

Have you ever had to run away from danger? During my year spent living in Torreón, Mexico, I would often bike to work. There was a pit bull that regularly roamed the neighborhood. The dog was dangerous; it was known to chase after people and bite them. He chased after me on several occasions. The only way to stay safe was to pedal my bike as fast as I could to get to safety.

What is it that pursues you that you should be running away from? Paul warns us about greed. Greed and materialism seek to replace comfort found in God's promises with short-lived creature comforts. Paul reminds Timothy a few verses earlier that **"we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it."** We need to understand that greed is not measured by net worth. A widow with two mites can be greedy. A millionaire can be generous. Greed instead applies to how we approach the physical blessings of this life. Greed trusts in gifts, rather than the giver. Greed wants what God hasn't given.

Greed and materialism pursue us! They are not passive; they are demonic forces of this broken world, determined to drive a wedge between us and our God. Greed is a threat that needs to be run away from! Passivity toward materialism isn't an option. Paul urges us to flee from greed as if it were a monster trying to do us harm...because that is what it is! Think about all the tactics that this monster uses to track us down today. He chases after us through constant advertising, through attempts to keep up with the lifestyles of others, through sports gambling, through envy produced by social media, through the fear of missing out, through obsession with experiences, and through anxiety about financial security. Greed is unrelenting! None of us is immune to its attacks.

The opposite of fleeing something is to pursue it. While many give their lives to the pursuit of more of this world's wealth, Paul suggests a different pursuit for people of God. He urges us to pursue justice in our behavior toward God and our neighbor. He urges us to actively pursue a deeper faith in God. He urges us to chase after selfless love that strives to put God and neighbor first. He urges us to pursue patience and gentleness in our interactions with God and our neighbors.

Think about how different each of those things is from a pursuit of greed.

If I am driven by greed, and justice stands in the way of my getting ahead, I will be motivated to act unjustly. I might cheat on my taxes. I might overcharge someone for my goods and services. I might extort and steal. I might bribe and manipulate.

Greed conflicts with faith, too. It tries to supplant faith, which puts its hope in God, with a hope that centers my feelings of security in the accumulation of wealth.

Greed conflicts with selfless love because greed encourages us to put our own interests ahead of the interests of others.

Greed conflicts with patience, because it demands immediacy in acquiring those things that we want, rather than being content to receive physical blessings on God's timetable.

Greed conflicts with gentleness because the language of greed is one of dominance and asserting one's own will over others in an effort to get ahead.

Understanding these differences helps us see that a Christian cannot be indifferent toward greed. Our capitalist culture may promote greed, but here is where our God encourages us to be uniquely countercultural. Paul suggests that you are either pursuing greed or fleeing from it. You are either pursuing justice and faith, or you are acting in ways that lead you away from them!

Greed stalks us. The quest for more is something that lurks in every human heart. If we are not committed to fleeing from it, it will make its home in our hearts, and it will not be satisfied until it has consumed us whole. It is demonic, a monster that desires to have free rein of our souls and rob us of the salvation that is ours in Jesus.

It is also a demonic force that we routinely overlook. We don't have a problem identifying that certain sins of the flesh are wrong. But when listing sins that are dangerous and deadly to faith, greed is so often overlooked! In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul lists greed right alongside other notable sins of the flesh. He says, **"Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the**

kingdom of God.” Why is it that we often spend more of our time focusing on the other public sins that Paul lists, while ignoring greed? Is it possible that we have allowed ourselves to develop a dangerous blind spot to this specific type of sinful behavior? Is it possible that we don’t want to seriously address the materialism that pervades not only our culture, but our own hearts?

What makes greed so dangerous is that it isn’t as readily recognizable as some of those other sins Paul lists, like the public sins of sexual immorality or drunkenness. Greed is a sin of the heart. It lurks within our hearts, hidden from others in our thoughts and feelings. That makes it really hard to address. Sure, there are the obvious examples of greed that are recognizable in our world, but we don’t always immediately recognize when we have given greed a foothold within our own hearts. Recognizing our greed requires intentional, godly self-reflection.

Here we see why Paul is so adamant with his warnings to Timothy. He doesn’t want his young coworker to get lured into complacency. He urges him to fight back! To struggle inwardly against greed! To run away from it! And to take hold of eternal life!

But you might be thinking, "I thought eternal life was already mine through baptism and faith. Why does Paul say to take hold of it?"

It is true that we already possess eternal life in Christ. That was made certain at the cross, and made ours personally through the promises God made to us in our baptisms. Yet we do not yet possess this eternal life in all of its fullness. We have it by promise. We await it by sight. Paul is not telling Timothy to earn eternal life. What he is encouraging him to do is to cling tightly to the gift God has already placed in his hands, and to flee those things that might threaten to loosen his hold on that gift.

Paul urges Timothy to do everything in his power to take hold of what is eternal. The stuff of this world is temporary; it will all be kindling on the day the Lord returns. Having an eternal mindset would help us see through greed’s false promises of security and safety. Knowing of God’s salvation helps us see worldly wealth as a tool that God has given to me to feed and clothe my family, and care for my neighbor. That’s all it ever can be, a tool designed to accommodate temporary needs!

