

Training Session 14 - BLESS Rhythms: Sacrificial Giving (Greed)

Objective

Help determine if greed is an obstacle that is keeping you from living out the BLESS rhythm of giving sacrificially

Key Scriptures

Luke 12:13-34

Surely you have heard (or said) this, “All that church cares about is money. It feels like every sermon is about money, and each Sunday they find another creative way to fleece me. ‘Give online. Give in the offering basket. Give at the kiosk on the way out. Oh, did we mention you can give via text. And we’ll be having a building campaign coming up. Or perhaps you’re interested in the Legacy campaign. Surely you want to leave a Legacy of eternal significance.’” Here is the good news. We, at Movement, don’t need your money, nor are we even asking for it. This training session on money isn’t attached to an offering or a giving campaign. Relax.

In fact, many of you in this mentoring process work for Movement, so you’re receiving money rather than being asked to give. Thankfully, we don’t have the pressures and trappings of a church and tithing and giving campaigns. We can come before God and His word and say, “Help us think about money the way You do, and then help us live in right relationship with You, with others, and with the money You entrust to us for a few short years.”

Let’s get warmed up with a little Biblical overview of money. Howard Dayton, a pioneer in Biblical stewardship and founder of Crown Financial Ministries, states, “There are 2,350 verses dealing with money and possessions (in the Bible).”¹ When it comes to the New Testament, if you read all the parables of Jesus, then you will find that Jesus taught about money and possessions in sixteen of the thirty-eight parables. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. In total, 15% of everything Jesus said had to do with money.²

Why does Jesus talk about money so much? Because He understands the human heart so well and He knows our hearts are prone to have an inordinate desire for money. In His mind, the problem isn’t money; the problem is the human heart. The human heart has an inordinate love for money because we know its power and we know what it can do for us. Money itself isn’t the root of all evil, but the inordinate love of money is (I Timothy 6:10). And what Jesus says in the passage we’ll study this week is that virtually every one of us has a money addiction called greed.

Our money sickness prevents us from doing what healthy followers of Jesus do, which is give joyfully, generously, and sacrificially. Luke 12:13-34 presents a great case study for us on the money sickness we call greed. It begins with a man asking Jesus a question. *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me” (Luke*

12:13). Most commentators feel like this is a younger brother whose father has died and he doesn't like the way the inheritance is being divided up. According to Deuteronomy 21: 15-17, the older brother is entitled to receive a double portion. So, most likely we have an older brother who has taken more than his double portion. Now, the young pup is tattling on him and he says, "Hey, Jesus, make him do what the Bible says." Or, in the famous words of Rod Tidwell in Jerry Maguire, make him "show me the money."

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" (Luke 12:14) "You know what," Jesus says, "I don't care *who* gets *what*. You can haggle with your brother if you want. But, since you asked me a question about money, let me share with you my thoughts on the subject...." *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15).* Do you hear Jesus on this one? Watch out! I imagine Jesus virtually screaming (hence the exclamation point). I'm guessing he waved his arms. "Watch out!" It's almost as if there is an enemy at the gates hiding under the cover of the bushes and Jesus is desperately trying to get the crowd to wake up before the enemy overruns them.

He exhorts them to watch out because greed hides, it masquerades, in a multitude of forms. And I'm sure the people were thinking, "Greed, whatever Jesus. Not a problem for me." Because, after all, who thinks they are greedy?

In 13 years as the pastor of a church, I never once had anyone come to me and confess the sin of greed. I heard just about everything else under the sun, including all sorts of crazy sexual stuff that you would think would be far more difficult to confess. Nothing but crickets, however, on the subject of money and greed.

Why is that? Why is it that none of us think we have a money sickness called greed? A primary reason in America is because we all know someone who, in our minds, is greedy, and we compare ourselves to them. We all know someone who makes a little more money than we do and has a little more stuff than we have—and they are greedy, not us.

If you make \$40,000, you know someone who makes \$75,000. If you make \$75,000, you know someone who makes 6 figures and on up the ladder we go. And so the ever elusive rich guy in the Bible is always someone out there, the guy making a little more, the guy with a little more stuff, not little old me. And when Jesus takes on the rich guy in the Bible, we start doing the orange justice dance and shouting, "Get 'em Jesus!"

