



“The Greatest Thing in the World”

1 Corinthians 13

January 5, 2019

Sermon Series: “7 Virtues: A Life of Moral Beauty”

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

This message introduced a new series of messages on 7 Virtues. Primarily, the sermon was about love – The Greatest Thing in the World. The virtues are based off of the list of the 7 Deadly sins as corresponding virtues. The sins were deemed deadly in the 6th century because they offended against the command to love. We begin the New Year on the message of love as defined by 1 Corinthians 13 because it’s the mother of all virtues. And the seven virtues we’ll look at these coming weeks empower us to love better and live out the eternal love of God in Christ.

GETTING STARTED

1. When Henry showed the Fred Rogers video where he asked “Who has loved you into being,” who did you come up with? Who has loved you into being and what traits made that person loving?
2. Explain the title above. Why according to Henry Drummond – who Henry quoted – is love the greatest thing in the world?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read 1 Corinthians 13

3. Paul is writing to them in a time of conflict. What’s he trying to get across as you read the verses.
4. Love is greater than faith and hope. Really? Explain how you define faith and hope and what Paul is saying here?
5. Look at the traits in this passage. Define and explain what love is – feeling? Thought? Action? Choice? And so on. Bear in mind the word love is “agape” which means self-giving.

TRAITS OF LOVE

Patient
Kind
Generous
Humble
Courteous
Good Tempered
Guileless (open, truthful)
Sincere

1 CORINTHIANS 13 DESCRIPTION

“Love is Patient”
“Love is Kind”
“Love Does Not Envy”
“Love Does Not Boast”
“Love Does Not Dishonor Others”
“Love is Not Easily Angered”
“Love Does Not Delight in Evil”
“Love Rejoices with the Truth”

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. Look at the list of what it means to love well from 1 Corinthians 13. How do you fare based on what's listed? How might you do better at loving people into being?

THE “EXTRA-MILE”

8. Practice Love intentionally this week based on the list.
9. Look at these virtues and consider your devotion to them in your life. Bear in mind this series is fixated on virtue as a means toward greater love. Allow the right hand column to direct you toward our need for virtue as we seek to be a person whom Christ is loving into being.

7 VIRTUES

Humility
Kindness
Meekness
Passion
Purity
Self-Control
Charity

7 DEADLY SINS

Pride
Envy
Anger
Sloth
Lust
Gluttony
Greed

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for people you want to love better in 2020 and how you can make a plan to put into action.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“To love abundantly is to live abundantly, and to love forever is to live forever. Your eternal life is inextricably bound up with love. We want to live forever for the same reason that we want to live tomorrow. Why do you want to live tomorrow? It is because there is someone who loves you, and whom you want to see tomorrow, and be with, and love back. There is no other reason why we should live on than that we love and are beloved. That is the philosophy of what Paul is showing us; the reason why in the nature of things Love should be the supreme thing – because it is going to last; in the nature of things it is Eternal Life.” Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*.

“Everything minus love = nothing.” A statement popularized based on 1 Corinthians 13.

“If Philippians 2 is All We Had”

Philippians 2: 3-11

January 12, 2019

Sermon Series: “7 Virtues: A Life of Moral Beauty”

Virtue: Humility

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

This message centered on the teaching of Philippians 2: 3-11 and looked at the implication of what we might know about the Christian faith based solely on its meaning. This Scripture and its verses highlight humility, its traits, how we can model it, and the detail of God’s humility revealed in his becoming a person and bearing the cross. Humility grounds us properly in our position before God, and poises us toward deep and greater love. There are myriad characteristics of what humility looks like through the verse of “looking not to your own interest but to the interest of others,” “valuing others above yourselves,” and having “the same mindset of Christ Jesus.” We can live humbly by having habits of the heart that drive us toward more care toward others through sacrificial service.

