



## Part 2: Greed | Pastor Joe Wittwer | 26 April 2009

### A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

### B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

We use the Seven Deadly Sins as a lens to examine our hearts, repent of sin and ask Jesus to help us build virtue. This week we're talking about greed: how it affects us and how to overcome it by building the virtues of generosity and contentment.

#### 1. **The sin of greed: a selfish and excessive desire for more than is needed.**

"More! More!" is the fundamental cry of greed. But is it always wrong to want more? When does desire become "selfish and excessive"? Greed is desire gone bad, taken to extremes. But we draw the line between desire and need differently, which is why we need to ask God, "Am I greedy?" There are some outcomes of greed that pinpoint it as a sin:

Greed is a sin against yourself. A greedy person is never satisfied and is unable to enjoy what he has for very long. For these reasons Jesus warns in **Luke 12:15**, "*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*" Life is more than the sum of what you own; greed reduces your life to a collection of things. Paul put it this way in **1 Timothy 6:9-10**, "*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. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*"

Greed is a sin against your neighbor when your having more means he must have less. **1 John 3:17-18** says, "*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*"

Greed is the cause of conflict. **James 4:1-2**: "*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.*"

Greed is a sin against our world. When we pursue prosperity without limits or regard for the effect on the planet, we destroy our planet. God commanded the Israelites to care for the land they lived in, which included giving the land a Sabbath. And He removed from the land into exile when they didn't (**Leviticus 26:35**). This is our Father's world—it belongs to Him, not us, and we're to care for it. If we don't, we may find ourselves evicted!

Greed is a sin against God. **Colossians 3:5**: "*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*" The greedy worship something other than God. Greed tries to satisfy our restless souls with things that were never met to satisfy it. Greed keeps us from God. [Read **Luke 18:22-25** together, which tells about Jesus' response to a rich young ruler who wanted to follow Him.] Greed kept this young man from following Jesus. Given the choice of Jesus or money, he chose money. When we begin to follow Jesus, He is our Lord, our Leader, and we put everything at His feet. Jesus said you can't serve both God and money. If you choose to serve God, He has your money. So how do we overcome greed? By developing a couple virtues:

**a. Generosity: to be liberal in giving.** The classic virtue that is usually considered the opposite of greed is generosity, or to be liberal in giving. In **Matthew 5:42**, Jesus teaches, "*Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*"

And in **Luke 6:38** He says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” There is no better way to overcome greed than to give. If you feel yourself growing greedy, fight back! Give!

**b. Contentment: to be satisfied with what you have.** **Hebrews 13:5** says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” Although contentment isn’t usually listed as one of the Seven Holy Virtues that correspond to the Seven Deadly Sins, it is the exact opposite of greed. Greed says, “More, more,” while contentment says, “Enough.” I am satisfied with what I have. More isn’t always better. We build generosity by giving; how do we build contentment?

**Sabbath.** The Sabbath is taking every seventh day and stopping work, stepping out of the rat race, resting, and worshiping God. It’s more than a day off: it’s a God-day. We take the day to enjoy God and His good gifts to us. The voice of greed can make us feel that there is always something to be done to get that promotion, to achieve, and to expand. Graham Tomlin writes, “But the voice of God tells us . . . to slow down, to be happy just to be, to slowly learn the great art of doing not very much and feeling fine about it. This takes some learning, but when we do learn it, it is one of the best antidotes to greed there is.”

**Waiting.** This spiritual practice has fallen out of favor in our busy society. We don’t like to wait—for anything! Read what the Psalmist says about waiting in **Psalms 27:14, 37:7, 40:1** and **103:5-6** together. When was the last time you just sat and waited for God? Greed is fueled by our impulsiveness. We see things and buy them impulsively, without waiting. But if we waited, if we let the impulse die, we’d buy less and be happier.

**Simplicity.** The more things you own, the more things own you! Think of all you have to maintain, organize, use and store. Greed only complicates our lives, never simplifies it. Jesus repeatedly talked about simple living, about not worrying, not accumulating, but trusting God.

### **C. Life Group Questions** (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. Tell about one of the best experiences of your life—one of the happiest times. What’s central to what you enjoyed: specific possessions or material goods, or those you were with? When it comes to the *material* goods of life, what do you think are some true *necessities* beyond food, clothing, shelter, and clean water? (e.g., work and transportation?)
2. Read **Luke 6:30-31**. How seriously do you take Jesus on this issue? In what ways have you practiced giving to anyone who asks you, and when is it most challenging to practice? What does radical giving (perhaps even to greedy people) have to do with *our* issues with greed?
3. How do you usually spend your Sundays (or the day you regard as your “Sabbath”)? How do you take time to rest, enjoy your family and friends, and appreciate God’s creation?
4. Regarding the practice of “waiting,” when have you “slept on it” (or failed to do so) before making a significant purchase? How did you feel about the outcome then and now?
5. How do you think our desire for our possessions can separate us from God and His Creation? What are some practical things you can do to simplify your lives?

### **D. Personal Applications** (1-3 Minutes)

- Memorize **1 John 3:17-18** this week. Also try what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:42**: give to each person who asks. We fight greed by giving; see what God teaches you this week!
- Continue or start the spiritual *practices* of the Sabbath, waiting, and simplicity. (They’re called “practice” for a reason; if you fail, try, try again—God will help you get better!)
- Consider taking *Financial Peace University* or *Journey to True Financial Freedom*.

### **E. Prayer Time** (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for blessing you with all that you need now and in the future, and ask Him to help you be content with what you have.
- Ask God to help you identify ways to better observe the Sabbath, wait, and simplify, in order to counter the impulse to *get* out of want, with the impulse to *give* out of contentment.
- Thank God for His incredible gifts, the greatest being His Son and our Savior, Jesus.