

## If I Were A Rich Man

Sterling UMC  
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1 Timothy 6:3-10

(Begin with clip from the movie, "Fiddler on the Roof" where Tevye sings *If I Were A Rich Man*.)

If I were a rich man! Things haven't changed very much have they? Tevye's desire expressed in this wonderful scene from the movie *Fiddler On the Roof* set in Czarist Russia in 1905 seems to be the dream of our society today. We want more and more and more. And what is it that drives this seemingly insatiable desire for more? GREED! This morning as we resume our series on *Breaking Free: The Seven Deadly Sins*, we're going to look at greed. And, at the outset this morning we need to acknowledge that GREED is one of the most socially acceptable sins in our fallen culture. GREED is very much a part of our world. Think of it. If an individual starts a business, pounds his employees mercilessly, undermines his competitors deceitfully, overcharges his customers regularly, but makes a fortune in the process, what do we call him? - A SUCCESS!

The fact is our society is structured to encourage all of us to be GREEDY. Every day we are pelted with ads that prompt us to WANT more. In the United States alone the advertising industry spends over six billion dollars a day. Why do merchants spend all this money on these ads? Because they work-in that they lead more and more of us to live in a perpetual state of wanting more and more and more which leads us to buy more and more and more.

Now, many of us think, "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 and fantasizing and standing in lottery lines, fully convinced that more money would solve every problem and meet every longing in their life."

Now God's Word has a great deal to say about this particular deadly sin. And once again I would like to do two things this morning. First I want to look at some of the ways greed hurts us. And then look at what God's Word says about how we can break free from greed's deadly grasp. So how does greed hurt us?

### 1. First, greed DECEIVES us.

Greed 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 deliver much more than material well being can. I mean, greed lies to us and promises things that it does not deliver. For example:

Greed tells us that having more things will make me more happy. We think that. We believe that. No society has as much *stuff* as we do. But we think having more things will make me more happy. Ecclesiastes 5:10- 11 *"He who loves money shall never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness! The more you have, the more you spend..."* If things buy happiness, the people who had the most things would be the most happy and we all know that that's just not true. Things can bring you happiness -- for a while. But then the thrill wears off. Lasting happiness is not in things.

Greed also deceives us by telling us that having more things will make me more important.

We have the concept that I am what I own, that my valuables determine my value. If I want to be liked, respected, looked up to, then I've got to keep in this constant acquisition of getting more and more -- "Keeping up with the Jones". The problem is that when we think things make us important we buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like. It's amazing what people will do, how much they'll pay for status symbols to prop up their self worth.

Luke 12:15 *"Be on your guard against greed in any shape or form. For a man's real life in no way depends on the number of his possessions."* Don't confuse your net worth with your self worth. Your value is not based on your valuables.

Finally greed deceives us into believing that having more things will make me more secure.

If I get more things then I'll be more secure. Then I'll secure that ultimate goal of financial independence. I've noticed that the more possessions I have the more I have to worry about. Proverbs 11:28 *"Those who depend on their wealth will fall like the leaves of autumn."* Proverbs 18:18 (Living Bible) *"The rich man thinks of his wealth as an impregnable defense, a high wall of safety. What a dreamer!"* How many ways can you loose everything over night? All you have to do is watch the news every day and you'll find plenty of examples. You can have it all and loose it overnight.

Greed is VERY deceptive.

2. And then a second reason God warns us about GREED is that so often it leads us to embrace other sinful BEHAVIORS.

As our text from 1 Timothy 6 says, *"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."* And the Bible records several examples of this greed-induced downward spiral. For example, the book of Acts records of the actions of Ananias and Sapphira who sold some land and bragged that they gave the entire proceeds to the church. Acts 5:3 says that they lied to the Lord. Instead of giving it all to God they had kept some of the money for themselves. They were stricken dead for their deceit. It all began with their GREED.

Here's a more current example. A survey was done recently to find out what the average American would do in exchange for ten million dollars.

- Twenty-five percent said they would be willing to abandon their families.
- Twenty three percent said they would become prostitutes for a week.
- Sixteen percent would leave a spouse.
- Thirteen percent would put their kids up for adoption.

