

Devious, Insatiable and Corrosive 2022
 Jeremiah 17:7-11, 14 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-21

Jeremiah 17:7-11, 14 (New Revised Standard Version)

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings. Like the partridge hatching what it did not lay, so are all who amass wealth unjustly; in mid-life it will leave them, and at their end they will prove to be fools. Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for you are my praise.

1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. Grace be with you.

Do you remember the anthropologist/primatologist, Dr. Jane Goodall?

She became well known for her expertise on chimpanzees,
 after studying them by living among them for many years.

In one of her articles, she explained that chimps are normally
 quite docile, cooperative and easy-going, and they share freely.

But if a surplus of bananas are placed in the middle of a group,
 the most dominant chimps will try to drive the others away.

They will become uncharacteristically possessive and aggressive,
 and they will fight and snarl to control and horde the excess...

...even chimps will succumb to the insatiable power of greed.

One time, back when I was still working in the business world,

I received a much larger bonus check than I was expecting.

It was several thousand dollars that just dropped into my lap,
 and obviously I was very pleased,

considering what a difference all that extra money would make.

But when I was figuring out my taxes at the end of the year,

I was reminded of that financial windfall,

and I was struck by a very surprising truth,

that not much about my life had really changed,

despite a fairly significant boost to my income.

Oh, maybe I stayed in a little nicer hotel on vacation,
or the next suit I bought was a bit more expensive ...

... but nothing I'd consider significant was any different.

**That was an important learning-experience for me that helped
reshape my perspective and understanding of money and wealth.**

Generally, we put so much emphasis on acquiring as much as we can,
and get so worked up over money and possibly not having enough,
despite having enjoyed relative prosperity all our lives.

Indeed, most of us have never had to miss a meal
because we couldn't afford to buy food,
or have been unable to provide other necessities of life,
- yet we still allow money to be such a dominant issue of concern.

This is one of the more difficult challenges we face as Christians
trying to live faithfully in **a materialistic-consumer-culture,**
with its devious, insatiable and corrosive appetites for more.

When you played the game of Monopoly as a youngster,
do you remember how intense the game could be sometimes? ...
... that dreaded disaster of landing on Boardwalk with a hotel,
or players palming the dice to get just the right roll,
then tempers would flare, someone was caught trying to cheat.
Winning or losing would seem like such a big deal right then.

And yet win or lose, at the end of the game, every single time,
all of the Monopoly money, all of tokens and properties
would all go back into the box and be put away on a shelf.

The amount of money and which of the properties you'd acquired,
even who'd won or lost would fade into forgotten insignificance.
Winning was a distinction that made very little difference
once the game was in the box and returned to the closet.

1st Timothy is thought to be one of the Apostle Paul's last letters.
Timothy was a young pastor Paul had known since he was a boy,
and he probably took great delight in watching him grow up.

**And looking back at his own life-journey and experience,
Paul wants to pass on and share some of what he has learned.**

In this part of his letter, as Timothy's mentor,
Paul is explaining how our financial resources – our stuff,
relates to our walk of faith and relationship with God...
... which is probably one of the toughest spiritual battles we all face.

The Apostle wants Timothy to understand that at the end,
that when we are finally putting the Monopoly board away,
it won't be the stuff of this world that actually matters,
or as Paul explains it, vs. 6-8

Of course there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, so that **we can take nothing out of it;** but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

Paul's point to Timothy is that an authentic faith-walk with Jesus
is incompatible with a desperate longing for material abundance,
that can bring out our worst, leading to anxiety & greed,

which will stifle and damage a Christian life of faith...

... for as surely as a compass needle always points toward the north,
so too our hearts will point toward what we truly treasure most.

Tony Compollo helps explain that struggle with a parable
that he used in a speech and that became a book later on.

In it, some troublemakers break into a department store,
not to steal, but they spend the night switching price tags.

Then the next day, a pair of sox were now marked at \$400,
and a nice stereo system was marked at \$12, and so on.

You can imagine the confusion that created because
the cashiers had no idea what was the correct price.

Compollo explains, that's what happened with our world.

Our culture & media seem to place its great sense of value
on inconsequential and flashy things that don't last
while ignoring other things of truth, integrity, character & depth,
and our culture is as the prophet Jeremiah described, vs. 9

The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it?

The point of this mortal life isn't to accumulate all that we can,
and from his own experience in life, Paul warns Timothy:

that our attitude toward acquiring money and wealth
can be horribly corrosive to our spiritual well-being
and become a deadly snare, a trap and distraction -

**so Paul urges & warns stay focused on what really does matter & last,
and that isn't going be shiny-glittery stuff and toys of this world.**

As Paul continues and explains, vs. 9-10

But those who **want to be rich** fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires
... For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away
from the faith.

Notice that Paul is not condemning or denouncing having wealth.

It is **the love of money** that is **devious, insatiable & corrosive...**

... and that is a very crucial distinction.

And we can overcome that propensity to horde and always wanting more,
by remembering to be grateful to God who is the generous giver,
and by responding with generosity in meaningful ways...
... by consciously choosing that which matters most.