But here are the facts. We live in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, blind to our greed. We're not rich, someone else is; we're not greedy, someone else is. Yet, think for a minute about global poverty and place yourself, momentarily, alongside our brothers and sisters throughout the world. These are the facts:

1. 2.1 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water services. (WHO/UNICEF 2017)³

2. 4.5 billion people lack safely managed sanitation services. (WHO/UNICEF 2017)⁴
3. 340,000 children under five die every year from diarrhoeal diseases. (WHO/UNICEF 2015)⁵
4. A child dies every 90 seconds from lack of clean water.⁶
5. 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. That's about one in nine people on earth.⁷
6. Poor nutrition causes nearly half (45%) of deaths in children under five - 3.1 million children each year.⁸
7. Based on the updated poverty line of \$1.90 a day, World Bank projections suggest that global poverty may have reached 700 million, or 9.6 percent of global population, in 2015.⁹

Yet, we aren't rich. Why? Because we all know someone who is rich in our minds, and it isn't us. And Jesus says to us, "Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Greed is ubiquitous. It's in the water you drink and the air you breath and you don't know it!" Think about it. If greed had infected every part of Ancient Near Eastern Culture in the 1st century (which is the point Jesus is making), then I think it is safe to assume the same is true in 21st century American culture.

Some of you, however, may not be convinced of your greed, and, to be fair, some are less greedy than others. Thankfully, Jesus told a parable to help all of us determine how we are faring with the money sickness called greed. As you read this parable, I want you to imagine that you are sitting in a doctor's office and Jesus, the Physician, walks in and tells you this story to essentially help you diagnose if you have the money sickness of greed. First, read the parable, then we'll highlight the symptoms that the physician is identifying in the story. ¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'* ¹⁸ *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and **build bigger ones**, and there I will store my **surplus** grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; **eat, drink and be merry.**"* ²⁰ *"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'* ²¹ *"This is how it will be with whoever **stores up things for themselves** but is not **rich toward God.**" (Luke 12:16-21).*

1st Symptom of Greed: Ever increasing lifestyle

The rich man in our parable constantly feels the need to increase his lifestyle and so he builds bigger barns. Now, let's be clear: this isn't a prohibition on saving. Establishing margin in your life is absolutely essential to health. Neither Jesus nor the Bible are against saving. In fact, the Bible promotes saving. Proverbs 21:20, "*In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has.*" The fool is one who doesn't save anything. The issue here isn't saving, it's spending, as the fool seeks to make his life increasingly easier and more comfortable. The foolish rich man in the parable continues to ratchet up his standard of living. He's rich toward himself, not God.

The rich man evidently ran a prosperous business. He and his family are set. Putting it in modern terms, his retirement account is fully funded and then some; his college fund for the kids is fully funded; he has a vacation home, multiple cars, and then he makes Dave Matthews song Tripping Billies his life motto: eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

It's easy for us to identify with the this man, isn't it? Not so much in having so much surplus that we don't know what to do with it, but more in this man's tragic flaw. Lifestyle creep got the best of him and it does to us too, doesn't it? Jesus called him a greedy fool because he couldn't stop the inevitable lifestyle creep. So, the first symptom identifying the underlying money sickness of greed to watch out for is an ever increasing lifestyle.

2nd Symptom of Greed: Lack of jaw-dropping generosity

Think about the man who built the bigger barns. He could have said, "Everything I have is a gift from God. God has been so radically generous to me, and I am going to be rich toward God and give radically and generously to His purposes," but instead we learn that he can't....let.....go.....ofthe surplus (fists clenched). The problem isn't the surplus--it's the surrender (or lack thereof). He is rich toward himself, not God (see Luke 12:21). He is stingy. His life consists in the abundance of his possessions. Now, resist, for the moment, every fiber of your being screaming, "Not me. My life doesn't consist in the abundance of my possessions. I am rich toward God."

Maybe. How much do you give away each year? If you are follower of Jesus, God says start with 10% off the top (before taxes) as an expression of love (and obedience) and then give generously on top. Now if you aren't a follower of Jesus, this giving standard doesn't apply to you. God doesn't want your money—He first wants your heart. And until your heart has been affected and changed by God, then you are under no obligation to give to the work of God in any way.

But, for followers of Jesus, God has gifted the tithe to us as a sure and certain progress report indicating how we're doing with greed and generosity. If we're giving less than 10% and living in opulent America, then it is safe to assume that greed has its claws wrapped around us. It would be like someone asking you, in the middle of a chickenpox outbreak in their home, "Hey, do you think all these little red bumps on my skin that itch like crazy are chicken pox?" Pretty good chance.