Even more revealing than what Americans would do for ten million dollars is that most would do something. Two-thirds of those polled would agree to at least one - some to several - of the options. Now, I know what you're thinking-"I'd never do something like that." Perhaps not. But you've encountered situations where the lure of money and possessions was so strong or the lure of temptation was so attractive and enticing that it could make you say or do something you later regretted. We all have. The amount or the situation may not have been the same but the choices are. The truth is GREED is the door that leads all of us from small sins-to deeper and deeper ones.

### 3. A third danger is Greed can lead us to push GOD out of our lives.

You see, GREED is a form of coveting-a behavior the 10th commandment forbids. Well GREED-COVETING-breaking the 10th commandment-it CAN lead us to break the 1st commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." You see what a person WANTS, he serves-and that which a person serves is his god. Martin Luther rightly said, "Whatever thy heart clings to and relies on, that is properly thy God."

Do you remember the Rich Young Ruler? Luke 18 tells us of that tragic day when he came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life. In response Jesus asked him if he had been obedient to all of God's commandments and this brash young man replied by basically saying, "All ten-since I was a youth." Jesus replied, "Well then you lack just one thing. Sell everything you have. Give the proceeds to the poor and then come and follow Me." Now, don't get nervous. Jesus wasn't saying that "cashing out" like this is a requirement to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Of course not. Salvation is a matter of repentance and faith in Christ. It is a gift available to anyone, rich or poor. No-Jesus said this because He had picked up on this young man's greedy attitude and He wanted to flush it out in the open. His requirement that the young man sell his possessions was a test to show how serious this guy was about obeying the FIRST commandment. You see, if he truly put God first in His life then He would be willing to obey Jesus. And his negative response revealed that his true God was money-wealth.

So when you think of it he didn't possess things. They possessed him. He foolishly gave up eternal life for temporary earthly riches. This young man made a very bad business decision for as Jesus said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). And we need to heed that warning today because GREED can lead us to make the same foolish error.

Okay...hopefully it's obvious then, that GREED can ensnare us and hurt us. Well, how can you BREAK FREE of the sin of greed?

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

Don't say you are exempt because to do so would be kidding yourself. The truth is GREED affects all of us to one degree or another. Many times its hard to see because as I said our society encourages it-but its there. And to deal with it we have to first of all be honest and admit this is true.

You know, the fact is we have no problem acknowledging the greed in others. When we hear of these CEO's taking huge bonuses for themselves while their companies are going belly up and their employees are being laid off and their stockholders are going broke, we say, "Put those GREEDY crooks behind bars!" But we refuse to acknowledge that paying more attention to the stock market than we do the Bible is greed-or that having more clothes than we can possibly wear is greed- or that spending more money than we make and going into debt to buy things we don't need is greed.

To break free from this powerful sin we must begin with CONFESSON. We must ask God to open our eyes so that we can cultivate an awareness of how often we find ourselves planning and scheming and dreaming of ways to get more and more and more.

## 2. And then a second way to defeat GREED is to expose it's LIES.

You see, so much of GREED'S power to enslave us lies in its exaggerations and deceptions. It leads us to think, "If I could only HAVE that car or those clothes or that job I would be happy for the rest of my life...Those things would give me LASTING JOY!" Well, when GREED tempts us with thoughts like this we must remind ourselves that this is a lie, mainly because nothing on this earth lasts-so nothing GREED can give us brings lasting joy! Do you remember Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount? *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6:19-21)

Our Lord is telling us that everything on earth is temporary. THINGS don't last. To break free of GREED we need to ask God to help us look at life through the lens of eternity so that we can see GREED'S promises for the lies they really are! And then the most important thing we must to do DEFEAT greed...

## 3. ...is to learn to TRUST God for our needs.

You see, GREED leads us to believe we can't trust our Heavenly Father to give us what is best for us. Well, God knows our needs even better than we do-and He promises to take care of us. In Matthew 6 Jesus said, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:31-33) In Philippians 4:19 Paul reminds us that, "God will meet all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 6:17 says, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, Who richly provides us with everything or our enjoyment."

Greed leads us to distrust all these promises of God. Breaking free of GREED requires us to embrace a patient trust in the CHARACTER of God. We must realize that in His infinite WISDOM, He knows our needs and our children's needs. We must realize that in His infinite POWER, He is able to meet our needs...and that His limitless LOVE will prompt Him to give us what we need.

Do you want to see the greatest evidence of this? Look right here. Romans 5:8 *"The proof of God's amazing love is this: while we were sinners Christ died for us."* The cross shows how important you are. Jesus thought you were worth dying for. That's pretty significant.