GETTING STARTED

1. Who do you know that is humble? Think about someone who has touched your life through their humble poise and sacrificial care.
2. Review the quotes used in the message (see additional resources below) as a reference point of our working definition of humility.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read Philippians 2: 3-11

3. The final verses – 6 through 11 – are said to be a hymn repeated by the early church. Reflect on each line and what it tells you about God. Consider what the cross reveals.
4. Early in the message Henry said this Scripture and its teachings – if lived out - is “utterly simple, profoundly complicated and completely reliant on grace.” Explain that. How are verses 3-4 both simple and complicated in their application? How are verses 5-11 utterly reliant on grace?
5. Consider the word “kenosis” which means self-emptying. The NIV version doesn’t use the word – see the NRSV (which is a more literal translation) and its use in verse 7 “but he *emptied* himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”

What did God empty himself of, in and through Christ?

How does this translate to our own personal lives and how we might live?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

6. In the message, Henry made some comments and shared a story about humility that is false. How can we avoid the pitfalls of false humility?

Consider that humility was a corresponding virtue to the Deadly Sin of “pride.” Contrast the two. Bear in mind – obviously – that this isn’t the positive dimension of pride (a healthy confidence) but rather the one that’s boastful, self-focused, and falsely assumes lordship over his or her life and its accomplishment without crediting God.

Contrast humility and pride. Put together a list that is juxtaposed. Consider how Christ ultimately exhibited his humility – in service toward others – deploying his good and “resources” toward care, love and service.

If you looked at this list that was used during the message, how do you think you fare?

When We Look to the Interests of Others, We...

- Listen well
- Forgive quick
- Apologize when wrong
- Be flexible with plans
- Admit to not having every answer
- Respect and honors all persons
- Serve at every opportunity available and when feasible
- Maintain a posture toward including others to contribute and add value to your life and perspective

Habits of the Heart

7. If you aim at humility too directly, it can backfire into false humility. Humility is a delicate, tender virtue to take on.

What are habits of the heart that enable us to practice virtue?¹

Many were listed by Henry toward the end of his message – remembering our position before God (we brought nothing into the world and leaving with nothing – all is credit to him); dwelling upon others and imagining and leaning into a future of greater posture of listening and care; remembering the least of these in our prayers; gazing and meditating on the cross and using Philippians 2 as a means to do so. What are healthy and useful habits for us to cultivate so that we grow more and more into a person that has a humble poise that postures us toward greater love and service?

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for this series to mobilize our church toward greater intention to living a virtuous life. Pray also for our government – that the first verses of this Scripture would apply – pray those verses. Pray for the least of these in society– pray specifically over a circumstance you grew aware of recently (a headline or otherwise). Let it humble you. And may it be a blessing to them.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

¹ The label “habits of the heart” are used by New Testament scholar NT Wright in his book “After You Believe.” He references them as a means toward aspiring to virtue.

“Humility is the mother of all virtues. It is in being humble that our love becomes real, devoted and ardent. (It is the basis of true love),” - Mother Theresa

“Humility is the noble choice to forgo your status, deploy your resources or use your influence for the good of others before yourself. More simply, you could say the humble person is marked by a willingness to hold power in service of others.” John Dickson, Humilitas.

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less,” - CS Lewis.

“More Than a Random Act of Kindness”

2 Samuel 9

January 19, 2020

Sermon Series: “7 Virtues: A Life of Moral Beauty”

Virtue - Kindness

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

Sunday’s message looked at this lesser known story in the Old Testament about David’s remarkable kindness toward Mephibosheth – someone who was physically disabled and set up to be an enemy of the King. David demonstrates Hesed which describes God’s loving commitment to us to show mercy and thoughtful care. It is through us receiving a clear vision of the widespread mercy of God that we are better poised to show intentional and random acts of kindness toward others. It’s a kindness that exceeds most types. It’s a type that is committed and intent on loving others with thorough and thoughtful care. Kindness is one of the 7 Virtues of this series that corresponds to envy. Envy covets the neighbor’s good. Kindness intends for the neighbor’s good and overcomes ill feelings we may harbor. We do so by looking toward the loving kindness of God in Christ which then flows out from us.

