

The Sneaker Effect  
1 Timothy 6:6-10; 17-19  
Rev. Jonathan Cornell  
11-17-13

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I invite you to remain standing out of reverence to the reading of God's Holy Word and grab a copy of Scripture, either the one you brought with you or the one we've made available to you in the pew racks in front of you. And turn with me to the New Testament book of 1 Timothy, chapter 6. Follow along with me as I read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and 17-19.

And when I'm done I'll say, "This is the Word of the Lord," and if you believe that to be true in your heart as well, you can respond by saying, "Thanks be to God." Listen carefully; we're reading God's Holy Word.

**Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.**

Verse 17 **As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.**

Friends, this IS the Word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

The prophet Isaiah writes, "All flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows upon it. The grass withers and the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever." Amen, and you can be seated.

To live a life that is deeply and intimately rooted in God, there is a very important lesson to learn when it comes to money: *it's not about what God wants from us, but what God wants for us*. The life God wants for us is one of open-handed generosity and unyielding trust.

There are few other topics Jesus speaks more prolifically about than money. The only one that gets more press is the Kingdom of God. In the Gospel of Luke, 1 out of every 7 verses deals with money, and 11 of the 39 Parables of Jesus deal in one way or another with money. But Jesus doesn't focus on subject of money because he wants more of your

hard earned cash; he does so because he wants more of your uniquely valuable heart. Money is the thing more so than any other that can disorient this relationship.

There is a story about a CEO who was driving with his wife on their way to a dinner function when they had to stop by the filling station for some gas. So they pulled into one of those full service stations, where a service attendant came over to fill up the tank. And as he came over, the man's wife sort of gasped in the seat next to him. The husband is a little confused and the gas attendant is a little embarrassed, so he quickly goes over to fill the tank. "Are you OK?" the husband asked. "You are never going to believe this, but the gas attendant is a former really serious boyfriend of mine." After the attendant returns, they quickly pay and get back on their way, and there's this awkward pause, until finally the man says, "Honey, I know what you must be thinking, that if you had married that man, you'd be married to a gas attendant and not a CEO." And his wife says, "No, that's not what I was thinking. What I was thinking was that if I had married that man, *he* would be the CEO and *you* would be the gas attendant."

In our passage this morning, the Apostle Paul is warning us about the dangers of money, and how the desire for wealth can ensnare and entrap us.

What are the snares and traps of money? First, one of the things that money does to us is it causes us to see ourselves as fundamentally different from or better than others. Now this isn't a result of money itself, but rather the pride that can sometimes come with having money. The temptation when we have it is to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, that we have money because of some inherent superiority. But Paul is very clear in verse 17 that disciples of Jesus who have money are not to be haughty or arrogant, because all of it is fleeting.

In 2008, just as the financial flooring of our nation was beginning to crumble beneath us, I was a Youth Minister in a church in Montclair, New Jersey. And early on, I got to know a man there named Eric, and Eric worked in the Financial District of NYC, and let's just say he did very well. When we were getting to know one another, I was so intimidated by him. Here was a guy who was seemingly untouchable, strong, intelligent, savvy; he had very little interest in God, because he had it all together. Fast forward about 8 months and I get a call from Eric, asking if he could come to meet me in my office. And there on the couch in my office, this master of the universe was crumbled into a pile in front of me because, as he put it—in a matter of days, everything was gone. In his own mind, he went from hero to zero. And he said to me, "I needed God as much then as I do now, it's just that I wasn't able to see it for myself."

Paul tells Timothy, who is working with the growing church in Ephesus, "Listen, if you still see yourself as rich and powerful in all things, then you have not come to understand your own true poverty. If you see yourself as better than those who are poor, then you have not been brought to the foot of the cross and shown your own spiritual destitution. Only in the shadow of the cross can you see the solidarity we have with the poor, and the sooner we see that we are fundamentally the same in our condition, the sooner we will see the goodness of God's provision," as Paul says, "for our enjoyment." God doesn't

just want us to see the importance of writing a check each week, but to see how trust in God's provision actually enables us to enjoy his blessings more.

If you have ever been to another country where poverty is rampant, you know that the root of people's joy is not their diversified portfolio. Joy comes from knowing that they are released from the fear of having to cultivate happiness in things. And let me make this clear, poverty is not spiritual. God's design is not for people to be poor, but what happens when people are not reliant upon stuff to make them happy is a clarity of understanding that is not possible when our lives are ruled by our riches. What I think Paul is saying here is that we can have so many choices, so many options that we can become clouded and confused in our thinking, and thus drawn away from trust in God.

