Theme: The Seven Deadly Sins
“Greed”
Sermon preached by Jeff Huber
August 10-11, 2013 at First United Methodist Church, Durango


25 Greed causes fighting; trusting the Lord leads to prosperity.
15 Then Jesus said, “Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”
12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.

VIDEO  Oz the Great and Powerful
VIDEO  (NO BREAK – this next video will play automatically)
Greed – Sermon Starter
SLIDE  Greed

Today we continue the sermon series on the Seven Deadly Sins by looking at the most deeply embedded sin in our culture which may make it the most challenging for us and that is greed. That clip from “Oz, The Great and Powerful,” gives us a good glimpse into greed’s power over our lives. Sometimes we don’t even know why it is we want that thing that we want, or what it even really is (like a chalice), and yet we desire to have that thing.

As we begin I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. My prayer each week will be that there will be at least one thing that you will want to remember from the message and there is a place for you to write that down and take any other notes that you’d like to take. I pray each week that the Holy Spirit would speak to each person who gathers for worship in this place and when you feel a nudge I encourage you to jot down what it is you feel like God might be speaking to you.

Continued on the backside of the front page you will find our Meditation...
Moments which give you a chance to read further in the Scriptures about what it is we are going to be talking about each week. I encourage you to take some time each morning or evening to read a bit of Scripture and to reflect upon what it might mean for you and spend some time in prayer either individually or with your family or in a small group. If you are watching at home or online you can simply pull out a piece of paper and pen or pencil to take notes and you can download this resource off our website after you are done.

Let’s start with a confession from your pastor. I am turning 50 this year and several people in my family have asked what I want for my birthday even though it is still several months away. It’s like they can’t wait for me to hit 50! I have decided that after 20 years it would be great to have a new set of golf clubs so on Thursday I stopped by the new Sports Authority to check out some Taylor Made irons. After looking a bit I left the store and there in the mall was a brand new Nissan 4x4 pickup that was a beautiful sparkling blue. My old Subaru has given me nothing but fits the past two years and I’ve always wanted a truck since I sold my first one 20 years ago. I pressed my face to the glass and looked inside and think I even drooled a bit on the driver’s side window.

Then I came back to my office to finish my sermon on greed!

I want to start by being very clear about why we are doing this sermon series. I have struggled personally with every single one of these sins and I will be using first person when I talk about sin during this sermon series. My intent is not the point a finger at you or to make you feel bad. I do want to remind you that there are struggles that all of us have which can lead to pain and hurt and heartache and they often begin with these sins that we are talking about in this sermon series. I am preaching as much to myself as to any of you during this series of sermons.

**SLIDE  The Seven Deadly Sins**

Let’s remember that the modern concept of the seven deadly sins is linked to the works of the 4th century monk Evagrius Ponticus. He and his fellow monks began to name those things that they most struggled with as they try to pursue the Christian faith and become faithful followers of Jesus. The monks found that they shared the same common struggles with these sins and later Pope Gregory I said that these deadly sins were not unique to those in the monastery, but recognized that all Christians struggle with them. He noted that these sins were the root sins of all of the other sins which spring forth from them. He used the metaphor of a tree with seven primary branches going out in different directions.
and those were the seven deadly sins. All of the other sins were branches off of those main seven sins.

The church then began to teach people about these seven deadly sins as a way of understanding the things that could choke the life from you. These things will keep you from God and ultimately destroy you. The sins were categorized and put in an order typically from the least deadly and progressing to the most deadly which was always seen as the sin of pride. The order, starting with the least deadly that we will begin with next week goes like this.

SLIDE
Lust
Gluttony
Greed
Sloth
Wrath
Envy
Pride

We have talked the last few weeks about how the seven deadly sins are ordinary and unspectacular. They are mundane and all too human foibles of the human race in general, not just sins of the few utterly depraved. Maybe there is something in us that wants to believe that "sin" must apply to someone other than ourselves. That's why we make movies about the seven deadly sins and depict them in this way but the truth is they are not. These sins are where we live and this is who we are.