GETTING STARTED

1. When’s a time someone showed kindness to you in a way that was (positively) overwhelming. Who was that, what was the kind act and how did it impact you?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read **2 Samuel 9**

2. Read through all the movement in the story. Consider the fact that in most and many cases, a new King and certainly the one who conquered the former King (Philistines), would want to eliminate the remnants of the former kingship – including extended family.

Explain the myriad ways David showed kindness.

Explain the myriad ways Mephibosheth was blessed. Remember his disability in the midst of it.

The basic thread that ran throughout the message was “You’re Mephibosheth. And you’re David too.” Explain what’s meant by that.

3. Where else do we read about kindness in the bible? Consider places in the New Testament and old. For starters, you’ll recall it’s listed in 1 Corinthians 13 as it first describes love –

“Love is patient. Love is kind.” Kindness is listed right at the top as the twin of patience.

Love is listed in the fruit of the Spirit – “Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness...” in Galatians 5: 22. In other words, if you have the Spirit of God living in you, you will definitively be a kind person.

Consider also Colossians 3:12 “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility...”

Look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 25-37 – the act of kindness is highlighted through the behavior of the Samaritan.

Consider the kindness of Jesus through your own examples.

What do all of these tell us about kindness, the importance it has in our faith, and its relationship to Christ?

4. For extra credit – what would you see as the difference between being “nice” versus being “kind?” Have fun with it!!

Living It Out

5. What are habits of the heart that enable us to be more kind? Consider the illustration Henry gave from James Bryan Smith’s book – The Good and Beautiful God about looking toward God’s “widespread mercy.” How much time do you take journaling or writing down the amazing, endless ways God is and has been merciful and kind “hesed” toward you? Try that out as a habit every day this week.
6. What’s your strategy toward more intentional kindness? Ex: how about creating a margin in your day to be extraordinarily kind toward someone thus allowing for more interruptions? Create a plan for yourself.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for our people who are in need of healing right now in the church – some are sick. Some are distressed from losing something. Pray for God’s Hesed to be known in their lives and through the hands and feet of Christ’s church.

“Our Strength in Meekness”

Ephesians 4:25-32 and Psalm 37:1-11

January 26, 2020

Sermon Series: “7 Virtues: A Life of Moral Beauty”

Virtue - Meekness

Rev. Tammie Veach

THE BIG IDEA

Our virtue for this week is meekness, a word with a very different meaning in the Bible than that of today (see question 2). The deadly sin that stands against it is anger, the kind of anger that leads to rage or sin.

GETTING STARTED

1. What are some of your favorite activities for a cold rainy afternoon when you are not at work?
2. What do most people think of when they hear the word “meek”? How does the biblical definition differ from the common definition?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read **Psalms 37:1-11**

3. Take a look at the verbs in this passage, highlight them in your Bible. What do these words say to you about what God wants for your life?
4. Read Eph. 4:25-32. Together, find the negative action, its corresponding positive action and the motivation to change from the negative to the positive.
5. How does looking at anger as the corresponding sin help you to understand meekness?
6. How would you rewrite Matt. 5:5 to help yourself or someone else better understand meekness?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. What common things in life cause you to be offended, irritated or angry? What safeguards can you put into place to keep these from leading you into sin?

THE “EXTRA-MILE”

8. Read Psalm 37:1-11 and compare it to Mat. 5:3-12. What similarities do you see?

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *(optional)*

Additional resources can be listed here: including quotes from message, additional reading (books referred to), websites, etc.

