

## Sinning Like A Christian: #6

### Avarice: *I Want It All*

January 10, 2010

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

The movie is entitled: Wall Street: The story is about a person named, *Bud Fox who is a Wall Street stockbroker in early 1980's New York with a strong desire to get to the top. Working for his firm during the day, he spends his spare time working an on angle with the high-powered, extremely successful (but ruthless and greedy) broker Gordon Gekko. Fox finally meets with Gekko, who takes the youth under his wing and explains his philosophy that "Greed is Good"*

**Clip: Wall Street: Gordon Gekko's :Greed is good.**

In order to keep a fire going you need air and combustible material. In our consumer society, greed is the fuel that keeps our economy going. Why did you think Uncle Sam sent you a tax refund some years ago. So that you can put it in the bank to save it. I don't think so. Let us not quickly forget the ugliness of greed that has gotten played out vividly on Wall Street these past 2 years. We all remember the **Enron debacle**.

Someone wrote a satire piece entitled "**Enron Venture Capitalism**"

It works this way:

- \* *You have two cows.*
- \* *You sell three of them to your publicly listed company, using letters of credit opened by your brother-in-law at the bank,*
- \* *then execute a debt/equity swap with an associated general offer so you get all four cows back, \* with a tax exemption for five cows.*
- \* *The milk rights of the six cows are transferred via an intermediary to a Cayman Island company secretly owned by the majority shareholder who sells the rights to all seven cows back to your listed company.*
- \* *The annual report indicates that the company owns eight cows, with an option on one more!*

The Early Church Father Chrysostom wrote his rules for clergy in his book, *On the Priesthood*. It is the most extensive early document on pastoral ethics. It is clear that he thought that greed, not lust, was the chief clerical sin.

Another word for greed is **Avarice**.

The dictionary definition of avarice is: *Insatiable greed for riches; excessive, miserly desire to gain and hoard wealth.*

The greedy person's attachment to wealth can wear many faces.

- \* overflowing shopping cart
- \* single purchase
- \* stock portfolio that is aggressive or conservative
- \* a wallet full of credit cards
- \* a safety deposit box with a few carefully guarded treasures.
- \* closet jammed full of great deals.

It can affect the young, the old, and everyone in between.

The thing that is scary is that we learn it at such a early age.

Don't think for a moment that your first word you learned as a toddler was mommy.

The first words that came out of your mouth was Mine.

Here is the thing that makes greed so difficult. **The line between want and need, or desire and necessity is so thin.** I don't know how to distinguish between the two.

Am I considered greedy if I buy all my clothes from Eddie Bauer, American Eagle or LL Bean instead of the Salvation Army?

When Priscilla and I were in Chicago, when we were first married, we were connected with a group of young urbanites. A lot of them took great pride in wearing old cloths, driving old cars without air conditioning and made every effort to live a simple lifestyle. In their simple lifestyle, they became arrogant and prideful thinking they were one step above those who are involved in consumerism.

The line between want and need, or desire and necessity is so thin.

**William Williamon** ask the question: *When does the desire for the abundant life become the life that is jerked around by grubby Greed?*

In **Leadership Magazine** some years ago they did an article in what type of car should a clergy drive? Is the clergy considered materialistic if he or drives around in a Cadillac? Yukon ? or a Honda? Or is he more spiritual if he drives around in a used Yugo?

The effort to distinguish between true, absolute need and merely accidental desire is therefore not as easy as one might think. **James Twitchell** defines a luxury as *something we absolutely do not need*.

What do you do if you go by the guideline? To have desires is not a bad thing. In fact it can lead us toward some of the best things that we do. Desire to work hard and be proud of what we have accomplished is good. When does that desire cross over into greed? I don't know.

I do know this one thing, the **hideous thing about greed** is, it begins to take root within our heart without us even recognizing it. **Cancer compared to sin**. It is so subtle. Greed causes us to want things or hold on to things that we don't even need or even think we need.

When my **mom died**, there were a few pieces of furniture that came from her side of the family. When my sister and I were dividing up the pieces, greed quickly raised its ugly head. I begin picking out dishes that I never knew she had. Now I have a few old chairs sitting around, that are the most uncomfortable things to sit in. Just ask Evita who sits on one during small group. Now I'm stuck with them. Yet, I don't sell them, because they are "family heirlooms". Sad reality, when desire turns into greed, greed becomes this unquenchable desire that is never satisfied.

**Evagrius** observes, *The sea is never filled up even though it takes in a multitude of rivers; the desire of the greedy person cannot get its fill of riches. He doubled his wealth and wants to double it again, and he does not stop doubling it until death puts a stop to his endless zeal.*

You would think that when we acquire a few things we would be satisfied. Guess what? We're not. The more we have, the more we as Augustine noted, we are afflicted with restless hearts. We want more.

So when we think of greed, we easily justify it in our minds that I'm not in that camp. I'm not Ebenezer Scrooge who excessively hoards possessions he already has.

Well? Maybe and maybe not.

**PowerPoint:** Picture of woman with a lot of shoes.

How many pairs of shoes does one really need? If I have 15 pairs of shoes and I go to the store and there is a pair that is 50% off, does that give me a license to buy another pair?