SLIDE Why were these sins called deadly?

One of the reasons these seven were picked as deadly sins is not because they are mortal and will lead to some gruesome death, but because they sneak up on us and take us over before we even are aware of it.

The deadliness of these sins is found in the reality that they are very ordinary and pervasive in human life, all with their roots in basic, from-infancy human nature. Because of this we fail to see how terribly they warp our humanity.

John Wesley is the founder of Methodism and our heritage in this church springs forth from his teaching about the Christian faith. Wesley would talk about sin and brokenness between us and God and between us and our neighbor or

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simply a brokenness inside of ourselves. It wasn't just about a list like the seven deadly sins but it was more about what happened as a result of our actions or thoughts and do those things that we do or thought processes that we have which separate us from God or each other. If that happens then there is sin and it is meant to simply describe the relationship that can happen between us and God and us and other people.

One of the things about the deadly sins is that they are all a distortion of something that is a good part of God's plan for our lives. This is clearly true of the deadly sin we will talk about today.

**SLIDE Greed**

God's will is that we be able to work and enjoy the fruits of our labor. Many of you know that our sacrament of Holy Communion is rooted in the Jewish feast of Passover. Jesus was celebrating Passover with his disciples when he broke the bread and blessed the cup of a new covenant. Did you know that the roots of Passover are that each year every Jewish family would bring 1/10 of all that they possessed to Jerusalem to be offered up to God? This was not 1/10 of everything they made that year or their annual income.

These gifts were not to be used for outreach programs or to sustain the local religious establishment. This vast accumulation of wealth was not designated for what we might call "some worthy cause." Instead, this incredible collection was used for a party. That's right, they had a great big huge party and everyone was invited! God loves to party and he wants his people to enjoy that as well! All the people of Israel were expected to travel to Jerusalem and participate in a gigantic blowout party at which 1/10 of all the assets of the nation's population would be spent on a banquet of celebration. There was singing and dancing and every person from every corner of Israel was invited, and none would be turned away. The village idiot, the tax collector, those of questionable reputation, the poor, the rich, the educated, the uncouth bombs were all to be there. The music would play into the night as the party went on for days. It is no wonder that the children of Israel exclaimed in the Psalms:

**SLIDE I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."**

Going to worship is meant to be fun and a party because in ancient Israel, God was worship and celebration. That is important for us to remember in our contemporary situation as we struggle with our stuff. The kingdom of God is more like a party than a soup kitchen.

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Knowing that God loves celebrations, you and I are delivered from a dour lifestyle in which we are made to feel guilty whenever we have a good time. I can enjoy a trip to the mountains with friends, scream with excitement at a football game, enjoy a new set of golf clubs or even a new car without going through a period of self-condemnation for having spent what could have been used to feed the poor. Our God loves a party, and those who refuse to party in God's name lose out on a foretaste of glory that is to be when God's kingdom comes on Earth as it is in heaven.

The important lesson to be learned however is that there are limitations on partying. Moses teaches us that 1/10 of our assets in any given year must be set aside for partying, and the other 9/10 are to be used in service for others in the name of God. There is nothing wrong with spending a dollar or two on a roller coaster ride or golf clubs or any other earthly enjoyable experience, as long as we keep our spending on pleasure under control.

As we respond to the needs of the poor and reach out to others we must also remember how Jesus encourages us in Matthew 6: 16-18 with these words.

SLIDE 16 “And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. 17 But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. 18 Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

We are meant to sacrifice for the poor and to give to others, but our lifestyles should give evidence that we are happy, party going disciples of the One who invites us to a banquet. There is nothing wrong with dressing up as long as we limit what we spend.

Unfortunately, most of us have turned God’s formula around. We spend 9/10 of what we possess on the party and things we want and, if we are even willing to try, the remaining tenant on service for God's kingdom. God wants his people to enjoy life, but God wants us to enjoy life in a manner that does not require the suffering of others. He does not want any of us to adopt a lifestyle that leads to the disproportionate consumption of the good things that God meant for all of God's children to enjoy.

