

An Enemy of My Heart

- I. It happened a couple weeks ago. I was driving on Yadkinville heading to meet someone at Starbucks (of course), and got caught by the light at the Reynolda intersection. I was just about to hit the gas and pull out in front of a slow mover when she caught my attention. She was standing on the side of the road with an oversized cardboard sign. Scrawled in handwriting I could make out only two words. "Please Help". She looked like she was in her sixties but life had not been kind...so she age as me. 35 😊 She had long blonde stringy hair falling down to her waist. Her face weathered and cracked. I quickly glanced around my car looking for the homeless bags we occasionally make here at G3. I spotted a French Fry at least a month old, a wrapper from Wendy's stained with ketchup but no bag. Now let me be completely honest here. Normally I would have just hit the gas and pulled in front of gramps. Justifying that she would only spend the money on booze. But there is a peril of being a preacher. Even if no one else listens to your sermons you do. For the simple reason you have spent hours and hours in study and preparation with it. I made the "mistake" of preaching on giving to the poor just that Sunday before. I essentially said that if we are going to follow Jesus caring for the poor is not an option. It's not like the you "pick two at Panera." "Yes, I will have the Jesus and His redemption but please hold off on the giving to the poor bit." I digress. All that to say I simply couldn't just drive off without feeling like a complete hypocrite. I looked around in the console and only spotted a few pennies and they looked corrosive. So unless she took Mastercard or Visa there was little I could do and I was running late anyway. Sure I had my wallet in my pocket but if you didn't know I have two teenage girls. So do you really think I ever have any cash? Except I did that day. I remembered I had a ten-dollar bill. Not sure how it escaped my family's attention. I was thrilled that I actually had some real green in my pocket besides the lint. So in a span of 30 seconds I had to make a decision. I so badly didn't want to part with my new friend Alexander Hamilton. I knew I wouldn't see him or any of his kind again anytime soon. But it also occurred to me much to my shock that I felt this way. Strongly. I realized that my heart was growing callous. So I decided gave Mr. Hamilton away. As much to help me as to help that desperate woman. I wanted to begin rid myself of a toxin that begun taking root in my soul.

- II. So why share that? As a pastor sometimes, I preach on topics that I don't necessarily relate to or struggle with... for example pride. I don't have a problem with pride whatsoever. In fact I am the humblest person I know. 😊 But seriously there are some topics that I don't personally wrestle with as much. But then there are some I completely do. As evidenced in that story giving had become one of them. As I reflected why this was the case, it was very clear I am selfish. Well there is a special word when we talk about being selfish with our possessions and our money. It's called greed and this is what was seeping into my heart. So this is what we are going to talk about today as some others might wresting with this too.

None of you of course but maybe you might hear something you can share with someone else. 😊 Let's talk about greed. If not for your sake for than mine. And I want to borrow extensively from Andy Stanley's short but excellent book, **Enemies of the Heart**. Andy Stanly says greed is the one most difficult sins to see in the mirror. Many of us will admit to things like an anger problem or jealously occasionally but greed, not likely. I don't know about you but when I think of a greedy person, I think of the Grinch.... especially as we get closer to Christmas. Or in the real world the New York City tycoon living in a penthouse on the 100h floor of sky scrapper. But the guy in the mirror? Never! Or according to Jesus, maybe so. Let's read **Luke 12:13-21 NIV**.

