists of sins and find greed on them, try Romans 1:29-2:1; Ephesians 5:1-4; Colossians 3:1-7. We know how to deal with sin, we discussed it a bit last week, and I am sure you are all willing by now to confess to a little greed and ask God to give you a more generous heart. Here's the key question: Are you also willing to do what scripture says is needed to get your heart healthy and cooperate with God's work in you?

Generosity

- † **[Slide 6: 1 Timothy 6:17-19]** Paul wrote some instructions for us – the rich – in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 [NASB]: "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."
- † **[Slide 7: highlight God]** Note the generosity of God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. It is because God is generous that we *can* be generous, for he has blessed us immensely with his love, with salvation, and to various degrees with earthly blessings. All we have is a gift from God.
- It is because God is generous that we *must* be generous: we were created in his image, are growing to be like Christ, and have a role of representing him on this earth.

- † **[Slide 8: highlight hope]** It is also because God is generous that we can put our confidence, our security, in him, not in accumulation of wealth or possessions.
 - I have some friends who grew up in poverty and they are the greatest hoarders you ever met! They have books, toys, clothes, junk – all bought at garage sales for ten cents or a quarter – stacked from floor to ceiling in every room, with the overflow outside! It is compulsive for them, it makes them feel safe, to have all this stuff.
 - People who lived through the Great Depression tend to stockpile possessions, storing up for a rainy day. I had one grandmother who was a packrat; another has enough freezers full of meat to survive for months if something happens; and yet another who when she was accused of being tight with her money replied, “How do you think I got to be so rich?” All of us tend to feel anxiety when we think we do not have enough – no matter how rich we are relative to the world – and to feel more confident when we have more.
 - But God wants us to count on him, not on anything of the world. We are greedy because we fear God can’t or won’t take care of us in the style to which we aspire, and this gap between what we want and what we think God will provide causes us anxiety, so we take up the burden to acquire and keep what we desire instead of trusting in God. But with this mindset, we never will have enough, we will always think we need more.

- † **[Slide 9: highlight doing good]** Paul writes we are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.
 - God has blessed us with an amount of wealth unheard of in history or even yet in most of the world, and he wants us to enjoy it, but he also wants us to be generous with it.

- † According to this passage, there are two benefits of being generous, really three because one has two parts: the first is that we store up **treasure** for the future.
 - **[Slide 10: treasure and Luke 12:33-34]** Let’s go back to Luke to get some clarity: In Luke 12:33-34, Jesus said, “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
 - We can invest in treasure for our future in Heaven. I am not sure what it looks like; I can tell you it won’t be the forty virgins you might have heard about; defiling virgins is not part of God’s heavenly plan. It might be greater heavenly rewards, special acknowledgment by the King, or the joy of realizing we made an eternal difference by doing God’s work while here on Earth. Whatever it is, it will be a tremendous blessing, one Jesus wants us to have, one that will last forever, unlike our treasures here on earth.

- † **[Slide 11: highlight true life]** The second benefit of being generous is we **take hold of that which is life indeed!**
 - When we are generous, we develop a sense of the true life God is offering us right now. We have been born again, but we have yet to learn how to **truly live!** We grow cozy in what the world offers us, frightened to step out and try this strange way of life God instructs us to pursue, and so we never step out into the greater blessings God offers us!
 - Investment counselors always advise us to take a life-time perspective, to plan our finances so they will last 100 years instead of spending it all now. But God says that is inadequate: God says we need to develop a kingdom perspective, one that accounts for our eternal life [not just 100 years], one that accounts for the limited value of material things and places greater value on doing God’s work, so we store up treasure in Heaven.

- What is holding us back is a lie. Remember back in Luke 12:15, Jesus confronted the deception under which we live, the lie that fuels our greed, when he said that life is not about our abundance of possessions. He wants to teach us how to truly live and be free!
- † **[Slide 12: highlight heart]** Remember we are to guard our heart because it is the wellspring of life: Jesus wants to help us truly live by leading us to a **cleansed and healed heart**.
- Jesus tells us to reallocate some of our wealth from ourselves to others. His reasoning for this was not that God needs our money or even that these good causes need our money... He said to give because where your treasure is there too is your heart. Jesus isn't after your money, he is after your heart!
- † You want to see how your heart is doing right now? Check the money trail. Never mind your feelings [Oh, my heart goes out to the poor!] or your intellect [philosophically, I do agree that those of us better off should come to the aid of the under-privileged], because your emotions and intellect can deceive you on this issue: instead, look at the evidence.
- Ten years ago, I looked at the evidence, and I saw that I spent 100% of my money on myself. If a charity called me, I told them I had nothing to give, while I spent more than my salary on myself each year.
 - What does your bank statement suggest about the condition of your heart? If you spend most of your money on the things of this world, on the blessings of this life, where is your heart? Your spending indicates where your heart is – focused on yourself, on self-indulgence, on the things of this world.
- † But your spending also directs your heart to some degree. That is the depth of what Jesus is saying here: where you allocate the financial blessings God has given you will have an effect on the condition of your heart. If you invest only in your own fleeting pleasures, then your heart will remain selfish and greedy.
- In Matthew 6:24, Jesus said you cannot serve both God and wealth; don't be deceived into thinking you are living for God if you are spending all your money on yourself.
 - But if we submit to Jesus' authority in this area of our lives, begin to take an eternal perspective, begin to love others and put their needs before our own, begin to let go of materialism and the need for entertainment, and start serving God through serving others, then our hearts will begin to heal and be cleansed.