Paul alludes to Timothy's confession, which likely refers to a confession he made at the time of his baptism. In doing so, he points out how the things that greed promises couldn't be more different from the promises that God had made to him in baptism. Where greed says, "you need more", baptism says, "you already have everything you will ever need". Where greed says, "you need to seek out security", baptism says, "Christ has secured you." Where greed says, "your identity is tied to what you possess", baptism says, "you are a redeemed child of God."

Paul also holds up Jesus' confession before Pontius Pilate as a source of comfort and confidence. What confession is he referring to? When Jesus was before Pilate, he confessed, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Think for a moment about what Jesus is saying through that confession and what it means for us! We have not always fled greed. Sometimes we have chased it. We have envied, hoarded, worried, and trusted money more than God. But Jesus never did. Standing before Pilate, he could have grasped earthly power and wealth. He could have claimed earthly glory. He could have avoided the cross altogether. Instead, he held fast to his Father's will and laid down his life for greedy sinners. The One who never clung to earthly treasure gave up heaven's riches so that we might inherit an eternal kingdom. Jesus kept his eyes focused on eternity, and in doing so, he helped us see where our confidence can be found. Not in the pursuit of earthly wealth and influence, but in the eternal kingdom that is ours in Christ.

That's why Paul wraps up this portion of Scripture by saying, **"I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen."** Keeping Timothy's eyes on Jesus' eternal rule and kingdom promised to him through Jesus life, death, and resurrection would help him flee the false promises of worldly greed. All the wealth of the kingdoms of the world could never compare to the security that was his as an heir to the kingdom of God.

This is Paul's encouragement to us as well. He urges us to view all of our life's pursuits with an eye on eternity. This perspective gives us the strength to

resist greed's deadly siren song. Greed can't deceive us if our hearts are focused on the eternal promises of Christ.

As you plan your family's monthly budget, what might it look like for you to have an eye on eternity and Jesus' rule over all things? What might it look like for you to have an eye on eternity as you plan for retirement? What might it look like for you to have an eye on eternity when you receive an unanticipated influx of earthly physical blessings? What might it look like to have an eye on eternity when you receive an inheritance? What might it look like for you to think of Jesus' eternal rule when you hear the news about the latest Powerball jackpot? What might it look like for you to have an eye on eternity when watching advertisements for gambling apps like FanDuel or Kalshi? Actively and intentionally fleeing from greed will change how we approach each of those situations.

Paul even gives some examples of what fleeing from greed might look like for those who have been blessed with an abundance of physical blessings in the verses after our text. He encourages Timothy to speak to the wealthy and **“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”**

There again, Paul urges his readers to keep an eye on eternity, so that we may take hold of life that is truly life. To cling to a life that lasts. A life that is ours in Christ. He specifically encouraged us to be generous, hospitable, and charitable. Which leads us to one last important application for us to consider. One of the ways we flee from greed is by letting go of the things that greed tells us to cling to. The confidence we have in Jesus motivates us to loosen our purse strings and money clips in service to God and to our neighbor. It teaches us to let go, rather than cling to wealth for our comfort. We can act generously, knowing that our God, who rules the heavens and the earth, is more than capable of providing for us.

Now, let me be clear, this isn't a call for you to renounce every physical blessing you have received from God. This isn't a call to live like an ascetic monk from the Middle Ages. God has given us many of these physical blessings to care for our temporary, earthly needs. Nor is this a call to empty your savings or retirement accounts. Wise stewardship of the blessings God has

given you so that your physical needs are met in your later years is not the issue here, as long as such stewardship maintains an eye firmly fixed on eternity. Our God doesn't tell us to renounce all of our physical possessions, but he does urge us to stop clinging to them as if they were our source of hope and confidence. He also helps us see that some of what he gives us, he has given us so that we might share with others. Sharing the gifts given to us is one way that our God intends to bless your neighbor through you!

One day, all of the things that greed promises us will disappear. The money in our bank accounts will one day belong to someone else. The homes we worked so hard to acquire will pass into other hands. The investments we watched so carefully will no longer matter. Even our own bodies will return to the dust from which they came.

But the kingdom that Jesus won for you will remain. The God who called you by name in baptism will still reign. The Savior who stood before Pontius Pilate and made the good confession for you will still be King of kings and Lord of lords. That changes everything!

It means we do not have to spend our lives clinging desperately to things that cannot last. We do not have to be ruled by fear or driven by the endless desire for more. We are already rich beyond measure. In Christ, our sins are forgiven. In Christ, we are God's beloved children. In Christ, an eternal inheritance has been reserved for us that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

So flee from what cannot save. When that dog chased me in Mexico, I pedaled for safety as fast as I could. Paul says that's how Christians treat greed. We flee from it. We flee into the arms of the King whose kingdom cannot be taken away.

Fight the good fight of faith, friends. Take hold of the life that is truly life. And keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords. For all the wealth of this world cannot compare with the treasure that is already yours in him. Amen.