- III. So what do we have? (**image**) We find Jesus caught in a family dispute. A man, in the crowd demands that Jesus settle a financial argument with his brother. His father died and evidently his oldest bro was not giving him his due. The way the law worked back then is that the oldest surviving male would receive the balk of the inheritance. But the younger males still would be given a cut too, albeit much smaller. So the young man is simply demanding his brother give him what is fair. Being a younger brother myself, I feel for this kid. I don't detect a Grinch but just guy wanting justice. Instead of making a legal decision, Jesus delivers this warning **Luke 12: 15**. The guy wanted what was due but Jesus gives him a life lesson. Be on the lookout for greed. The way Jesus describes greed here is like it is a living thing that can ambush you when you don't expect it. As if one day you are innocently walking down the street minding your own business and boom! Greed body slams you and you left wondering what happened. Why would Jesus describe it like this? Because greed is the sneakiest of what Stanly calls "heart toxins." He says, "**greed is always looking for something good to hide behind.**" What he means is that we can justify it; "I am not greedy, I am just good with money." Or " I am just fiscally responsible." Or " I am just prudent." And just when we least expect it the Grinch and us have become one.
- IV. To let this really sink in, Jesus has story time. **VS.16** So this guy worked hard for his money, right? Actually, he doesn't. He is just fortunate to own good land. Everyone would have known back then that the farmer doesn't control the crop production. Sure you can pull the weeds and till the land but the rest is out of your hands. But honestly it doesn't matter whether he busted his agricultural buns or not. The point here is that he had a great crop. **VS. 17**. Now we get to the heart of the story. He has a decision to make. What does he do with the extra? What would we do? Before we answer, let's approach it in a different way. Let's say you are sitting on your couch one Saturday watching the Panthers beating the Patriots when you get a call. It's from a lawyer. Your heart skips a beat. Your mind goes into overdrive thinking of who might be suing you. But then the lawyer says to take a deep breath. You are not getting sued....this time at least. No, you have a third cousin who left his fortune to you. You are the sole benefactor. Two million! But it only comes to \$250,000

after federal, state, county, city taxes and of course legal fees. After the shock wears off, what do you decide to do with that money? This extra? What is the prudent thing?

- V. The question comes down to both with the farmer in the story and in our scenario just like in football is possession. Who's extra is it? Is the abundant crop the farmers? Is the \$250,000 ours? As we read **verse 17** again, how does the farmer see it? A little English lesson. He uses the possessive "my" as his possession. There is no doubt in his mind. It's his. Who owns the \$250,000? We would right? The problem is that maybe true according in a legal sense but that is not the biblical view. Paul the church planter reiterates this in quoting David **1 Cor 10:26 NIV**. This is the consistent message in Scripture. **When we get to the heart of it, we own nothing. We are stewards or managers of God's possessions.** Say what? We really own nothing. We just manage on God's behalf. And we do so for only a limited time. That brand new 4K flat screen 58 inch TV will be managed by someone else one day. As painful as it is to think about, it will not be coming with us into eternity. It has to stay here with your annoying Cousin Nelly who always smells like aged cheese. So getting back to the farmers decision, if the crop is really not his, and he is only the manager of said crop, what should he do? Put it this way how would you feel if you left cake for a snack for your three kids and asked your oldest to manage it. And when you get home you find she ate the whole thing? You would be ticked! You ask her about it, he says "I thought you left it for me." The problem, the wealthy farmer too thought he was the sole owner when in fact he was only the manger. He should have shared it but instead he scarfed it...or stored it for later scarfing.
- VI. The rich farmer has the same issue. Let's finally finish the story. **VS18-19**. No surprises here. And I would say that most of us would have done the same thing. If we think it is ours and for our consumption of course, we should store the crop or in our scenario take the \$250,000 and begin investing it, buy that new sports car, eat, drink be merry in Tahiti! Because we are greedy? No, because it is our money and we can do with it what we want. We are not grinchinng it! We are simply enjoying our abundance. Then Jesus lays down the spiritual smack in **VS 20-21**. Did we get that? The man or woman in our society who is called wise, prudent, smart, savvy, careful, God calls what? Fool. Why? First, they did a terrible job managing God's crop/wealth. Because second, they thought the crop was theirs and for their benefit alone. So they ate all the cake themselves and left none for anyone else. They were rich to themselves but poor to God and His other children.
- VII. Stanly say's greed is the feeling" I owe me. " That is what we see in Jesus' story. The farmer felt like the abundance was owed to him. Do we ever think or say things like? "I earned this! It's mine. I worked hard for it! I deserve it! It was given to me!" If we see our

possessions not as a gift from God but as something owed to us, like the farmer, we are dealing with greed in our life. This might be as much as a shock for us as it was for the younger brother who Jesus told this story. But we might say, "Ron, this is the American way. To think otherwise is like...communism!" No. Communism is the economic theory the state owns everything. The biblical economic theory is God owns everything. This isn't thinking like Lenin or Marx but like Jesus. Please understand, I am just the messenger. This is hard for me too. But to ignore this means we will have to answer to God one day. And He will not call us fiscally responsible, He will call us fool. And fool here in the original context is not simply someone who does dumb things occasionally. It means to act in a way opposite of God and His pattern of living. I don't mind being called a fool by people, neighbors even friends but that is not what I want to hear from the One who made me.