This good gift of God that is meant to be a blessing in our lives in terms of enjoying the fruits of our labor gets distorted in our human minds as we want
more and more and sometimes don't even know why we want that next thing. This is why the sin of greed can become deadly. It also can become deadly because we have it built into our culture. Maybe some of you remember this clip from the movie Wall Street.

**VIDEO**  
**Wall Street**

**SLIDE**  
**Greed**

I think that Michael Douglas's character is simply stating out loud what many of us believe but are embarrassed to admit. We often times live as though greed is good and because of it, owners of corporations get greedy and members of unions get greedy and people on welfare get greedy. We all feel like we deserve a certain type of lifestyle even if we haven't earned it and even though God has not promised that. I know that on more than one occasion I have sat with people in my office who thought that greed was good and it would lead them to a great life but instead they have found themselves in debt and alone and living a life that has little if any meaning beyond the stuff they own.

You have heard me say this before that we Americans live with two great fears. We are afraid of dying and we are afraid of losing our stuff and what is interesting is that Jesus knew this about us. Just after Jesus gave the words that we just heard from Matthew's Gospel about fasting he gives these words about our wealth and what can happen to us when greed gets the best of us. He gives us a formula for dealing with our tendency to want more and more and more, and at the same time also deals with our fear of death.

**SLIDE**  
19 “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal.
20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

He goes on in verse 24...

**SLIDE**  
24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.
25 “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your
heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?
28 “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing,
29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?
31 “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.
34 “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

I often hear from people who have been steered away from the church because they believe that the church talks about money too much. More than two thirds of the parables of Jesus and his teachings were about money and He was talking to people who lived in poverty in the first century. Jesus knew that we all struggle with this and the reason that I talk about it is not because the church needs your money or because God needs your money. You have heard me say this before but the truth is that God owns everything anyway.

Yes, the church can do great things when people give faithfully, and this church does amazing things because many of you are generous. But if you don't learn to give and if you don't learn that your stuff is not really yours then you will try to take it with you and your heart will shrivel up and you will find yourself empty and without meaning. You will live in fear of death and losing your stuff and not having enough. This is what greed does to us.

SLIDE Lake City cemetery gate 1876

On the video screen you will notice the entrance to the cemetery in Lake City, Colorado that was built in 1876. During this series of sermons I have been sharing with you what I learned about people buried in the cemeteries. We have learned over the past few weeks that there are actually two cemeteries in this small Colorado mountain town. This was the first cemetery and it was built for the poor, gamblers, saloon keepers, criminals and those who were not White. There is
another cemetery up the road for the "good folks." We got to hear a number of stories about people buried in both cemeteries and what I discovered is that the "good folks" had as many sins as the other folks buried in the not-so-good cemetery.

This week I want introduce you to another person buried in the upper cemetery where the so-called good folks are laid to rest.

**SLIDE Peter Kennedy Grave (graphic)**

Peter Kennedy was a pioneer, merchant and capitalist of Lake City who died on February 2, 1904 after a long illness. He was almost 70 years old. Kennedy came to Lake City in 1876 from Minneapolis, Kansas and operated a shoe store until retirement in 1898. He was highly successful in mind speculation and best-known for being part owner of the Golden Fleece Mine at Lake San Cristobal. He was a shrewd businessman and his holdings at his death included a cattle ranch in Powderhorn, Colorado, a drugstore in Montana, a residence and Orchard in Canon City, Colorado along with his business, mining and residential property in Lake City. His wife Mildred is also buried beneath this headstone.

The interesting part of Peter Kennedy story is that you will notice that this headstone is square and if you look carefully the metal plate that has his name engraved upon it is held on to the gravestone by screws. The other three sides are held on by rivets and the reason that there are screws in one side of this is because Kennedy wanted much of his fortune buried with him. There were rumors that some of his money was buried in the casket with him and some of his deeds to his property were put in this headstone.

