**Defy Gravity – Week 1 – The Pull of Culture**

**Message Big Idea:** Jesus reveals the way to defy the gravitational pull of our culture and live a life of generosity.

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:19-34

**NOTE: The video bumper for this message will include a reading of Matthew 6:19-34.**

**Introduction: Gravity**

*(Series Graphic)* There are just certain forces in life that seem to affect everything. If you’re a Star Wars fan, you probably immediately think of the force that gives the Jedi extraordinary abilities like levitating objects or seeing things before they happen. But I’m talking about the kind of force that *everyone* feels, not just some select group of Jedi fighters. The force I’m referring to is not seen or heard, but it impacts every one of us every day. What kind of force is it?

Gravity.

Gravity is a force that we are not consciously aware of most days. No one gets up in the morning and thinks, “I really need to make sure I experience gravity today.” However, if you step outside and your foot catches an unobserved patch of ice, you become aware of gravity very quickly!

The power of gravity, however, doesn’t stop some of us from trying to defy it, like this guy…

**VIDEO: Indoor Skydiving Fail**



He should just keep his feet on the ground! Gravity affects every area of our lives. And there is another force that I think is a lot like gravity: *(Picture)* money. Money is constantly exerting power in our lives. We don’t like to talk about it, but it’s there. We may not even consciously be aware of its effect on us, but it is constantly impacting us.

* Every month I know I’ve got to pay my mortgage.
* Every month I know we’ve got to buy groceries and gas for the car.
* Every month I know I’ve got to buy a ridiculously expensive bag of grain-free dog food because God somehow decided I should have a dog with food allergies.

It feels like we’re constantly being pulled by the gravitational force of our finances. And unlike actual gravity, most of us are very aware of the effect money has on our lives. In fact, a recent survey by Capital One found that **73% of Americans say their finances are the number-one cause of stress in life.**[[1]](#endnote-1)

When it comes to money, most of us feel like we frequently find ourselves sliding all over the ice and too often flat on our backs.

**The Pull of Culture**

****The truth is…it’s always been that way. Money has always exerted a powerful force on human beings. *(Bible page)* Jesus recognized this and addressed it in one of his most famous sermons, the Sermon on the Mount. We heard a portion of that sermon at the beginning of this message as Matthew, the tax collector and one of Jesus’ first disciples, recorded it in the book he wrote about Jesus’ life.

Jesus knew that his followers would face real challenges when it came to money. In fact, his words are as relevant today as they were 2000 years ago. They speak to the gravitational pull we feel in our culture when it comes to money. It’s a pull to *(All 3 words on screen stacked)* **HURRY**, **WORRY**, and **CONSUME**.

First, *(highlight)* **HURRY**. The gravitational pull of our culture convinces us not just to pursue stuff, but to pursue it NOW! All we have to do is watch one commercial or walk into one store to convince ourselves that we need something NOW! *(Target)* You know this feeling, right? *“I never know how much is missing from my life until I step foot in Target.”* We see something, and we instantly feel an urgency to acquire it. We hurry from one purchase to the next.

*(“For the pagans run after all these things…” Matthew 6:32)*Jesus said that pagans, that those who don’t know God, live like this…constant running after things.

Now, I’m not a fast runner, but generally if someone is running after something, they want it NOW! When it comes to money, what this gravitational pull to hurry does is take away any sort of thoughtful decision making. We convince ourselves that we need something, and we need it NOW!

But the gravitational pull of our culture doesn’t just convince us to hurry, it also fills us with *(3 words with “worry” highlighted)* **WORRY**. We find ourselves wondering:

* How much is enough?
* Will I ever have enough?
* Will it continue to be enough?

We rehearse scenarios in our heads about all the things that could go wrong to jeopardize our well-being.

*(Matthew 6:25-31)* Jesus knew we’d be pulled to worry. In this passage, he mentions the word “worry” or “worrying” four different times *(highlight)*. It’s almost as if he’s on to something! ☺ *“Jesus, how did you know I would struggle with worry?”*

It’s no secret that worry is a major struggle for many of us…and many of us are aware of our anxiety. In his book, *Worry Less, Live More*, author Richard Morgan notes how Amazon keeps track of highlights from e-books and then publishes the most popular highlights from its best-selling books. Do you know what the most highlighted passage in the Bible is? It’s this verse from Philippians 4:

**“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” -Philippians 4:6**

The popular Bible app YouVersion also said this was the most shared, highlighted, and bookmarked verse during 2019. We are an anxious people, and we know it!

Jesus knew that worry would invade our hearts and minds, and leave us empty.

Listen, I want to acknowledge that many of us experience challenging circumstances that can lead to worry. Growing up, my Dad lost his job when I was about 10 years old. I can vividly remember that as one of the few times I witnessed him distraught. *(Describe more about how it felt to go through this).*

Maybe you’ve had a similar experience. Whether it be…

* A season of unemployment without a paycheck.
* A prolonged illness that left you with a pile of medical bills.
* A business decision that didn’t pan out.