See, Jesus wants us to be healthy in every way, and humans that are healthy are "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). But what in the world does it mean to be rich toward God? Glad you asked. "Rich toward God," John Piper notes, "means using earthly riches to show how much you value God. This is what the prosperous farmer failed to do...the issue isn't that the man's fields prospered. The issue is that God ceased to be his supreme treasure."¹⁰ God wasn't the rich man's supreme treasure, and we know it because of where he invested his treasure: in himself. Friends, our money reveals the commitments of our heart. For where your money is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).

People who are rich toward God give with such radical generosity that their lifestyle is affected. Just a few verses after this parable, Jesus encourages his disciples to, “*Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys..*” (Luke 12:33). Notice He doesn’t say sell all of your possessions, liquidate everything, and have an estate sale. If you did, then you would be in poverty, something the Bible clearly doesn’t celebrate. “*The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty*” (Proverbs 10:15) Or Proverbs 30:8 states, “*Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.*” The goal isn’t wealth or poverty, but trusting in Jesus for our daily bread.

But notice Jesus does say “sell your possessions,” meaning *some* of them. Not all, but some. Back in the day of Jesus, possessions were things like houses, barns, crops, and sheep. Possessions were your assets. People didn’t have stocks and bonds or bank accounts. So, what Jesus is saying to us in modern language is this, “Don’t just give from your income, but give out of your savings account. Give in such a way that decreases your net worth. That is radical generosity. That is being rich toward God.”

If you want a powerful case study of someone of jaw-dropping generosity, read the account of the prostitute who anoints Jesus’ feet (see Luke 7:36-50). She took the central asset of her business, her alabaster jar, and smashed it on the feet of Jesus. It hung around her neck, always. It was her livelihood. She had no hope of attracting men in the sweat-stained, dry, smelly desert climate if she herself didn’t smell good. And, in jaw-dropping fashion, she smashes it and anoints her Savior’s feet with what many say would have been a year’s worth of wages. She is giving her most treasured possession.

That is being rich toward God. Being rich toward God requires us to give up things. To not do things that we otherwise would have done. That means we might be tithing (or giving more than a tithe) and still be far short of being rich toward God if there is no sense of sacrifice in our giving. For instance, maybe we could say, “I eliminated my Starbucks budget so I could give that away to kingdom purposes. I held a garage sale just so I could have a little extra money to be rich toward God. We cut our grocery bill by \$50 a month so we could be rich toward God. We could have gone a five star vacation and we chose to go on a two star vacation so we can be rich toward God. We sold a stock or sold an investment property because our hearts went out to a group of orphans and we wanted to do something about it.”

To be clear, Bradford and I are tithing, but just barely above a tithe as I write. The greed light, if not fully on, is definitely flickering on the dashboard of our car. Uggghh. We’re having hard conversations. Our spirit is willing, but our wallet is wantin’. We could justify endlessly, but here is the bottom line: we need to live more sacrificially and that is what we’re going to be striving towards in the days to come, and we’re glad to move toward being rich toward God with all of you.

3rd Symptom: Worry

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? (Luke 12:22-26)

Worry. Ask yourself, “Do I often worry about my finances?” If so, then you, along with most Americans, have another symptom associated with the money sickness called greed. Money is consistently at the top of the charts for things that cause us to worry in America. Some of us wake up at night stressing over money. And we might be facing legitimately difficult times—foreclosures, evictions, mounting medical bills, student loans, endless bills, and job uncertainties. Jesus says, “Relax. I take care of the ravens and I clothe the lilies, how much more you.” Yet, we worry, because our wants have become needs and we have frittered away His provision on wants, not needs. So we’re stressed.

The symptoms are clear, but how do we treat this money sickness? Here are the remedies:

1st Remedy: Unmask and own greed

The first step is unmasking greed in our culture and, more painfully, in our lives. We need to own it and admit it, much like we would at an AA meeting. If we’re struggling with greed (and most of us are), then the first step is to unmask and own it. It’s the first step the rich young ruler couldn’t make and it’s the step the foolish rich man in this parable never made. If we want healing, then unmasking and owning is the first step (James 5:16).

2nd Remedy: Seek first His Kingdom (now)

Shortly after the parable on the greedy fool, Jesus said, “*But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well (Luke 12:31)*.” So the first piece of advice Jesus gives us is exceedingly practical. Get going in seeking first the kingdom. Begin now. Seek first the kingdom right now and you’ll get the rest. Make a commitment to raising your giving level to at least 10% right now, even though you have no idea how in the sam hill to make it happen, and watch God work. He’ll probably begin with some budget cuts!