It was noted by his friends that Kennedy was nervous and anxious a good portion of his life and always afraid that someone was trying to steal something from him. He tried his best to take his fortune with them but we all know that you can't take it with you.

**SLIDE Greed**

This is why Jesus gave us the prescription for dealing with our greed by reminding us that nothing that we earn in this life is eternal. Maybe you remember the story in Mark's Gospel of a man who ran up to Jesus and said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus called the man to draw upon his own resources, and to reflect on his own training, "You know the commandments." The man did know the commandment and he kept them from his youth. He was a good man and a pious
man who attempted to live by the rules of God but still, living by the rules had left them empty. Being good was not enough. The man sensed there was more but he wasn't sure what it was.

For many of us life is not so much a gift as a matter of setting goals and achieving them. Life is something to be accomplished, something one plans. The man had met his own goals. In the process he remained his own master, his own judge and Lord. This illustrates a problem for all of us, or perhaps more so for those of us who are gifted or wealthy.

The Scripture tells us that Jesus looked at the man and he loved him. His heart went out to him. The man was no fraud. He was sincere and that is why this story is so chilling. Jesus then attempted to free him from his bondage by giving him these words from Mark 10:21.

SLIDE 21 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Jesus intends this moment to offer great liberation to the man but he did not hear it that way. Jesus intended to meet his deepest needs and the deepest longing. The man's life appeared to be a dream come true, but he senses a terrible void. He found that God was missing from the dream and avoidance came because there was an Idol located at the center of his existence. It was so firmly placed he could not or would not dislodge it. At the words of Jesus he was shocked, his countenance fell, and he left grieving. For that moment, the Idol of wealth had won.

By most standards in the world, I am a rich man. As such, I gasped each time I hear this story. If I come to Jesus to ask for an aspirin will he suggest radical surgery? If this is the way he treats the ones he loves am I able to handle such affection?

During this initial encounter, many of the disciples, and perhaps some of us, were not involved in the story. The disciples had given up all they had to follow Jesus. Their possessions, compared to the rich man, were few. Greed, they thought, is a rich man's game. Unlike most of us, they were poor. Up to this point they had listened to Jesus address the problem of someone else. It was interesting, but not crucial. Now however he turned to the disciples and said these words.
I am pretty sure that every single one of us has dreamed of being rich. We have dreamt of winning the lottery even if we don't play it just so we can spend the winnings. All of us think that a few extra dollars will change us. "I can handle it God so give me a shot at it!" It might even free us up to pursue true ministry if we had enough money. This is why Jesus warns us about the danger of getting the whole world only to forfeit our life and our soul. Even after such warning most of us are willing to take the risk however, aren't we?

People in the first century were convinced that wealth was a sign of God's blessing. Sometimes I think we still think that way. But for Jesus, wealth can be a hindrance and not a help to discipleship. Serving God is a two-handed call, and it cannot be done when we are hanging on to what we own with one hand. Jesus did not say we should not serve God and money, he says we CANNOT. All too often we find that we do not own things, they own us.

There was a demon who owned a large box of gold coins that he kept buried under an old house. One day he was ordered to leave that area for another part of the world. He would not be able to return for 20 years. What should he do with the treasure during his absence? If he hired a Guardian it would cost a great deal of money. If you left it under the house someone could dig it up and steal it. At last he thought of a foolproof idea.

He took the treasure to the home of a miser. "Dear Sir," the demon began, "I wish to give you this gift before I leave the country. I have always been fond of you, and I pray that you will not refuse my offer. You may feel free to spend these gold coins however you desire. There is but one stipulation. Should you die before me I am to be your sole heir." The miser agreed to accept the gift, and the demon departed.

20 years later the demon returned home to find that the miser had recently died. He found the treasure and discovered that not a single coin was missing. He
laughed, knowing the miser had been a Guardian who did not cost a penny. So here is the moral of the story.

SLIDE Is it not true that when we poured our money we are merely saving it for the demons?