“Your Passion, The World’s Envy”

Romans 12:11— “Do not lag in zeal. Be ardent in spirit. Serve the Lord.” (NRSV)

February 2, 2020

Sermon Series: “7 Virtues: A Life of Moral Beauty”

Virtue –Zeal

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

Sunday’s message looked at a pithy verse in Romans 12, using the NRSV of the bible (the most literal translation). This passage calls us to a virtue of living lives that are zealous before God. We’re called to embody a passionate faith. Throughout the message the words “zealous, passion, and enthusiasm” were used throughout to help communicate the meaning behind the phrase “ardent in spirit” and the command against “do not lag in zeal.” Legendary basketball player – the late Kobe Bryant – was highlighted as someone who embodied passion throughout his career. He even used it for caring for and serving others. Other examples were listed including the musician Bono, Nelson Mandela, and Oprah Winfrey. But to go a step further, Christians are meant to show passion not merely for their own personal interests (whether it be vocational, family or a hobby), but for one’s faith. A way to gauge this is to ask the question “Am I a ‘have to’ person or a ‘get to’ person?” The former lives his or her life in an obligatory way. The latter understands the precious gift of life, has an appreciation for all the mercies set before him or her by Christ, and lives enthusiastically because it’s understand he or she is a child of the promise and lives in the presence of God. A question posed for us was “How does the faith intersect with my life in a way that compels me toward a deep, life-turning conviction of faith?” Several examples were given of this including Henry’s, Lee Strobel’s, the apostle Paul, and the early church.

The sin from which “zeal” emerged was “sloth.” You’ll recall that sloth was initially understood not as being a couch potato, but rather a spiritual laziness. Neglect – in other words – of important things that pertain to one’s faith. Emotional laziness was included. Having a passionate faith is the corresponding virtue to sloth. Our faith is meant to consume every area of life.

GETTING STARTED

1. When’s a time when you remember having a deep passion for an area of your life? Describe.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read **Romans 12:11** aloud (listed above)

2. Break down the three verses and simply explain their meaning as was done during the message. Talk about their poignancy. How do they all fit together? Bear in mind the meaning for “ardent” in Spirit –

Zeontes – “Boiling” in spirit (Boiling, Ardent) in Spirit – To be deeply committed to something with the implication of accompanying desire, to be earnest, to set one’s heart on, completely intent on.

3. Look now at Revelation 3: 14-20. What does God think about a lukewarm faith? What does God want for us?

Consider the role of God shaping our lives for being passionate. What’s your feeling on that? How might we learn to interpret our lives as God conditioning us for a faith more reliant on him and to have a deer passion and vibrancy?

Think through the poverty spoken of here of the church? What’s he getting at?

LIVING IT OUT

4. Considering this quote given by Henry in the message –

“What we truly desire – what we are the most passionate about – will determine how we organize our lives.” James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God*

Is this true for you and your own faith? How would an outsider looking in gauge your life in the following –

Organizing your life around living toward higher virtue?

Practices of the faith for training your soul for receiving grace – prayer, Scripture reflection, living in community with other Christians, and serving others – including the poor?

Being emotionally present toward other people – engaging and being dialed in to others needs?

5. What’s one step closer toward having and or maintaining a “hot” (passionate, zealous, enthusiastic,” boiling over faith?

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayer for Christ’s church that we’d be known as a congregation that’s passionate in its worship and mission.

“The Single Most Difficult Passage in the New Testament?”

Matthew 5: 27-30

February 9, 2020

Sermon Series: “7 Virtues: A Life of Moral Beauty”

Virtue – Chastity

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

This message looked at the virtue of chastity and the notion of “purity of heart.” It did so drawing from the list of 7 Deadly Sins, lifting up the higher call of seeking virtue in our lives. We looked at lust – first off – by examining the passage from Matthew 5:27-30. These hard hitting words from Jesus are said to be by Jeff Cook – a scholar and pastor “the most difficult passage in the New Testament.” While that may be up for debate, what’s not is the difficult notion and teaching Jesus puts forth about the deadliness of lust for our spiritual life. Explored in this sermon was how sexualized of a society we live in where we can see the dehumanizing of women and men, their objectification. It falls short of God’s best, as does not pursuing chastity and enjoying sex in the context of marriage. This isn’t a popular teaching in society. Why would we ever compromise on an area that Scripture addresses and promotes for our own good. The question for any and every situation and relationship and area of life is “What is God’s best? What does it look like to glorify God before whom I owe my life for his grace, goodness and bounty toward me?”