- VIII.** So what do we need to do to rid ourselves of us this heart toxin? Deal with this "I owe me" mentality? There has to be both a change of mindset and this will lead to a change of behavior. If you and I are serious about dealing with greed we need to go home today and get in quiet place and pray "God I am sorry for thinking what I have is mine. **Help me to stop seeing myself as an owner but rather a manager of your possessions.**" And as we continue to pray this will begin to happen. The next time there is abundance, we will catch ourselves before thinking "wow, how can I spend this extra on me?" And rather consider "God, what do you want me to do with the extra?" I know people who do this. And these folks are not poor people. They are by most standards very well off. But they got this biblical mindset. I have had someone said to me "Ron, I had a large bonus this year. I am trying to figure out who God wants me to give it to." I was shocked. I never even considered such a question. But they got it. They realized they were not the owners; they are simply the managers of God's property.
- IX.** And once we are able to make this mental shift or better yet, to help us to make this mental shift, we need to start changing our behavior. The practice of generosity is the Christian antidote to greed. But why do we resist? I agree with Stanly. He says at the core it's fear, the fear of not having enough. And that was the case with the farmer. What if there is a drought next year? What if I lose my job? What if the economy tanks again? But as Christ followers, we are not to live in fear but walk in faith. Trusting that God will provide as He uses us to provide for others. So we need to give even if we don't feel like it. I love what Stanly says here "***Don't wait until God changes your heart to begin giving. Giving is the way God chooses to change our hearts. As your heart changes your attitude and feelings will follow suit. God loves a cheerful giver, but he will put your money to good use whether your cheerful or not.***" P. 154 EOH. It just says give. Whether we are feeling it or not. Give and then our hearts will catch up.

- X.** But watch out for this greed loop hole. I personally have struggled with this. We are talking about finding extra at the end of the month, right? But what if I don't have any extra to give. What if I am eating beans and rice the last few days before payday. I am rationing tp. It's bad! Here is the thing. Greed might surprise us but we can fight back with what I shared a few weeks ago planned generosity. How? This might mean we don't eat out as often, don't have the super deluxe supreme cable plan, shop at second hand stores for our clothes, or buy the generic cheerios, "circle O's". We do this, so we can have abundance to share with others. We can prevent the greed ambush by planned generosity. How much? The bible talks percentage. Why? An amount incredibly generous given by you would probably be incredibly stingy by Bill Gates. That is why we say here at G3 give in proportion to our income...so we are not still giving the same amount at 50 what we gave when we were 18 working at McDees.
- XI.** Finally, if generosity is the antidote to greed, thankfulness is the vaccine. Several years ago, I went to Guatemala. To prepare, I had to go to the Infectious disease clinic to get my vaccines. I am not a germaphobe, but I was that day. I tried using my feet for everything, so I didn't have to touch anything. Made using the bathroom rather awkward. I also sat as far as possible from every other patient and tried not to breath period. I was given several vaccines for diseases that have been eradicated in the States. As I thought about it, I will take a vaccine any day over an antidote. Why? I prefer not to get hepatitis B, typhoid, the bubonic plague in the first place. To get the cure, you have to contract the disease. The same goes with thankfulness and greed. Where generosity can eradicate greed from our heart, thankfulness can keep it at bay. A thankful person is unlikely to become a greedy person. And if are a follower of Jesus we should be the most thankful people of them all. So greed is the sense I owe me. The cure, planned generosity. That is why I gave to that women the other day, not because I am a spiritual giant. Far from it. The vaccine is thankfulness. Let's be rich to God, because really it's all his anyway. Otherwise one day, He will call us fool.