Worry is real. Many of us go through challenging circumstances.

But so many of us are pulled to worry even without extenuating circumstances. We live with a constant fear of not having enough. It can drive us to hoard and store away for that disaster that we are certain will come.

Worry focuses on the “what ifs” of tomorrow, causing us to miss the blessings of today. As writer Corrie Ten Boom says:

**“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.” -Corrie Ten Boom**

*(3 words with “consume” highlighted)* But the gravitational pull of our culture isn’t just to hurry and worry, it’s also to **CONSUME.**

Think about it… How many of us are feeling the weight of this as our credit card statements from holiday spending are rolling in? Our culture lures us into the trap of a consumptive lifestyle. What is a consumptive lifestyle? Simply spending more than we can afford. Or spending more than we should, given our other goals and priorities.

I think this happens to every one of us at one time or another. No matter how hard we grit our teeth and proclaim that we’re not going to overspend, the power of consumption takes us down. What’s most dangerous about our propensity to consume is that its effects are internal. Jesus said it this way:

**“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” -Matthew 6:21**

Like a wise old sage who can see things we can’t see, Jesus knew our appetite for money and possessions would be the chief competitor for our hearts. He warned us:

**“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” -Matthew 6:24**

Simply put, money and possessions have the power to change us. Our hearts are at stake.

Now, please don’t hear what I’m saying and think I don’t want you to have stuff. The trap of consumption is not that we have stuff. It’s that we can’t STOP wanting more stuff!

Statistics showed that in 2017 Americans spent $240 billion on goods like jewelry, watches, books, and phones. That’s twice the amount compared to 15 years ago. And guess what? We have nowhere to put all the stuff we are accumulating! There are over 52,000 self-storage units in America, twice the number compared to 20 years ago.

Our addiction to consumption reminds me of something pastor David Hansen said:

**“The essence of life today is not having – it is having to have.” –David Hansen**

*(3 Words)* Hurry. Worry. Consume. The gravitational pull of our culture will lead us to these things. I want us to understand today that there is a common thread running through all three of these. They are all about ME! They make up the **“Me-First!”** culture that we live in. They put ME in the center of my life.

And what has that led to in so many of our lives?

* Anxiety
* Failed relationships
* Overwhelming debt
* Dissatisfaction
* Emptiness

There has to be another way.

**Kingdom-First Living**

Who here remembers the old TV show: **“Let’s Make a Deal?”** There have been a few remakes, but the basic premise remains the same: Contestants dress up in the craziest costumes hoping to get picked to play the game. Then they come forward and the host, back in the day it was . . ? Right, Monty Hall. And he would walk the contestants through a series of transactions or deals that usually involved choosing one of three prizes hidden behind Door #1, Door #2 or Door #3.

So if this was “Let’s Make a Deal” and I offered you one of **two** prizes: behind Door #1 is **MORE** “Hurry, Worry, and Consume,” and behind Door #2 is a counter-cultural lifestyle that **FREES** you from “Hurry, Worry, and Consume,” which one would you pick? Who here would say, “Oh yea, I want more “Hurry, Worry, and Consume?” Anybody? No, of course not! We all want something different, don’t we? Is there anyone who wouldn’t want to discover a better way?

Jesus offers us what is behind Door #2, and it’s a counter-cultural way of life that frees us from hurry, worry, and consume.

As I mentioned earlier, Matthew, the one who recorded Jesus’ words, was a tax collector. If there was any occupation that exemplified the lifestyle of hurry, worry, and consume it was his. Tax collectors were so bent on pursuing wealth that they cheated their own people out of it. So imagine how counter-cultural these words must have sounded to Matthew when he heard them spoken by this rabbi and teacher he was beginning to center his life around.

Jesus tells us the way to defy the gravitational pull of our culture is to:

***“…seek first his kingdom...” Matthew 6:33***

Seeking the kingdom of God first means that every decision, every purchase, and every action is taken based on what our life is centered on. And when we choose to live under God’s reign and in his kingdom, then his priorities take center-stage. They are what matter most. Every decision, choice, or transaction is based on our allegiance to the king of our kingdom. **When we seek first the kingdom of God, we relentlessly pursue what is in the best interest of Jesus and his mission.**

When I married my wife, I had to make a choice to make her my one and only girl. How do you think she would’ve responded if when I proposed to her I had said, “I do want to marry you, but you need to know up front that there are a few other women that I like to spend time with on occasion. I’ll focus most of my attention on you, but once in a while there will be others.” I wouldn’t have known what hit me!

Jesus is saying, “I want your complete allegiance.” We can’t have a little Jesus here and a little Jesus there. We will never be satisfied with this life as long as we are obsessed with more, faster, and better. The only way we will find ultimate satisfaction in this life is when we seek the kingdom of God first because in doing so we will see all those other things for what they are – many of them very good things, but no longer the MOST important thing. Jesus is giving us a grid through which can make decisions about how to give, save, and live. And when we decide to seek his priorities first, he promises to take care of all the peripheral stuff that used to mean so much to us. It may not always turn out like we hoped or thought, but he promises to take care of us.