GETTING STARTED

1. If you watched the Super Bowl half-time show, share what you thought of it? Was it honoring? Cultural – in the right way? Decent? Same old?

If you didn’t watch the Super Bowl half time show, share what you think about the rating system for films and what we should expect when we see films of a certain rating.

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read Matthew 5: 27-30

2. Explain Henry’s title as it pertains to the passage. Why is this passage difficult?
3. Review the references below for illumination of the passage’s meaning.
4. What’s the difference between looking and staring? Explain the effect it has. Elaborate on how lust may be different for us all when it comes to another – maybe not another’s body, but it’s the romantic idea of a person we lust after, for example. Or perhaps it’s having an image like someone – to be more fit. Think about how lust applies to longing for image and can damage heart, mind and soul.
5. This biblical teaching is that sex is intended for marriage. This includes verses as such that follows –

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2: 23-24

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled. Hebrews 13:4

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 7: 1

6. Why do people decide to not do what is God’s best? Why might God intend such for our lives?

Consider this quote from the film Vanilla Sky “When you have sex your body makes a promise whether you do or not.” Julianna, played by actress Cameron Diaz
What’s this getting at? Why is it an important statement?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. Consider the declaration of the goodness of God in the first chapters of Genesis when he created the world and said “It is good.” How can our view of God be distorted by not promoting a healthy thought life and seeking virtue?

8. Consider your thought life. Look at this quote referenced that’s by Martin Luther –

“You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.” Martin Luther, 16th C.

Also, consider Philippians 4:8 “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.”

Is there an area here where you can grow?

9. If there’s a level of comfort to do so, talk about any way this teaching challenged you from Matthew 5:27-30 and that of the virtue of living chaste lives and having pure hearts.

THE “EXTRA-MILE”

10. Remember that our God invites us to restoration. If there’s an area of life pertaining to any of the above, bring it to Christ and invite restoration. Joining in God’s Restoration always begins with our own lives.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for our nation’s political climate and that our express of our own faith is honoring as we consider the viewpoint of others. Pray also for the virtue of our nation, that we seek the higher good.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“It is not looking at another person that is condemned; epithumia (lust) is sustained, willful looking. What we call ‘staring.’ All looking has a purpose, and the looking that Jesus condemns here, specifically is lustful looking, staring with the intent to possess or at least to burn. The other person is no longer a unique human being, she or he is now simply a kindling, tinder – a thing. Jesus’ concern is the human being and her or his valuation,” - Dale Bruner, The Christbook.

“Lust is like an all-consuming cloud- a place where our frame of mind is smothered by a furnace of unrealistic fantasies. Most of us can relate to the flames of lust and to the image of trash, and so Gehenna – a trash dump (hell) - is an appropriate picture. But we shouldn’t think of hell simply as a location. Hell is above all else an absence of reality – of what ought to be. It’s where fantasy reigns. Its only substance is illusion. If separated from God, we are left to feed on phantom foods that tickle our appetites but have no meaningful substance. Lust offers such a meal. Hell is the sphere where God is not seen nor enjoyed, - nowhere to be found,” - Jeff Cook.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” Matthew 5:8

“What the Super Bowl and the Academy Awards Have in Common”

1 Corinthians 9: 24-27 (NRSV Translation – most literal)

February 9, 2020

Sermon Series: “7 Virtues: A Life of Moral Beauty”

Virtue – Chastity

Rev. Dr. Henry Hansen

THE BIG IDEA

This message looks at the verse, “Run in such a way that you may win it (the race)” and how we define wins in our own lives. Defining the win is important because then we can achieve the amount of self-control or “temperance” (our virtue of the week) we need to get there. Temperance is the opposite of gluttony. Gluttony was understood as indulging in food (see definition by Thomas Aquinas below). Gluttony was deadly because it spoils one’s appetite for righteousness, leads to ingratitude and can lead also to other sins such as sloth. Eventually gluttony was understood as excess in any area. This message, however, spent time talking about how our food habits are important. Christians – who believe the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and hold fast to the belief in a bodily resurrection should care deeply about their habits of food. Our consumption matters to God. But gluttony can also be excess in work, hobbies like exercise or something else, and being carried away with an area of life that removes emphasis of an important area. Thus, self-control or temperance is about maintaining good health to stay the course. And Paul did this because he defined tangible “wins” in his life and sought to meet them. Like a runner in a race, we must train and prepare to excel in areas of life – assuming it magnifies God in so doing.