Greed is demonic. It is idolatrous. Greed replaces God with the things money can buy. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of greed in our day is that it is assumed. A baseball player is offered $10 million a year to play a game and he is offended! He takes his employer to arbitration and he wins $15 million a year... To play a game in which he then finds himself cheating and putting poison in his body so he can keep making more money than anyone ever needs. We no longer see greed as the sin. It is a goal.

SLIDE How do we deal with Greed?

The challenge to rid ourselves of our greed is not intended to be sad. It is meant to be joyful and freeing. It is only when we want to hang onto our idols and when we love them more than God that they become a burden. When that happens, we too go away sad like the rich young ruler. But when we realize the burden of our greed we experience joy like never before.

There is one primary way to overcome greed, and that is to discover the joy that comes from self-giving. The nature of sin is that it blinds us to the truth that we have been designed in the image of a giving God, and that we therefore will fill the purpose of our Creator by giving away what we are and have to others. We are called upon to sacrifice, it is not only that others might benefit from our self-giving, that we ourselves might know the joy that God wills for us to have.

This is what the Scriptures teach us in so many places. Proverbs 28:25 gives us this wisdom:

SLIDE 25 Greed causes fighting; trusting the Lord leads to prosperity.

Jesus reminds his disciples again in Luke 12:15

SLIDE 15 Then Jesus said, “Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”

And the apostle Paul shares his own experience in Philippians 4:12. Remember that Paul was wealthy as a Roman citizen who oppressed Christians before he became a follower of Jesus.

SLIDE 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a

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**full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.**

This passage makes me think of a family who made a commitment to support several impoverished children in Haiti through Compassion International. They gave almost $200 a month to feed, clothe and educate five orphan children who otherwise would have no hope. In order for the family to carry out its commitments, there were sacrifices they had to make. The children had to forgo some of the things that many of their friends took for granted. They rode secondhand bicycles and sometimes their Christmas presents did not compare favorably with what their friends got. The family, nevertheless, stayed with their commitment for almost a decade.

One day the father of this family came home with some exciting news. His company was sending him to Haiti for a week to take care of some business matters. Because his way would be paid by his company, he would be able to take his family along using some travel miles he had earned, provided they traveled in the most economical way possible. The family was thrilled with the possibility of meeting the five children whom they had supported for such a long time.

The second day they were in Haiti, the family hired a Jeep and drove out to the village where their young friends lived. The children, who are now teenagers, have been told of the visit and look forward eagerly to the day when they would meet those who had done so much for them. The American family traveled for hours, but their tiredness did not detract from the joy the experienced when they arrived at their destination.

The five young people whom they had supported stood waiting in front of their school. They had been there since the early morning waiting to meet their American friends. As soon as Jeep stopped in front of the school, the five patient teenagers ran to it with happy excitement. The two American children bounced out of the cheap and into their arms and there followed a half an hour of glorious hugging. Despite the language barrier, these young people communicated their affection for each other. At the end of that special day there was an unplanned ceremony in which the Haitian children gave to their American friends Christmas tree ornaments they themselves had made out of twigs and flowers. After a long and affectionate goodbye, the Americans got back in their Jeep to return to Port-au-Prince.

On the way to the capital city, the two children sat in silence. Their silence seemed so strange and puzzling their father asked what was wrong. "Oh, nothing's wrong," answered his daughter. "$I was just thinking that there is
nothing we could have done with our money over the last 10 years that would make us happier than we are right now."

This family's story and the Scriptures remind us of a powerful truth I hope you will take with you if you take nothing else from today.

SLIDE Greediness promises much, but delivers little in the way of joy.

On the other hand, those who are lovingly self-giving discover the real joy that money and things can give if they are graciously shared with others. This may seem a bit simplistic, but it is, nevertheless, the truth. Greed is defeated in the face of the hilarious joy that comes from Christ like giving.

Repentance is about turning around and going in a new direction. The call for us to give up the idols of our lives like wealth which becomes our God is intended to be liberating. It is the call to give up being caterpillars in order to become butterflies. Every now and then someone hears this call, understands what it is about and accepts it joyfully. In Luke's gospel we have one of my favorite stories which follows that story of the rich young ruler who leaves Jesus sad.