Paul's point is that it all comes as a gift from God, so don't be arrogant,
but be grateful & generous with whatever has been entrusted to you,
and don't set all your hopes on the uncertainty of wealth,
for wealth is just a tool that can be used for either good or evil.

Paul's instructions helps make that clear, vs. 17~19

As for those who in the present age are rich, ... **They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous,**
and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they
may take hold of the life **that really is life.**

It is a question of priority -- who or what will be the God I serve?

And if we do choose to be faithful, as Jeremiah explains, vs. 7-8

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is **not anxious**, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

I think the challenge is to recognize the false gods of our culture to be warned & aware of what distracts us from faithfulness to God,
and not seduced by the other and lesser gods of this world,
by our culture's pursuit of comfort, ease and pleasure...
...which is an on-going struggle a battle that comes up again and again.

Yes, we may say or even believe we are committed,
but are we committed enough to actually do something about it?

In our world and culture, in our ordinary daily living,
there are many other voices that seek our attention and loyalty,
but we cannot serve the Lord our God and compromise with them...
for either God is the priority of our lives, or God is not.

**The gospel of Jesus is about being healed and being transformed,
and becoming a useful instrument of God's grace,
one whom God can use to heal and transform our world.**

God has given each one of us unique gifts and priceless treasures.
Let us treat those gifts and blessings with the care they deserve,
so that they overflow with goodness onto all those around us.

One of the ways that I envision our church and its mission-work
is that we gather in worship unified by our shared faith in Christ
to be strengthened and encouraged to make a real difference,
by using our gifts & resources in support of God's Kingdom.

This church does some truly wonderful and significant ministry
through which lives are touched, blessing flow and hope abounds.

It has always been a true and hopeful delight and wonder
to see the skill and dedication of our many volunteers,
God's grace & truth, serving & active here in our midst,
as a beacon of hope and blessing to our community,
as God's mercy & healing are shared in so many ways...

**... but the truth is, opportunities abound, and we could be doing more,
for needs all around us have certainly not declined or decreased...**

... therefore today **I am asking you to consider digging a little deeper...**
... so that our church can do more and make more of a difference
to those in need of our community and out in this world.

As the Isaac Watts hymn declares, (#224, *When I Survey*, vs.4)
"Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, **Demands my soul, my life, my all.**"

Every person who has ever been created by God has also been uniquely
and purposefully resourced & gifted with abilities to bless others
so we can please and serve God for all the days of our lives-
- for as long as we live, God allows us some way that we can bless,
so that our lives can proclaim God's grace, love, joy & hope.

We all have something to offer that is precious, useful and needed--

and how tragic and sad for those who waste, or those who withhold their gifts & resources that were given by God, and whose lives never quite become the incredible blessing & joy God intends.

Somehow, somehow **God is inviting** all of us to live that adventure, and is calling each of us to respond to God's love and grace.

Maybe it's to abandon some habitual sin that's crushing your life.
Maybe God's calling you to seek reconciliation with someone.

Maybe there is someone God wants you to help, or to comfort, and maybe it's for a commitment like you never have before,
**as in sincerity and faithfulness, hope and gratitude
give generously of your time and talents and treasure.**

One of our most fundamental and essential tasks as a congregation, is that through the fellowship and the ministry we share, we are called to notice and affirm the giftedness of others, and to bless this church by offering our uniquely wonderful gifts as a celebration of God's gracious love, call & purpose among us.

As a community of faith, it is our joyful responsibility and task to help discover, discern, develop and share all of God's gifts.
**Our call is to rediscover continuously how we fit the needs around us
by eagerly presenting our gifted uniqueness & blessings back to God.**

I am certain that God has already made more than ample provision for the work to be done well, here at First Presbyterian, and that right here and now - among the people in this room,

-there are plenty of people, sufficient talents and resources enough for this church to rebuild, to grow and meet all that is needed in order for our church to serve usefully out in our community, for us to reflect the light of God's love and joyful abundance to our troubled & wounded world stumbling about in darkness.

God gives to us, and we respond by giving ourselves back to Jesus, by presenting ourselves to God, and by surrendering to the Lord and so we are transformed by God's indwelling presence as we re-learn to think and live in new & faithful ways,
for surely together we can do better than just get by and survive.

By being available to other people, open to the needs around us and being willing to offer our gifts to accomplish God's good.

By being active in our church, serving where and how we can, by participating and sharing in our common life together, by giving and seeking to grow in our faith walk with God.

By getting involved in our local community and out in the world by touching and sharing our gifts into the lives of others and helping to meet the needs and hurts of our neighbors.

Our call is to use the gifts of our lives to make a real difference, for that is where we derive satisfaction and our deepest joy as our lives meet and connect with needs to the glory of God.

Though we can't do it all, and sometimes our efforts can seem ridiculously inconsequential,

yet that does not mean that we cannot do something, somehow,
or that the little we can do does not make a real difference.

Friends, be assured that our **faithfulness does make a difference**,
so as in, Romans 12, Philippians 4, 1 Peter 4 from *The Message*.

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out, for God brings the best out of you.

Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.

Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything.