

# More, Part 1: Freedom

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**VIDEO: CLIP FROM WALL STREET “MORE”** Start immediately after choir anthem (use sermon series promo but delete the dates of the upcoming messages. End the clip with the word: “More”)

We all want more. The question is what do we want more of? Do we choose to pursue more of those things that will lead us bondage and stress? Or do we choose to pursue those things that will lead us to freedom and peace?

We are all familiar with the long running TV show, “Wheel of Fortune.” On the wheel are several dollar amounts that a person receives for selecting a correct letter to spell out a word or phrase. Also on the wheel are some things that create problems for the contestants: “bankrupt” or “lose a turn.” Nick Parker has built us a Wheel of Fortune for this series of messages. On the wheel are eight things that lead to financial freedom and eight things that lead to financial bondage. Many people live their lives based upon the “Wheel of Fortune.” Whether they experience freedom or bondage is a matter of chance and luck. Let’s give it a spin and see if we land on “bondage” or “freedom.”

Financial stress is one the major things that robs us of peace. This series of messages will look at God’s principles for handling our freedom that will lead us to freedom. Jesus knew that this was a major problem in our lives. He talked about money and possessions more that he talked about faith or love. Jesus wants us to experience financial peace. Listen to his words from the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”  
Matthew 6:25-27

**VIDEO: Commercial of man “in debt up to his eyeballs”**

Our desire for more and more stuff can lead us to the bondage of debt. We want more than we can afford and so we purchase on credit and at some point we realize that we are in debt up to our eyeballs and the stress becomes overwhelming.

If our desire is for more stuff we are in bondage to fear. Jesus said,  
“Do not worry about your life.” How much time do we spend worrying about money? Some worry about not having enough money. What if I get sick for an extended period of time and can't pay my bills? What if my car breaks down, and I can't afford to fix it? What if I can't afford my medications or rent or utilities? We receive multiple requests every week from people who cannot afford the necessities of life. The majority of them are in that situation because of things they could not control. Some of them are in that situation because of mismanagement of their finances. Do you worry that you might not have enough?

Others worry because they are afraid they will lose their money. They have saved and invested; prepared for college tuition for the kids and for retirement. Then along comes 2008 and the stock market plunges 30 percent. The median price of houses plummeted causing many persons to be “upside down” in their mortgages—owing more than their homes are now worth. Today there are more fears that we could face an even more severe recession. If the European economy collapses, it will devastate our economy as well. If Iran cuts off supply routes for oil, gasoline prices could triple. If we have another drought year in West Texas it could cause bankruptcy for many in the agriculture business—not just farmers but all the related businesses that serve them. It could have a serious impact on our local economy. We hear lots of doom and gloom and talk and dire predictions and it creates fear. “What if?”

Jesus wants us to experience freedom from fear. To those who worry about not having enough he says: “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or wear. Look at the birds of the air; they do sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can worry extend your life a single minute?” The key Jesus says is to trust in God’s provision. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus instructed us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Notice that Jesus said “daily bread”. He did not say “Give us a freezer filled with meat for the winter.” He did not say, “Give us a pantry stocked with food for six months.” He said, “daily bread”. When we were in the Congo we saw persons who lived on about \$1.50 a day. They were subsistence farmers who grew barely enough food to feed their families. They had nothing. Yet they were filled with incredible joy. They trusted God to take care of them one day at a time. Jesus went on to say in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Fear of not having enough can consume our lives. Jesus says the antidote to fear is to trust him for our needs one day at a time.

Jesus also wants us to experience freedom from the fear of losing what we have. He said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” (Matthew 6:19-20) Our bondage to fear is the result of the source of our worth. If we believe our value is determined by our net worth, then we are driven to always have more money. If our net worth declines

then we feel worth-less. Jesus said that our value is not determined by our financial statement. He told us to look at how God takes care of the birds of the air and plants of the field and then asks: “Are you not of much more value than they?” Our value comes from our identity as a child of God. We are of infinite value to our Creator simply because we are his children. Parents don’t love their children because of the size of their bank accounts. They love their children simply because they are their children. The same is true in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. His love is a gift—we cannot earn it, and we do not deserve it. But no matter how much we have or how little we have, we are of infinite value to him. How much are we worth to him? We are worth him laying down his life on a cross that we might be forgiven of our sins and could have an eternal relationship with him. We cannot buy a relationship with God. We do not earn a relationship with God by achieving a certain status in the world. We can lose everything and still know that we are the apple of God’s eye. When our worth comes from God and not our stuff, we experience freedom.

Our desire for more money results in bondage to greed. Greed is defined as “the excessive desire for more wealth.” It is interesting that we never consider ourselves wealthy because we are always comparing ourselves to persons who have more. The guy in the Wall Street video spoke a profound truth when he identified his number as “more.” We are never satisfied with what we have. We are driven to make more money. Greed drives people to make risky investments they cannot afford to take. Greed drives people to invest in things that are too good to be true—and they usually are. Many have found themselves to be

victims of Ponzi schemes. Greed is considered one of the seven deadly sins. It causes us to become obsessed with increasing our bank account and defending it all costs. It is one of the most destructive of spiritual forces. It flows from the darkest part of our souls that believes money is the solution to all problems and that wealth is the key to our worth as a person. But all that stuff creates bondage.

In ancient days, when the king of Siam had an enemy he wanted to torment and destroy, he would send that enemy a very unique gift: - a white elephant—a live albino elephant. These animals were considered sacred, so the recipient of the elephant had no choice but to take care of the gift. This elephant would take an inordinate amount of the enemy's time, resources, emotions and finances. Over time, the enemy would destroy himself because of the extremely burdensome process of caring for the white elephant. This is the origin of the "white elephant" expression. A white elephant is something whose cost far exceeds its value. A white elephant gift is something that is totally useless.

All our stuff is really a white elephant. When you evaluate the amount of effort we spend maintaining, repairing, replacing and paying for our stuff—it really becomes something that destroys our lives. We are so distracted by our stuff that we forget what really matters.

Jesus wants us to experience freedom from greed. Giving is the key to overcoming our bondage to greed. "Give and it shall be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into you lap." Greed drives us to hold on to what we have and to seek more. Greedy people are selfish people. Jesus says the way to be free of greed is to start

giving generously. When you invest your money in God's work—storing up treasure in heaven—you break the chains of greed on your soul. When you give to God the first 10 percent of your income, you take a huge step of faith. You are saying to God, "Out of gratitude for what you have given me, I present this gift to you. I trust you to provide for my needs." And God promises to bless you far beyond what you give. When we refuse to give, we are on our own financially. All we have are our own resources, and we are in bondage to them. When we give, God promises to provide for us. We have the resources of God to handle life's downturns and difficulties. Giving sets us free from greed and opens the windows of heaven to pour blessings into our lives.

The pursuit of more stuff also results in bondage to a false sense of security. We are the most affluent society that has ever lived in all of history. Everyone in this room is wealthier than 95 percent of the world's current population. Because of our resources, we feel a certain sense of independence. If you have a healthy savings account for an unexpected emergency, you feel relatively secure. If you have diversified your investments, you feel that you can survive the down turns of the market over the long haul. Our wealth can give us a false sense of security. Many people today do not feel the need for God. We can take care of ourselves. It is a myth of autonomy that says, "I don't need anyone and no one is going to intrude upon or control my life."

Jesus told a story about a man who felt financially independent.

<sup>16</sup> And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup> He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'<sup>18</sup> "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I'll say to

myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."  
Luke 12:16-21

This guy thought that more stockpiles of his crop would take care of his every need for years to come. He could relax and have fun. He was totally independent. Jesus said he was not rich toward God. Because he was self-sufficient, he felt no need for God. But he was in bondage to a false sense of security.

Jesus says freedom is experienced when we recognize our dependence upon God. Everything that we have and that we are is a gift from God. There is no such thing as a "self-made man" or "one who pulls himself up by his own bootstraps." It is God's grace that has provided everything that we have. When we recognize him as the Source of everything and that we are totally dependent upon him, true freedom comes. What matters is not how much more stuff or money we accumulate. What matters is how much of God we experience.

What do you want more of? Do you want more stuff? Or do you want more of God? One will result in bondage. The other will result in freedom.