GETTING STARTED

1. When’s a time you established a “win” or goal and met it. What was involved to get there?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read 1 Corinthians 9: 27-30. See also:

2. While working with the Jews, I live like a Jew in order to win them. (1 Corinthians 9:20)

In the same way, when working with Gentiles, I live like a Gentile, outside the Jewish Law, in order to win Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 9:21)

So I become all things to all people, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible. (1 Corinthians 9:21)

To win the prize of the heavenly call. - Philippians 3:14

3. Describe the notion of running a race and how you think it’s useful to apply to our faith.

Consider for example – that time is limited. Talk about form. Talk about training. Flesh out any and every example you can of the goal of a race, the hardship of a race, what it symbolizes and so on.

4. Consider the meaning of self-control. *Root Meaning (Enkrateia) - “power over oneself” or “self-mastery”*

How does this fit into running a race? Give examples.

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

5. Talk about gluttony for a bit. What do you think about the Christian’s care over his or her body? Consider for example what we know from nutritionists about the effects of inflammation in one’s body through processed food. Why should Christians care about that? How about eating whole foods? What about all things in moderation? Talk about bodily health and all the benefits it can have for the kingdom of God and God’s use of our lives when we care for ourselves.

What about other areas of excess? What about work? Other?

6. Describe “wins” for you. What are kingdom-sized and kingdom-driven “wins?” Examine the following –

In your marriage (if that applies)?

In your vocation?

Parenting or grand parenting? Ex: parenting toward character development over achievement. Spending one trip per year with a child or grandchild to build them up. Reconciling with someone. Passing down faith and sharing your faith story.

Friendships? Ex: Connecting in a meaningful week, with a friend who builds your character? Visiting with a friend in another location. Speaking truth to someone’s life?

Why are defining “wins” important?

THE “EXTRA-MILE”

7. Set goals this week that define wins in areas in life. Go above and beyond – look toward the degree to which they truly reflect the good and beautiful nature and character of God. How are they more deep and meaningful than the average? Then share them with your group and be accountable to meeting them.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for our Life Groups to flourish. We had a great speaker named Kim Engelmann at our church after worship invest in our Life Group leadership. Pray for our groups to proliferate, grow deep, and extend their reach.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Eating too soon.](#)
- [Eating too expensively](#)
- [Eating too much.](#)
- [Eating too eagerly](#)
- [Eating too daintily](#)
- [Eating wildly](#)

[Thomas Aquinas \(Dominican Friar, Priest, Theologian\) on Gluttony, 14th C](#)

“Odd for God”

Luke 12:13-34
February 23, 2020
Sermon Series: “7 Virtues”
Rev. Shannon Coon

THE BIG IDEA

This week’s virtue is generosity. Paul tells us in Colossians that if we are going to work toward cultivating the virtues in our lives, it involves “putting to death” the hindrances – the sins and vices – which keep us from growing more like Christ. If we are going to cultivate the virtue of generosity in our lives, we need to take a closer look at the sin of greed and how that can reside in our hearts. At the same time, we can take active steps to work on being more generous.