Jesus was passing through Jericho. A man named Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector there, and he was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was but could not because he was short in stature and could not see over the crowd. So Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a Sycamore tree because Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. We are going to have a party!" So he hurried down and was happy to receive Jesus. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who was a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to Jesus, "Look, half of my possessions Lord I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him,

SLIDE 9 Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

Jesus calls us to get rid of all those things that bind us. When we do as he asks, true joy is found and we hear these great words about salvation being found and how we have treasure that is built up in heaven.

William Willimon puts it this way in his book on the seven deadly sins entitled, Sinning Like a Christian.

We live it in a society that has long since moved beyond the satisfaction of
basic human needs to the gratification of all our wants and desires, and the expectation that is my God-given right to have those wants satisfied. Those who put it politely, by saying that we have moved into a "consumer economy" or a "service economy," are simply noting that those activities and commodities that were once regarded as superfluous and unnecessary have now become the very basis of our economy. Other words this is a bad neighborhood for those who hope to avoid the sin of greed.

What we don't need is central economic planning or new laws, more taxes or fewer good paying jobs. What we need is something much more difficult to get than a Porsche—character. We need to sort of character that is able to look at the world and all it has to offer at a certain key moments say simply, "Thank you, but I'm now satisfied." It takes a huge amount of moral stamina to be able to say, "Yes, we could afford it, but we are not going to buy it, because it does little to contribute to the basic goodness of our lives."

When it comes to combat with the Seven, one must start somewhere. Because the Seven, like greed, 10 to burrow down so deeply in our everyday lives, tend to infect just about everything that we do, one must begin with seemingly small, mundane, daily acts of defiance and resistance. A beginning not to be made, and one way of attacking greed where it is most vulnerable is an openhanded gratuities giving, practice in the art of letting go.

In the worship of the church, when the offering plate is passed and we are asked to put our money where our hearts are, when we are asked to take a stand, publicly to say just where we are in regard to the things of this world, this must be one of the most radical, countercultural, defiant acts the church demands of us. Thanks be to God that the church does not expect us to engage the Seven on our own, or we would never have any victories against sin, greed or any other. [pages 107 and 113]

As we close today I want to invite you as we have each week during this sermon series to pray a prayer of confession. You may not feel like you struggle with this, but I believe that we all struggle with it if we are honest. So if you're willing would you pray these words on the video screen with me?

SLIDE Oh God, we confess that we like our stuff. We admit that we would often rather have what we want rather than what You want. Help us when our desires get the best of us. Teach us to be free from our possessions so we can experience the joy of life in you. As we give,
may our hearts be lightened so we can experience the party that is your kingdom, on Earth as it is in heaven. In the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen.

SLIDE Blank Slide

In the words of the Apostle Paul remember that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Thanks be to God for this glorious gift, because through God all things are possible and you are forgiven. Let's respond with the words on the video screen.

SLIDE In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free. Amen.

Let’s pray...

SLIDE Prayer

“Greed”

Theme: The Seven Deadly Sins


Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________
• How do you understand Jesus’ challenging phrase about being “rich toward God”? What steps can you take, in your day-to-day life, to increase this kind of inner wealth in your life? How can you share that approach to life with your children or other people with whom you have some influence?

**Tuesday, August 13** – Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11 – God called the people of Israel to a level of generosity that neither they nor we have ever fully lived up to. Jesus quoted part of this passage—“The poor will always be with you.” Some would use those words to argue against generosity. That argument only works if we ignore the whole second half of verse 11!

• In verse 10 we find an idea that we’ll see again in this week’s reading. As in so many areas of life, God doesn’t just care about what we do, but about the spirit in which we do it. With what kind of spirit do you do your giving? What have you found that increases your joy in giving?

• In his book Seven, Jeff Cook suggests that greed is about getting (and hoarding) more than you need, while gluttony (next week!) is about consuming too much. How do you understand the “evil thoughts” against which Deuteronomy warns? What rewards might come with the type of generosity these verses call for?