For some of you, He won’t begin with budget cuts, just comfort cuts. One of our good friends put it this way. She said, “We have some friends who have faith, I think, but they just don’t have a need for their faith. It sits on a shelf. They can control their life and their life is so comfortable. So their faith just sits on a shelf and is, well, stagnant.” So do you know what she did. She challenged this couple to adopt. And she walked them through how to adopt and foster. “You can do it. Here is why the two of you would be great adoptive parents. In fact, here is a child I just happen to know that needs to be rescued.” ***See you don’t know if the bungee cord will hold until you jump.*** Seek first the kingdom. Get started in some small or big way towards a

sacrificial life with your time, your talent, and your money! Start small, or start big, but make sure you start.

3rd Remedy: Realize what you have been given: the kingdom

Also after the parable on greed, Jesus said, “*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*”³³ *Sell your possessions and give to the poor (Luke 12:32-33).* What if these verses were reversed? Sell your possessions and give to the poor. If you do this, then you’ll be my flock and I’ll give you the kingdom. NO! It is the other way around. Little flock, your Daddy has been pleased to give you the kingdom. You’re an heir. You’re a child. You’re royalty. It is all yours. The whole kit and kaboodle. Streams, rivers, money, cities, beach condos, fine wine, trips to see the Great Wall, front row seats at the Panthers game, it will all be yours one day (in full) and is already yours in part (right now). The whole kingdom will be yours. Everything He has will also be ours (John 17:10).

So, what that means, I think, is that once we get our minds around the reality of what we will have one day, then we can live a little more sacrificially here and now. It isn’t that we all take a vow of poverty and forego every pleasure in the world, but it does mean that we can forego a few. Start small, but start. Maybe it’s just one thing this month that we go without. Why? Because we’ll have an endless supply of whatever we choose to go without when we cross the Jordan. Our Daddy has given us the kingdom. We didn’t earn it, the kingdom came to us by grace, as a gift. And once we see how generous our Father is, then we can live with radical and sacrificial generosity.

4th Remedy: Treasure Jesus

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:34). Treasuring Jesus really is the remedy of all remedies for the money sickness of greed. Our money flows like a river running downhill to that which we treasure. Think about it. If you are a foodie, you spend lots of time and money on food. Nobody has to make you do it. It comes naturally. If you love reading, it isn’t hard to buy books. Your shelves and Kindle are loaded. Genesis 29:20 says “Jacob worked for 7 years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.” He worked seven years, but it seemed like seven minutes because of his great love for her. Our money flows naturally to that which we treasure.

And herein lies the gospel. Hear this: Jesus Christ treasures you. Deuteronomy 14:2 says, “*The Lord has chosen you to be His treasured possession.*” On the cross, Jesus Christ held nothing back, not even His life. He gave sacrificially and with jaw-dropping generosity, not to good people, but to those who were killing Him and deserting Him. And when His generosity grabs hold of us, our money and talent and time will start generously and naturally flowing in His direction.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Luke 12:13-34. What is the most significant reason none of us think we are greedy?
2. The rich fool constantly felt the need to build bigger barns, which we looked at as an ever-increasing lifestyle. Discuss how this symptom is or is not present in your life.
3. Read Luke 12:21. The rich fool was not “rich toward God.” What does it mean to be rich toward God?
4. Are you suffering from the money sickness called greed? Why or why not?
5. How are you going to start living sacrificially this month? What is one change you are going to make in your finances to reflect a greater level of sacrificial giving?
6. Discuss what you are going to do to begin applying the remedies to greed.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.stewardshipcentral.org/posts/howard-dayton-on-the-other-90-percent-of-stewardship>.
2. Greg Laurie, <https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/a-new-beginning/read/articles/money-and-motives-9220.html>.
3. <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/water/>.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. <https://www.samaritanspurse.org.au/every-90-seconds-a-child-dies-from-a-water-related-illness/>.
7. <http://www.foodaidfoundation.org/world-hunger-statistics.html>.
8. <https://www.wfp.org/stories/10-facts-about-hunger>.
9. [World Bank Group. 2016. Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016: Development Goals in an Era of Demographic Change. Overview booklet. World Bank, Washington, DC. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO.](#)
10. John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/lets-be-rich-toward-god>.