



SEVEN • Greed

What Do I Need to Know?

Our key passage for examining the topic of greed is Matthew 6:19-24, found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The passage divides into three sections, each comprised of a comparison.

Matthew 6:19-21: The comparison is between two types of treasure. One that is spiritual, eternal, and given from God; the other temporal, physical, worldly, and given by man. It's important to note that Jesus does not warn against trying to succeed, excel, earn rewards or approval, but clearly indicates the type of approval, rewards, and success we are to pursue. We are to seek God with the same zeal that many pursue wealth. The logic is obvious, worldly wealth perishes, but eternal wealth lasts forever.

Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth." The word "store up" can be translated "stockpile." In assessing where our hearts are in relation to God and greed, it's a good exercise to take inventory of the things we are stockpiling.

Matthew 6: 21-23: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

The comparison here is between two differing perspectives. There is actually a double entendre that gets lost in the translation. The word "good" can also be translated "single eyed" or "generous." The word "bad" can also be translated "evil eye" or "stingy." Here's the thought: If your focus is on God, you will have a tendency to be generous. Why? Because God has the resources to provide whatever we need. Therefore, we don't need to guard our resources. However, if your focus is off God, when you look to the uncertainty of the future, you will begin to stockpile your resources and become stingy. Why? Because who knows what problems the future will bring?

Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

The last comparison is appropriately between two masters. Do you serve God or money? Money, is from the Aramaic word mammon, which indicates the animating power behind greed, money, and wealth. Money is a substitute god:

What's the Big Idea?

This study will examine the sin of greed, and the need to choose decisively what will be the controlling force of our life: God or money.



it's all-powerful, it's everywhere, and it controls the affairs of the world. Few people, however, see themselves as serving money, so the study asks, "Are you following the American Dream, or God's plan for your life?" You want to uncover what is dictating people's decisions over where they spend their time, money, energy, or even career choice. This is what Jesus is trying to surface.

Countermeasures against greed: The application of the study could easily have been the biblical solution of following God with our lives. But because it is an evangelistic Bible study, we focused on two virtues that anyone can cultivate that can lead to greater freedom from greed.

The first is generosity, and the second is staying emotionally and relationally connected to the poor. Historically, the Seven Deadly Sins were often studied in the context of their corresponding virtue. The corresponding virtue for greed is generosity.

What if There's a Problem?

There is a question in the study about how much "stockpiling" or "storing up" is too much. This is a very difficult question. The answer is certainly not black and white. Clearly some degree of preparation is needed for the future, but how much? Pray for discernment, and try to keep the group from extremes: giving away everything or giving away nothing.

What Are the Answers?

1. Have the group discuss. (Make sure you have the group read through all of the Web quotes and Bible passages that are on the study. Their content is essential to the flow of the study.)
2. There's no right answer. The point is that even wealthy people do not see themselves as rich. And we often use other wealthy Americans as a point of comparison, rather than the rest of the world.
3. Allow the group members a couple minutes to make their lists.
4. There's no right answer, but certainly the Bible would affirm some type of saving and planning as good stewardship.
5. Allow the group to make their list and ask where they invest the most time. Also ask how much time they spent pursuing the things of God.
6. Open discussion.
7. If you keep your focus on God as your provider, you will be generous. If you take your eyes off God, you will tend to be stingy.
8. We don't need to guard our resources, knowing God can abundantly replace them. However, if our focus is off God, when we look to the uncertainty of the future, we will begin to stockpile our resources.
9. It becomes the source of our dreams, our hopes, and our deliverance. It is all-powerful, everywhere, and calls us to follow after it.
10. Discuss. It could be because we can tend to rationalize a compromise between the two. Jesus wants us to know there is no middle ground.
11. Go around the group and let each member share. Then give the group a minute to take the greed test.
12. Allow the group to share.
13. Allow the group to share what experiences they've had.
14. Discuss. Jesus is trying to surface the heart issue that is this man's barrier to following Jesus.
15. Discuss.
16. Allow the group to discuss but try to close the time with an explanation of the gospel; that through Jesus death, God has made it possible for all people, even the rich, to have salvation.

What's Our Response?

The Bible study closes with a section entitled "A Disturbing last thought." This is a difficult passage but one that leads directly to the gospel. We have the powerful statement of Jesus, "It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than a rich man to get into heaven." Apparently, the statement was just as difficult for the disciples, because they respond with the question, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus responds, "With God, all things are possible." This is a perfect opportunity to explain the gospel message: that man can never earn his way to heaven, but through Jesus' death for our sin, anyone can be saved, even the rich. Think through in advance how best to present or explain the gospel message, so that it is short, clear, and concise.