**Wednesday, August 14** – Read 1 Timothy 6:3-10 – In New Testament times, as today, some people saw religious teaching as simply one more chance for profit. The solution to their greed, and ours, this letter says, is not just outward changes in behavior. The key is inside of us. True wealth comes from a contented spirit, not our wallet or our bank account.

• Verse 7 states a basic premise for the whole Bible’s teaching about greed. How “permanent” do some of your main possessions feel to you? How vital is that sense of permanence to your inner security? How has your inner “need” for your possessions changed during the current economic crisis?

• In verse 10, we read that “the love of money” (not money itself) is the root of all kinds of evil. Whom have you known who had plenty of money but seemed free of “the love of money”? Have you known (or been) a person who, even if living in relative poverty, felt the tug of “the love of money”?

**Thursday, August 15** – Read Matthew 19:16 - 20:16 – In today’s first story, a young man asked Jesus how to find eternal life. When Jesus told him to break the grip his assets had on his heart, the young man went away sad. Jesus told a second story, a parable, that illustrates God’s vast generosity to us. It also shows how easily we slip into greed and resentment.

• Many affluent people in the Bible (e.g. Abraham in the Old Testament, Lydia the seller of royal purple cloth in the New Testament—see Acts 16) were NOT told to sell all they had. What heart issue do you believe Jesus wanted the young man to address? What made it hard for him to respond to Jesus’ call?

• Which group of workers do you most identify with in Jesus’ story—the ones who worked all day or the late arrivals? For what reasons? How does your heart respond when the landowner asks if you are going to be upset when he is generous to others? Do you find God’s “unfair” generosity a curse or a blessing?

**Friday, August 16** – Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 – Paul was gathering a gift for the Christians in Jerusalem. He was more concerned with the heart from which people gave, though, than with the amount collected. “God loves a cheerful giver” was not just an upbeat slogan. It was a serious call to check why they gave—“do not give reluctantly or under compulsion,” he said. Give generously!

• What influences and ways of thinking most strengthen your generous tendencies? What influences and fears pull you away from generosity? How can you reinforce generosity in your heart and your life? How have you found your life is better when you are generous?

• Have you ever found yourself giving reluctantly or under compulsion? How did that experience affect you? What do you think were Paul’s reasons for valuing cheerful hearts and willing spirits even over the positives of collecting a larger offering? Do you agree with him?
**Saturday, August 17 – Personal Application:** The *New Bible Dictionary* says confession “means to acknowledge sin and guilt in the light of God’s revelation, and is thus… an outward sign of repentance and faith” (p. 219). In what ways has the inner tug of greed shaped your actions and attitudes? Confess that honestly to God. Pray for God to work in your life to bring healing, and open your heart more and more to the joy and freedom of generosity.

**Family Activity:** Adults, gather a bunch of pennies and hide them throughout your home. Place a bowl in the center of the room. Have your children hunt for the pennies. (Pennies can be a choking hazard, so supervise any very young children.) Let each child place the pennies he or she collected in the bowl. Ask, “If this was all the money our family had, what would you do with it?” Read aloud Mark 12:41-44 and 2 Corinthians 9:7. Ask, “Why do you think Jesus wants us to share? How does God want us to feel when we give?” Decide where you will give the pennies. Pray for the people who will receive them and thank God for your blessings. Talk with your children about the importance of generosity and contentment.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, in my head I know that my life doesn’t consist of the abundance of my possessions and that I need to give generously. But I confess these are hard ideas to put into practice. I want to live as one who gives with a cheerful heart—but I don’t know where to begin. Change my heart where it needs changing, and give me the courage to begin to develop the contented spirit that I know you want me to have. Amen. **Prayer:** Holy Spirit, show me what is in my heart. Replace anything displeasing to you and fill my heart with your love. Let that love motivate and penetrate all my thoughts, words and actions. I give you my heart and my life. Help me to have a strong desire to live in your grace and freedom. Amen.