Of course **advertising** feeds on this unfocused, relentless desire. They push stuff into my face convincing me that I absolutely need this particular product. In the United States alone the advertising industry spends over 6 billion dollars a day.

According to an article in the Educational Forum a few years ago, *"the typical U.S. consumer is the recipient of 3,000 advertisements daily..."*...on billboards, in magazines, on TV, radio, the Internet-not to mention the U.S. Mail.

Irony of this is I never knew in the first place that I needed some gadget, until the advertisement told me that I needed it. "**Dennis the Menace**" cartoon strip where Dennis is looking through a Christmas Toy catalogue saying, *"This catalog's got a lot of toys I didn't even know I wanted."*

## **A. There are 4 things about greed that we need to recognize.**

### **1. Deceives Us**

**This sinful desire motivates us to try to earn more than we need, own more than we can use, and ache for stuff that never satisfies.**

Greed promises that material well-being will bring fulfillment and happiness. It's going to fill this deep desire in us that we are going to be blissfully happy. Tiger Woods should be the happiest person in the world. Do I need to say more? Greed lies to us and promises things that it'll never be able to deliver. Greed tells us we will find a high degree of happiness in this life by acquiring things that we think we deserve.

True-when we get something that we have wanted for a long time there is a brief thrill, but the thrill never lasts. Like a tire with a hole in it, it quickly loses its ability to bring us happiness.

**But we never seem to learn this lesson.** When the thrill fades we just yearn for another THING, hoping that it WILL bring us lasting happiness. And the process begins all over again.

### **2. The fallacy that greed is only a problem for those who have acquired wealth.**

*Well, I'm not rich, so GREED isn't going to be a problem for me!"* But that's not true. All of us-no matter what tax bracket we fit into-suffer from GREED.

**Bill Hybels** writes: *"Some of the greediest people in the world have very little but they spend countless hours, scheming, fantasizing, and standing in lottery lines, fully convinced that more money would solve every problem and meet every longing in their life."*

### **3. Greed causes us to be callous to the needs of others.**

Greed is the root of all kinds of evil.

**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.*

The main bed partner of greed is pride. Greed is anchored in pride and nourished in pride.

Prideful greed is the desire to make sure we get enough for ourselves. Or better yet, to make sure we get what we want. Greed will lead us to trample on the rights of others, justifying it in our minds that we deserve it or it rightly belongs to us.

Remember when you were young and you elbowed your sibling out for that last piece of pizza? It seemed so benign. Greed on that level seem so natural. When it is able to take birth at that level, it is able to mature to the level of murder.

### **Naboth's vineyard illustrates I Kings 21.**

Remember the story? **I Kings 21** tells that King Ahab wanted the land that adjoined his property but it belonged to his neighbor, Naboth. Ahab offered to buy it for a reasonable price but Naboth did not want to sell because the land had been in the family for a long time. Ahab was depressed over the matter until his wicked wife, Jezebel, assured him that she would take care of everything. She had the neighbor falsely accused of blasphemy, treason, and put to death. And then King Ahab was able to confiscate the land. So, the king's GREED gave birth to lying, theft and murder.

That is why the early Church Fathers called the 7 deadly sins Capital Sins because they give birth to more deadly sins.

Greed causes callousness toward those in want. We become callous to the homeless and the poverty in third world countries.

**Rebecca DeYoung** writes:

*Avarice does not just feed our wants, it tramples others' needs. It is also behind the fantasies and desires that moves us to rationalize lifestyles in which we regularly and programmatically take more than we need, or more than our share, regardless of injury to others.*

Because money is so attractive that we find ourselves, consciously or even unconsciously, commit many sins in order to acquire it. Money gives us this illusionary sense of power and prestige.

Again our verse from **1 Timothy 6:10**,

*Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble.*

*Going down the path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after.*

#### **4. Greed gives this illusion of self-sufficiency.**

Aquinas argues that human beings are tempted to seek material wealth because it gives us the illusion of self-sufficiency. Therefore it serves as a powerful incentive to deny our need for God.

**Frederick Buechner** writes:

*The trouble with being rich is that since you can solve with your checkbook virtually all practical problem that bedevil ordinary people, you are left in your leisure with nothing but the great human problems to contend with: how to be happy, how to love and be loved, how to find meaning and purpose in your life. In desperation the rich are continually tempted to believe that they can solve these problems too with their checkbooks, which is presumably what led Jesus to remark one day that for a rich man to get to Heaven is about as easy as for a Cadillac to get through a revolving door.*

#### **B. Three Steps to Over Come Greed**

William Williamon made this statement which helped me to put the focus on what I should be doing:

*Learning how to want the right things in the right way and the right proportions*

##### **1. First, ACKNOWLEDGE it as a REALITY in our life. Admit that it has pull and power..**

A survey was taken – not that many years ago and it dealt with questions about money and morality. One of the questions that was asked dealt directly with greed. Question was this.

*How far would you go for \$10 million dollars?*

Here is what they found out.