Parable

- † This is a harder sermon than last week. Last week, I tried to convince you you were jealous, but then offered you the chance to be thankful for what you had; this week I try to convince you that you are greedy, and then try to get you to give away the stuff you have! But it is a message of hope: of cleansing, healing, blessing, and experiencing God as never before.
- † **[Slide 13: Luke 12:15-17]** I want to go back to Luke 12 and look at the parable Jesus told right after he warned about all types of greed. Luke 12:15-17: Then he said to them, "Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed, because one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." He then told them a parable: "The land of a certain rich man produced an abundant crop, so he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'"

- Farmers today know how dependent they are on God’s blessing for a good crop, because too much lies outside their control. In Jesus’ day, under the Mosaic Covenant, God had made clear that an abundant crop would be the result of his blessing.
 - But look at how the man reacted: he said, “they are *my* crops.” There is no thankfulness, no thought to these being God’s resources. And despite already being wealthy, there is no thought of sharing the bounty, instead he looks to hoard the surplus for himself.
- † **[Slide 14: Luke 12:18-19]** Luke 12:18-19: “Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to myself, “You have plenty of goods stored up for many years; relax, eat, drink, celebrate!””
- The farmer should have asked himself a question, the same one we should ask ourselves: why did God bless us with extra? Why did God give us so much more than we need?
 - When blessed with extra, economists would say you should invest it so you could increase your holdings to use over your lifetime. We tend to react to a windfall differently: whoo-hoo! let’s spend it! Like the farmer, we have Bigger Barn Syndrome: we fill up our U-store rental units and our garages with our surplus so we can go buy more stuff for our houses.
 - Ask yourself, what would God’s view be? Why would God entrust us with more resources than we need? What would God want his representatives on Earth, the stewards of his resources, to do with the extra wealth he gave them?
- † This man figures to retire. That’s what he thinks the resources are for, retirement. And how does he view retirement? He will relax and party: total leisure.
- Do you think this is biblical? Is it God’s design that we live the last third or second half of our lives in total self indulgence? Extra time is a blessing just like the extra money that enables it: what would God want his representatives on Earth, the stewards of his resources, to do with the extra time he gave them?
- † **[Slide 15: Luke 12:20-21]** Luke 12:20-21: “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded back from you, but who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ So it is with the one who stores up riches for himself, but is not rich toward God.”
- In the end, all this man’s stuff, like all of ours, is reallocated to other people, but this reallocation was because he was dead, not because he was generous. In the end, all our stuff is given away anyway; we don’t get any credits for it in Heaven, you know.
 - This is Jesus’ example of a greedy person: he was given more than he needed by God and he hoarded it for himself instead of becoming “rich toward God.” He could have become rich toward God by being a good steward of God’s resources, by considering God’s blessing of wealth to be a tool for doing God’s work as he represented God, by being generous toward those in need and in funding programs that furthered God’s purposes.
 - The landowner lost everything. If he’d given it away, he’d have been rich toward God with treasure in Heaven. Instead, he had been greedy, and now he had nothing. Jesus called this man a fool! yet – thinking back to our talk last week, we would have envied this fool – and I think most of us are trying to emulate him!

[Slide 16: blank] Last week, when we discussed jealousy, we said that even if we thought God had not blessed us enough materially, we knew we had been blessed greatly with salvation.

- In the NT, people who had been blessed with salvation were expected not only to be content, but joyful, even if they were impoverished!
 - There are people like this today. I have friends who have served in missions in Africa, Haiti, Central America, and Asia, and they report seeing people who have nothing – nothing! just one set of clothes and a makeshift hut – and yet they are so bursting with joy in the Lord that the missionaries admired *their* spirituality!
- † Think about it... what is holding us back from full devotion to God? Isn't it our devotion to self indulgence, our passion for accumulating stuff and leisure?
- What is holding us back from full dependence on God? Could it be our self-reliance, our security in what we are accumulating materially?
 - What is preventing us from experiencing intimacy with God and the joy and peace promised as fruit of the Holy Spirit? We are distracted by the things of this world! and so we are anxious and stressed as we seek to rely on our own efforts to secure our blessing.
- † It's sad, really! And it takes us all the way back to the garden of Eden. You want to see a theme that runs through the whole Bible? Here is one: God gave man and woman a job to do, and in return, God promised to take care of them. A simple contract. But man and woman gave up doing the job God gave them to do, and instead tried to take care of themselves.
- As you read through the rest of the Bible, as you look throughout the history of man, as you look at our lives today, you will see the same pattern.
 - God has created you in his image, he has called you out to be his saved and reborn child, he has designated you to represent him here on Earth, and he has equipped you with abilities, spiritual gifts, and – yes – material wealth, so that you can represent him well. He has given you a job to do, and in return, later in this same passage of Luke, he promised to take care of you.
 - Will you be a good steward, will you see these blessings as tools to do God's work, and so represent God with what he has given you? or will you follow the age old pattern, and give up representing God to take care of yourself, and live not only in disobedience, but self indulgence and greed, and miss out on the greater blessings of God?

† **Monkey Trap**

- † Jesus was not saying God is after your money. His point was that in following the pattern of Adam and Eve, we burden ourselves with sin, we open our hearts up to greed, and it eats away at us like a cancer. Jesus wants to free us of this bondage. He wants to heal our hearts of this affliction. He wants to teach us to trust in God's provision, to live less selfishly, less self-indulgently, and to discover the joy, the blessing, of giving and blessing others in Jesus' name.
- † Oh how I pray he will help me learn how to truly live! To live in freedom from greed, to live with generosity in my heart. Will you trust him? Will you take steps toward being more generous, and allow the Holy Spirit to heal your heart? If we can be grateful for our salvation, like we discussed last week, let us choose to forgo our greed; let us choose to give up some of the blessings of this world, to dwell on the things of the Lord. Let us choose to be generous as our God is generous with us. Amen.