The second thing that Paul warns us about, and this ties into the first, is that the love of money leads to the fear that we will not have enough. There's a saying that goes, having too much money is a problem, but not having any money, that becomes the only problem. I like the way the New International Version puts it in verse 10 when it says: "Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." The outcome of turning away from God with our finances is that we then see our finances as something we earn or we create, and in the economy of the world simple supply side economics says that there will always be a fixed amount of resources. And scarcity creates competition, and you know as well as I people will go to many, and sometimes painful lengths to lay hands on resources when they believe that something can run out. So the worry, the hand-wringing, the scheming and plotting that isolates and alienates – all it ultimately does is pierce us with grief.

But in God's economy, in God's kingdom, resources are valued differently. Quantity and contentment are not equals because there is another variable that plays into the equation. Paul tells us that being rich AND at the same time generous and willing to share are the factors that lead to an abundant life. But this is only possible when we overcome the fear that there won't be enough.

In our home, both Christian and Annie love animal crackers, and last week I was giving Christian a few animal crackers in a bowl when I took one cracker from Christian's bowl and gave it to Annie. You can imagine how he responded. But he did so because he feared that there were no more animal crackers. What he couldn't see was the giant bucket of animal crackers that was sitting in the pantry, and that when he got a look at the abundance of Animal Crackers that were at my disposal, he no longer feared not having enough, because he trusted that there was enough to bring joy to him and Annie.

In our lives, the opposite of greed is not poverty. Ironically, the opposite of greed is generosity. God doesn't say that in giving we become poor or that we are diminished, but Paul uses the encouragement to be rich in giving. The only antidote to the pride and the uncertainty and the fear that come along with greed is the regular practice of generosity. In verse 18 he says that **They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.**

All four statements basically saying the same thing, so that we don't miss the point he's trying to make.

There is a small Presbyterian church in Lubbock, Texas, in the middle of nowhere. A member of the church was having lunch with a teacher from one of the poorer schools in town, and the teacher over the course of the lunch was down cast because of something she had just experienced that morning. What she witnessed was a seven-year-old boy in her class who had a pair of desirable tennis shoes. And the kid had gotten these shoes from a drug dealer. Now, the kid didn't know exactly what he was doing, but he was essentially a look out for the cops. IF the cops came around, he alerted the dealer.

And the Presbyterian from Lubbock couldn't get this out of her mind, because shoes were kind of her thing. If she had a vice, it was shoes. And the fact that that was her thing connected with the hearing of this story of the seven-year-old boy, that the only way he could get a new pair of shoes was by working for a drug dealer.

So she got together with a few other women from her church and they were talking about this, and they realized, "We're making this a lot more complicated than it needs to be. We need to give shoes to kids." So they approached every teacher in the school and said, "You identify 3 students from your classes who have displayed hard work and good behavior and give us their names each semester, and we will buy them shoes." Each recipient of the award was picked up by a member of the congregation and then driven to the mall where they went to Foot Locker, and then as they looked up at that huge wall of sneakers, they were told, "Pick whatever pair you want."

And what was interesting was now you had kids in the school who were wearing shoes for very different reasons. And when the congregation pulled together and this program took off, they realized that they were spending over \$10,000 a year on shoes. But with a \$10,000 investment, they were changing the demographic and the culture of an entire school, and the ripple effects of that went into all aspects of the life and the behavior of this institution. And this regular woman from the small Presbyterian church in Lubbock, Texas – you know what happened to her? She said she could never look at her own shoes the same way again.

When we are generous, it breaks the cycle for more, more, more. And when we give, the amazing happens: while our bank account may decrease, our human and spiritual bank account increases tenfold. When we place our hope in God and not in what we have, we discover the secret of what it means to be content. When we invest our treasures in heaven, we have enough perspective to take hold of a life that is really life. When it comes to giving, it's not what God wants from us, it's what he wants for us.

As I close and ask you to take with you the pledge card in your bulletin, I want to encourage you to put it in your Bible, put it near the place where you have your morning or evening devotion. Consider this week how the Lord is leading you to be generous in your life and with your money. And as you do, I want to leave you with this observation I made this past Monday.

As I walked into my office, I stopped in the CE Building lobby and listened: next to me in the Dickson Room, people were studying God's word in our Monday morning Bible study; in front of me was the clamorous sound of our pre-school in session and at capacity; upstairs, I heard parents and children learning and growing in our CareTogether collaboration with the YMCA; across the hall, the CASA office was meeting with clients; and down the hall, Hands of Hope, the domestic violence organization we partner with, was in the office; another classroom was being transformed into a new Godly Play space for Children's Sunday School; and to top it off, as I stood there, Peggy Coppler, who teaches Musicgarten, walked through the door.

Now look around and tell me God isn't up to something new at Wabash Presbyterian Church. How will you join in his Kingdom work and now?

Let us pray.