**Invitation to Defy Gravity**

Maybe this will help us see what it looks like to defy the gravitational pull of our culture when it comes to our money and possessions: *(Heading: “Me-first!”)*

* *(add - “Consume = Live. Save. Give”)* A “**Consume**” mindset tells us to *Live. Save. Give*. -- Live and get as much as you can, then save some for your future and give what’s left over.
* *(add - “Worry = Save. Live. Give”)* A **“Worry”** mindset tells us to *Save. Live. Give*. -- Save first because you never know when a crisis may occur, then live. And if there is anything remaining, sure, give that away.
* *(add - “Hurry = Live. Live . . . )* And a **“Hurry”** mindset tells us to *Live. Live* . . . and often eventually it’s . . . *(add - “Uh oh!”) Uh oh*! Jesus said, we get so busy ***“running after things”*** we don’t give **saving** ***OR*** **giving** much thought. And then one day we have that “Uh oh” moment and realize we’ve been crushed by the the gravitational pull that keeps us from truly living for our King.

Jesus says that a better way to live than the “Me-first!” way of our culture is to *(“Kingdom-first!”)* ***“Seek first the kingdom of God”***. Kingdom-first! This way involves a mindset and practices that call us to *(add)* “Give, Save, Live.”

For many of us, it sounds crazy to give first. We might even ask, *“How can I possibly give when I have yet to live or save?”* But when we give first we are, in a very tangible way saying, “I am seeking your kingdom first, God. And I trust you to give me whatever else I need in order to save for the future and live for today.”

I know making this shift can seem monumental, and so we want to provide resources and opportunities to help us defy the gravitational pull of hurry, worry, and consume and begin this “Kingdom-First” journey. In the coming weeks, we have a number of opportunities available to you… *(Slide) (promote the resources and / or classes being offered – FPU, Thrivent, Together Conference, etc.).*

*(Generosity Ladder graphic)* If you have been around Community much over the past couple of years, you know that we encourage everyone to step up onto what we the **“Generosity Ladder.”** The Generosity Ladder is a path toward seeking God’s kingdom first. And it begins when we simply choose to **“Give Something”** – a specific amount, and we commit to giving that first. The next step on the ladder is to **“Give Generously.”** When we Give Generously we are following the scriptural principle of tithing or giving back to God 10% of what we bring in. And then the last step on the Generosity Ladder is to **“Give Extravagantly.”** At this step we are giving beyond a tithe and continuing to grow in our generosity as we seek first God’s kingdom. We will talk more about the Generosity Ladder in coming weeks.

**Conclusion**

For today, let me just say that I know for some people, this topic can cause you to worry . . . and then just want to hurry up and get out of here. But let me ask you a very pointed question: If you find yourself living with a hurry, worry, and consume mindset, how is that working for you?

* Are you **truly** finding fulfillment in that?
* Would you be **open** to a different way? A way that to many may seem radical and counter cultural?
* Will you consider taking some initial steps toward seeking God’s kingdom first in how you approach your finances?

So often when it comes to this area of our lives we convince ourselves that this is something God wants **from** us – like somehow we’re going to end up on the short-end of the stick if we give first. But think about it, God doesn’t really need our stuff, our possessions, our money. Everything already belongs to him. *(Matthew 6:21)*What God really wants is your heart, and he knows that where your treasure is there is your heart will be also.

In our culture, so much of our treasure involves what we own and what we have. And while we think **we** have it, too often it truly has **us,** doesn’t it? It’s when we put Jesus at the center of our life, seeking his kingdom first – giving over to him what is already his, that we begin to defy gravity and experience freedom from hurry, worry, and consume.

**Communion Idea**

*(Matthew 6:24 on screen)* Somewhere back in the deep storage of your brain files, maybe from World History class you remember the emperor Charlemagne. Charlemagne was the most powerful European ruler of the Middle Ages, leading a people called the Franks to rule most of Europe. Under his rule, many people got baptized into the Church. It was pretty much expected of his soldiers. In fact, they would go down to the river *en masse* and take the plunge. But one source reports that there was one thing that was a bit unusual about the baptisms of those soldiers. When they would go under the water, they would hold one hand out of the water with their sword in that hand. They didn't want that hand baptized. They wanted to be free to use to that sword, which was likely their most valuable possession, to kill whoever they needed to kill.

That story makes me wonder if may be in our culture the one thing we hold out of the water of baptism isn’t a sword, but our wallet. We’ll let everything else go under, but we hold out when it comes to our finances, and consequently we never fully experience the freedom in Jesus we are meant to experience.

Every week we celebrate the price Jesus paid so we can have our freedom. And today as we remember how he gave up his life, let’s consider what we have yet to give up for him in return.

The bread represents his body and the juice represents his blood.

1. <https://www.cnbc.com/select/73-percent-of-americans-rank-finances-as-the-number-one-stress-in-life/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)