GETTING STARTED

The author David Brooks spent years collecting data about our culture and society. And the data shows a broad shift from being a culture that encouraged people to think humbly of themselves to a culture that has encouraged people to think of themselves as the center of the universe. He writes about this in his book *The Road to Character*, and calls this phenomenon “The Big Me.” Can you give examples from our culture or society which exemplifies “The Big Me” condition?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read **Luke 12:13-34**:

1. In verses 13-21, Jesus engages with a couple brothers about greed and then tells the parable of a rich man, a “fool.” What is “timeless” about the brothers and about the rich character in the parable?
2. Verses 22-34 are some of the most beautiful reassuring words from Jesus. What is the underlying human emotion that Jesus is trying to address? What do you suppose it has to do with greed?
3. Notice how Jesus points out that the “pagan world” runs after the things of this world. He is calling us as believers to be different than that (perhaps to be a little “odd for God”). What reassurance does Jesus give to us if we follow his words?
4. Jesus tells the crowd to sell their possessions and give to the poor. How does this act of generosity counter-act the tendency in our hearts to be greedy?

What is greed? The Latin word for greed is “avarice,” which means caring too much. Greed is being too attached to money and the things money can buy.

What is generosity? The Latin word for generosity is “liberality” which is where we get our English word “liberty” from. Generosity is being free from the attachment to money and possessions.

Greed says: “Move. More. Mine.” Generosity turns that upside-down.

Greed is being out for oneself. “Move over, I’ve got stuff to do, money to earn.” Generosity is an act of justice. It’s because excessive acquiring and hoarding possessions can deprive others of what they deserve or need. Greed causes an indifference or callousness toward those in want. Thomas Aquinas said, “Avarice is a sin directly against one’s neighbor since one person cannot over abound in external riches without another person lacking in them, for temporal goods cannot be possessed by many at one time.” Generous people see the ones around them who have less and they share.

Greed is about “more” because greed doesn’t know when enough is enough. And when money and possessions become the goal, we shift our reliance upon God to a reliance upon goods. Our tendencies to trust in money for happiness and security undercut our trust in God. Generous people recognize that there is no temporal good that can provide satisfaction at the soul level.

Greed focuses on “mine” and lives with close-fistedness. But generous people are able to have a healthy detachment from money and the possessions of this world because they know that everything is a gift from God and is not really MINE. Actually, nothing in this world can really ever be described as “mine.”

Consider this quote from Christian psychologist Mark McMinn, in his book *The Science of Virtue*: “Vice elevates self to preeminence and traps us in gratifying present desires. In contrast, virtue calls us to a place of balance where we exercise control over wanton self-interest because we love God and neighbor. Virtue invites us to imagine a better self and a better world, and Christian virtue does this while being embedded in a profound love relationship with God.”

What does cultivating generosity – and any of the virtues – in our lives have to do with love?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

5. There are ways we can take a closer look at our hearts with regards to greed.
Assess your last one or two weeks and calculate how many hours you have spent on thinking about or acquiring things – going to the mall, browsing catalogs (or online!), working longer hours to get bigger paychecks, watching home improvement shows that are tempting us to upscale in ways that never would have occurred to us before, etc.
6. Look at a week, two weeks, or a month of spending (there are great apps and computer programs that make this easy) and categorize your expenditures. How much you have spent on yourself versus on other people? Take a highlighter to the things that you could have truly done without. Ask yourself why you may have spent frivolously - Are feelings of frustration or depression temporarily relieved by buying something for yourself? Does earning more money or acquiring more things create a renewed sense of power over your life?
7. There are also ways we can actively work on being more generous people.
Take a Sabbath rest from consumerism. What if you took a week – or even a whole month! – and refrained from going to the mall, looking at catalogs (especially online!), limiting your exposure to advertisements (even if it means not watching commercial television). Taking a break from constant exposure to this assault on our desire to acquire and possess helps us to become less attached to the things of this world.
8. The oldest advice “in the book” to become more generous is tithing. When you get your paycheck, you calculate 10% of that check and immediately give it to God. (If you have never done this before, could you try it with one paycheck? Or one month?) Giving in this way does two things for us. It helps us to loosen our grip on what we earn. And it is a gesture that says, this is really NOT mine. It says, my heart is with you God. Because our heart follows where our money goes.

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS