

"WHEN DREAMS BECOME NIGHTMARES" MATTHEW 4:8-10, 16:24-26; ECCLESIASTES 5:10-11

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Hayward United Methodist Church

Call to Worship James 4:6b-5-8,10

Do you suppose that scripture is meaningless? Doesn't God long for our faithfulness in the life he has given to us?

**But he gives us more grace. This is why it says, *God stands against the proud, but favors the humble.***

Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will run away from you.

**Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Humble yourselves before the Lord and God will lift you up.**

Prayer of Invocation 1 Peter 5:8

**Holy God, we humble ourselves before you, trusting in your love and your power to save us. Fill us anew with your Holy Spirit, that we may be strong in our inner being, self-controlled and alert. May we, like Jesus be able to resist our adversary, the devil, who as scripture says "prowls around looking for someone to devour" Make us steadfast in faith, loyal and true disciples of Christ our Lord, when we also must face the temptations of life in this world. Amen.**

The Word Matthew 4:8-10, Ecclesiastes 5:10-11, Matthew 16:24-26

Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said, "I'll give you all these if you bow down and worship me." **Jesus responded, "Go away, Satan, because it's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*"**

The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.

**When goods increase, those who eat them increase; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?**

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. **All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them.**

Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives?

**What will people give in exchange for their lives?**

Living the Word

A couple of months ago I received a flier in the mail that said 20% off on your next order, in-store or online. Since they haven't a store located within 60 miles, I decided one evening as I relaxed after dinner, to check out their 'stuff.' I first went to the blinking yellow button that said sale. I chose several items that weren't things I needed, but things I thought I had always wanted. Then I found a larger item that seemed like a really good deal so I added that to my cart. I could have quit then and been happy.

Yet, now they offered me free shipping if I would only add \$50 more. Alright then! I went into the full priced stuff and chose 4 items I might need if I ever ran out of all that I already have. Stocking up, for you know not when...a blue sign popped up – you now have free shipping. I could have been done at this point, but they had a special offer if I ordered item numbers 4 and 6 in quantities of 3 or more.

I didn't fall for this 'special deal', as I could only use 3 or more of item 6, not both 6&4, so I added 3 more items to the cart. From Hayward it is a drive to any major shopping options and they would deliver right to my door! This would save me time and running around. After all, when I moved up here almost 40 years ago, my mother-in-law bought everything from Sears and Wards Catalogs. She just wasn't as fortunate as we are because you couldn't get your grocery items and just about anything you could ever want by mail order, UPS, or Fed-ex, like we now can.

I went to check out and was shocked to see the total. Even so, it would all be here in 3-5 business days and I would have boxes waiting for me when I got home from work. I got out my credit card typed in my numbers, expiration date and that special 3 digit code. One click and it would all be mine...

## The American Dream

*What characterizes the greatest hopes, desires, and dreams of most Americans?*

For most people, the American Dream has to do with a desire for achieving success and satisfying the desire for material possessions. It is the opportunity to pursue more than what we have, to gain more than what we have, and to meet success. We tend to measure our success by the 'stuff' that we possess.

*The pursuit of immediate material pleasure*

The love of money and the things money can buy is a primary or secondary motive behind most of what we Americans do. We want to consume, acquire, and buy our way to happiness—and we want it now.

## The American Nightmare

The American Dream has become an American Nightmare because of two distinct yet related "illnesses" that affect us both socially and spiritually.

*Affluenza*

"Affluenza" is the constant need for more and bigger and better stuff—as well as the effect that this need has on us. It is the desire to acquire, and most of us have been infected by this virus to some degree.

- The average American home went from 1,660 square feet in 1973 to 2,700 square feet in 2016.<sup>1</sup>
- Today there is estimated to be 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage space in America.<sup>2</sup>

*Credit-itis*

"Credit-itis" is an illness that is brought on by the opportunity to buy now and pay later, and it feeds on our desire for instant gratification. Our economy today is built on the concept of credit-itis. Unfortunately, it has exploited our lack of self-discipline and has allowed us to feed our affluenza, wreaking havoc with our personal and national finances.

- Average credit card debt in America in 1990 was around \$3,000. Today it's nearly \$17,000.<sup>3</sup>
- The average sale is around 125 percent higher if we use a credit card than if we pay cash, because it doesn't feel real when we use plastic instead of cash.
- Credit-itis is not limited to purchases made with credit cards; it extends to car loans, mortgages, and other loans. The life of the average car loan and home mortgage continues to increase, while the average American's savings rate continues to decline.

## The Deeper Problem Within

*There is a spiritual issue behind both affluenza and credit-itis.*

Our souls were created in the image of God, but they have been distorted. We were meant to desire God, but we have turned that desire toward possessions. We were meant to find our security in God, but we find it in amassing wealth. We were meant to love people, but instead we compete with them. We were meant to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, but we busy ourselves with pursuing money and things. We were meant to be generous and to share with those in need, but we selfishly hoard our resources for ourselves. All of us have an inclination toward sin.

*The devil plays upon this inclination toward sin.*

Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). In order to destroy us, the devil doesn't need to tempt us to do drugs or to steal or to have an extramarital affair. All he needs to do is convince us to keep pursuing the American Dream—to keep up with the Joneses, borrow against our futures, enjoy more than we can afford, and indulge ourselves. By doing that, the devil will rob us of joy, make us slaves, and keep us from doing God's will.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.aei.org/publication/new-us-homes-today-are-1000-square-feet-larger-than-in-1973-and-living-space-per-person-has-nearly-doubled/](http://www.aei.org/publication/new-us-homes-today-are-1000-square-feet-larger-than-in-1973-and-living-space-per-person-has-nearly-doubled/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.statisticbrain.com/self-storage-industry-statistics/](http://www.statisticbrain.com/self-storage-industry-statistics/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.nerdwallet.com/blog/average-credit-card-debt-household/](http://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/average-credit-card-debt-household/)

- In the parable of the soils, Jesus alludes to this as one of the ways the good seed doesn't make it to fruit: Luke 8:7, 14 *"Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorns grew with the plants and choked them. As for the seed that fell among thorny plants, these are the ones who, as they go about their lives, are choked by the concerns, riches, and pleasures of life, and their fruit never matures."*
- *In the book of Mark 8:34-36 we find this: "After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives?"*
- The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy and says in 1 Timothy 6:7-10 *"We didn't bring anything into the world and so we can't take anything out of it: we'll be happy with food and clothing. But people who are trying to get rich fall into temptation. They are trapped by many stupid and harmful passions that plunge people into ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some have wandered away from the faith and have impaled themselves with a lot of pain because they made money their goal."*

## The Bible's Solution

### *We need a heart change.*

Although we receive a changed heart when we accept Christ, in a sense we need a heart change every morning. Each morning we should get down on our knees and say, "Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn't be there, and help me to be single-minded in my focus and pursuit of you." As we say this prayer and act on it, God comes and cleanses us from the inside out, purifying and changing our hearts.

### *We must allow Christ to work in us.*

Christ works in us as we first seek his kingdom and strive to do his will. As we do, we begin to sense a higher calling—a calling to simplicity and faithfulness and generosity. We begin to look at ways we can make a difference with our time and talents and resources. By pursuing good financial practices, we free ourselves from debt so that we are able to be in mission to the world. A key part of finding financial and spiritual freedom is found in simplicity and in exercising restraint. With the help of God, we can

- simplify our lives and silence the voices constantly telling us we need more.
- live counter-culturally by living below, not above, our means.
- build into our budgets the money to buy with cash instead of credit.
- build into our budgets what we need to live generously and faithfully.

By the way, I didn't push that button to finish my 20% off purchase. Instead I got up, put the 20% off flier in the trash and went to bed to sleep well. It doesn't hurt to dream as long as you know when to wake up!

## Closing Prayer

I'd like to invite you to put your hands on your lap—just extend your hands palm upright on your lap. And I would invite you to say this prayer with me, quietly under your breath.

*Change my heart, O God. Clean me out inside. Make me new. Heal my desires. Help me to hold my possessions loosely. Help me to love you. Teach me simplicity. Teach me generosity and help me have joy. I offer my life to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*