25% said they would abandon all their family

23% said they would be willing to work as a prostitute for a week

16% said they would give up their citizenship

10% said they would withhold testimony that would allow a murderer to go free

7% said they would murder a stranger

6% would change their race

4% would have a sex-change operation

Greed is quite natural, we are born with this disposition just as we are born with a propensity to Lust. Put you in the right place, at the right time, in the right mood, and I will guarantee you that greed will raise it hideous face.

**Erwin Lutzer, Pastor of Moody Church, writes,**

*"We try to define greed out of existence. We tell ourselves we really don't love money. We might romance it, ruminate on it, worry that we might lose it, but we really don't love it."*

You cannot be neutral. You have to be intentional in not letting avarice get the upper hand in your life.

##### **2. We have to be intentional and learn to say NO**

Again let me repeat, William Williamon says that the goal is to learn how to want the right things in the right way in the right proportions. This is what he writes,

*We need the sort of character that is able to look at the world and all it has to offer, and at certain key moments say simply, "Thank you, but I'm now satisfied."*

He goes on to say that we need to have the moral stamina to be able to say, *Yes, we could afford it, but*

*we re not going to buy it, because it does little to contribute to the basic goodness of our lives.*

What we need today, especially in this rampant consumer society, is to say to ourselves and to our children, *I know you would live to have this, but it does little to contribute to the basic goodness of our lives.*

**Christmas Gifts.** Internet Extravagant gifts for young girls.

Extravagant Gifts for Younger Girls

Red Mercedes Benz 190 SL Pedal Car

This \$350 mini replica of the real thing features padded seats, a chrome grill, steel body and rubber tires. A very classy convertible to pedal around the neighborhood in.

The Most Outrageous Gifts Ever for Girls

Dance-On Piano

This 22-foot long keyboard is the most outrageous gift of all.

For \$25,000 you can purchase this Dance-On Piano exclusive to FAO Schwarz. The keyboard lights up and plays music as you step on its keys. A private one hour dance session with an FAO Schwarz choreographer is also included. We laugh about these things, but how many things do I have in my house that does not contribute to the basic goodness to my life and to the life of my family? Learn to say NO. Just because you can afford it doesn't mean you should buy it.

### **3. Learn to have a heart of a giver.**

This is not a point about tithing. In everyday life look for ways on how you can bless others through generosity.

**Rebecca DeYoung:**

*Because the Seven, like Greed, tend to burrow down so deep in our everyday lives, tend to infect just about everything that we do, one must begin with seemingly small, mundane, daily acts of defiance and resistance. A beginning ought to be made, and one way to attacking Greed, where it is most vulnerable, is in open handed, gratuitous giving; practice in the arts of letting go.*

The main reason why it is mandatory for Christians to give away part of their income is not that God needs our money, but to free us from the ugly monster of material possession. You cannot serve God and Mammon. Learn to give when the opportunity arises. Learn to give things that are closest to your heart.

It is real easy for me to give my wife's things away. When it comes to my little treasures, it's a different story.

**William Williamon** makes a great point, He says that over the years when he has given away at least 10 percent there is at least 10 percent of his soul, by God's grace, that is free from the grips of greed. When I give unconditionally, not expecting anything in return, **in defiance and resistance**, I smack greed right in the face, and say to it, *You have no hold over me.*

Think of the freedom one would have if they gave away 15%, 20%, 30%. of their income. Wouldn't that be great to have 30% of us free from the grips of greed? The more we give, the more we live our lives in such a way that we are free from being enslaved to our stuff, and having our possessions serve our needs.

Again it's not so much the amount you give but the heart in which it is given. One can give 30% of one's income and be puffed up with pride.

The classic parable is in **Luke 21**. The widow gives away her last two copper coins out of devotion to the Lord. Her coins couldn't buy a single church bulletin, but even in her poverty, her love and devotion made her willing to give.

Likewise, the gospels recount the costly gift of a newly cut tomb for Jesus's body, given by a rich man, **Joseph of Arimathea**. **The mark of generosity is not the size of the gift, or the wealth of the giver, but the readiness to give what one does have to God.**

**Ambrose** says, *It is the heart that makes the gift rich or poor, and gives things their value.*

Our possessions are meant to serve us. God, for one moment, never created us to be slaves to material possessions that he loaned us. He created them for us to enjoy. Not for them to have a death grip of us. The bottom line is, everything we own, belongs to Him. He is the owner and we are just the stewards.

If someone ask to burrow your car and they hit a telephone pole. *God, I loaned out your car in good faith, it's your car. If you would like to get your car fix, you'll have to pay to get it fix. I don't have the money for it.*

When you begin to live that kind of generous life, three things happen.

1. Freedom
2. God will honor your faithfulness and supply your needs like you never thought possible.
3. You go face to face with the demon of greed and slap it down. You are making a statement through concrete actions that God is truly number one in your life when you learn to have a generous heart.

Commitment.

1. Areas in life
2. *Teach me to want the right things in the right way and the right proportions*
3. God give me a gratuitous heart so that I look for ways to be generous with you money that you have entrusted me with.

**The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:**

**Resources:**

Deyoung, Rebecca. [Glittering Vices](#)

Willimon, William. [Sinning Like a Christian](#).