**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)* 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 were to see me step on a basketball court, you would recognize the force of gravity very quickly!

Even so, some people till insist on trying to defy the power of gravity, -- like this guy…

**VIDEO: Indoor Skydiving Fail**



He should just keep his feet on the ground! Gravity affects every area of our lives.

But 56here is another force that I think is a lot like gravity: *(Picture)* MONEY. Money is constantly exerting its 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 influencing 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 have to send one more huge heck to that crazy expensive college my daughter chose – thank goodness she only has one more year

And so it feels like I’m constantly being pulled by the gravitational force of my finances.

But 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)

**The Pull of Culture**

****And you know what…it’s always been that way. Money has always exerted a powerful force on people. *(Bible page)* Jesus recognized this and addressed it in one of his most famous teachings known as the Sermon on the Mount. We heard part it being read before I made my way up here to talk today.

Jesus knew that his followers would face major challenges when it comes to money. His words 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**.

* **Hurry** up and buy
* **Worry** over not having enough
* And **consume** as much as you can whenever you can. Why? Because you can.

First, *(highlight)* **HURRY**. The gravitational pull is not just to buy stuff, but to buy stuff **NOW**! All we have to do is see a convincing commercial or walk into an enticing 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.”* What is it about Target that leaves gives me an instant urge to acquire all sorts of stuff I don’t really even need? But we buy anyway. And we often hurry from one purchase to the next.

*(“For the pagans run after all these things…” Matthew 6:32)*Jesus said that this constantly running after stuff is no way for us to live the life he so wants for us!

But the pull of money isn’t just to hurry, it’s also to **WORRY**. *(3 words with “worry” highlighted)* We find our thoughts too often consumed with questions like . . .

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

We replay scenarios in our heads about all that could go wrong to jeopardize our financial status or well-being.

*(Matthew 6:25-31)* And again, Jesus knew we’d be pulled toward worry. And in this same part of his talk, he mentions the word “worry” or “worrying” four times *(highlight)*. He knew we would struggle with worry!

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 the most highlighted passage in the Bible? It’s these words from the Apostle Paul:

***“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 Bible app YouVersion also said this was the most shared, highlighted, and bookmarked verse in 2019.

We are an anxious people . . . and we know it!

When I was a kid I wouldn’t say we were poor, but there wasn’t necessarily an abundance either.

* I can remember a time when we started drinking powdered milk and mixing it ourselves rather than buying milk in a carton, so we could save money.
* We had a jar where we would save change, and when that jar got full we were able to go out to a restaurant for dinner.
* I wore more than my share of hand-me-downs from my older brother, Dave. And he was just a tad chunkier than me, so they didn’t usually fit too well. He would love to know I just said that.

For the most part we were ok, but those memories stay with me, and have a way of clouding my perspective a little today causing me to over-worry at times about our finances.

Maybe you’ve had a similar experience in the not-so-distant past. Maybe it was…

* A season of **unemployment** where there was no paycheck at all,.
* Or a prolonged **illness** that left you with a pile of medical bills.
* Or maybe it was a **business decision** that didn’t go as you had hoped.

Worry is real. And one of the real problems with worry is that it focuses on the “unknowns” of tomorrow, and can cause 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 maybe the gravitational pull of our culture is best summed up in this third word: **CONSUME.**

Anybody feeling the weight of your credit card statements from holiday spending? It’s **THIS** time of year when we pay for **THAT** time of year when we often spent more than we could afford.

And sometimes our spending just lacks any concern for taste or style. A while back, Ugg’s, the boot company unveiled their master plan to get men to buy Uggs. “Men in Uggs” sounds more like a SNL sketch than an advertising campaign. The company signed Patriots QB Tom Brady to endorse the boots.





I’m sorry, those are just plain UGG - LY! And I know, some of you ladies think Tom Brady could make anything look good . . . but not those boots.

An article in the Atlantic titled, “We Are All Accumulating Mountains of Things” noted how online shopping and cheap prices are turning Americans into hoarders. In 2017, Americans spent $240 billion – twice as much as 2002 on goods like jewelry, watches, books, luggage, telephones, and communication equipment – mostly non-essentials. Spending on personal care products doubled over that time period.

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**

And Jesus cautioned us about this pull to consume we he said,*(add to slide with previous quote)* ***“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)***

*(3 Words)* So yes, the gravitational pull of our culture leads us to Hurry. Worry. Consume. And there is a common thread running through all three. Sadly, they are all about ME and placing ME in the center of my world. **(“Me-First!”)**

And too what does that lead to for so many of us?

* DEBT
* DISSATISFACTION
* ANXIETY
* EMPTINESS
* And sadly a LONGING for even more . . .

Aren’t you glad you came today? ☺

Hold on because it’s not all doom and gloom - there is a better 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! I think deep down we all want something different, don’t we? Is there anyone who wouldn’t want to discover a better way if you could?

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 these words of Jesus, 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 all sorts of money. 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, better (or hurry, worry, and consume). 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. Circumstances 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 consume 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 (you know, that crisis you’re always worried about), 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 eventually it’s . . . *(add - “Uh oh!”) Uh oh*! With this mindset 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 when we realize we’ve been crushed by the gravitational pull of Me-First!

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