

So how many of you stood in line this week, or contributed to the office pool, for a chance at the Powerball jackpot?

What were you expecting for your \$2.00 contribution? Did you have dreams of retiring early, buying a bigger house, getting a fancy car, putting your kids through college; maybe even paying off the church's debt? Let's be honest; how many of you really thought you'd win with the odds of 1 in a 175 million. Your chance of being struck by lightning is better!

I was not one of those people who stood in line.

Lotteries, Powerball or any other kind, are one game that I've never played; and I never intend to play. That is a personal decision I made long ago, sort of like not drinking coffee!

But lotteries are big business in the US and around the world. In 2011 Americans spent over \$65 Billion dollars on a chance at fortunes. As far as I know, I've only ever met one person who had a big pay day- and compared to some recent jackpots, you'd have to say their winnings were rather small. (BTW, they never let their good fortune change them. They continued to work, they helped out their family, and they made many wise donations that aided children throughout the community.)

Unfortunately, there are a lot of stories of individuals who won millions only to lose it nearly overnight. In the wake of their sudden windfall they destroyed their marriages, squandered fortunes on addictions, and in many cases today are living from paycheck to paycheck. It is a long way from the lavish lifestyles they hoped to achieve by buying that ticket.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/17-lottery-winners-who-blew-it-all-2013-5?op=1>

I had an interesting discussion some time ago with someone about my position on lotteries, and gambling in general. One of the things I mentioned was that I thought it was a waste of money. That individual made a good point; you could consider a lot of things a waste of money.

Have you been to the movie theatre lately? They charge you exorbitant rates for a bag of popcorn that I imagine cost them a fraction of the price they charge. There are a lot of people who would consider the movie and popcorn a waste of money...but I go the movie & buy the popcorn anyway.

Think of that expensive dinner you ate recently. Was that really worth the price you paid? Some people would consider that dinner a waste of money.

And there are other things in our lives that someone would consider a waste of money- cable TV, exotic vacations, hobbies, cars...the list could go on and on.

So I could try to convince you that buying the next Powerball ticket is a waste of your money; but we could just as easily insert any number of other items. What I want to challenge you to look at this morning is the deeper issue associated with how we, as disciples of Jesus, steward the money/resources that God has entrusted to our care.

After all, taking a chance in the game of life for the temporary gain of wealth is a bet that few will win and fewer still will know how to navigate with wisdom should they suddenly find themselves with more money than they ever imagined.

That at least seems to be the wisdom of King Solomon, who was considered one of the world's wealthiest men. Listen to what he wrote about money in Ecclesiastes 5:10

*Whoever loves money never has enough;  
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is  
meaningless.*

The reason a person pays the two dollars to purchase a Powerball ticket is simple: they think that Solomon was wrong. They believe that possessing a little more than what they have today will bring satisfaction.

There is an old story that someone once asked John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men in the world at the time, how much money was enough. To which Mr. Rockefeller replied 'Just a little bit more.'

'Just a little bit more.' And so the person who plops down the \$2.00 hopes that his/her wager will give them just a little bit more. But how much is enough?

Think about this for a moment:

Whatever our current income; we always want more. And we tell ourselves that all we need is just a little bit more.

However much we have invested; we want it to grow so it becomes more. (As a matter of fact, just the other day I opened my pension statement to discover that I had lost money. I wanted more, not less; after all I've got to live on that someday!)

More is woven into the very fabric of the American mind. Like Rockefeller, we want just a little bit more; but when will it be enough? And why are we always seeking more? And if you wouldn't mind telling me; how much is a little bit more?

When Solomon was writing these words about wealth he was trying to pass along a lesson to his sons. And looking back at his life, Solomon discovered that the accumulation of wealth, the accumulation of possessions would never be enough.

*Whoever loves money never has enough;  
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.*

In the verses that follow I believe Solomon teaches us a very important lesson about our quest for more. First, that our greed will never be satisfied; and secondly that our only hope is to find satisfaction or contentment in what we have.

Apparently Solomon's wisdom had an effect on the Apostle Paul who would write some time later in 1 Timothy 6:10, '*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*'

For Solomon and for Paul, wealth is not issue; money is not the problem. Money is amoral; it is neither good nor evil. It is our relationship with money that causes us to more often than not find ourselves in a place where our love of money leads us into all sorts of problems. When we don't have enough we crave more and when we have more than enough we still want more.

Jesus spoke about money more than any other subject; including heaven. He must have realized the powerful influence that money would hold over people. When Jesus responded to a man who brought him an issue over an inheritance, Jesus said in Luke 12:15, *Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*

Greed is just wanting more. It could be more money, but it could just as easily be more power, more pleasure, more leisure, more food, more fame... Greed often comes out in one of two ways, envy and coveting. Envy makes us unhappy because of what others have and we don't. Envy drives us to 'keep up with the Joneses.' Envy makes us discontent until we can have what others already possess.

But coveting is the more sinister outcome of greed. Coveting makes us want to take what others have. Suddenly, keeping up with the Joneses means taking from the Joneses. Maybe that is why the tenth commandment challenges us to not covet – to not just *like* to have what someone else has; but to actually want the thing or person that someone else has.

We could spend all morning talking about the power of greed and the love of money and all the evil that has been done in the world because people always think that what they need is just a little bit more. But the challenge is for us to understand that overcoming greed- wanting a little bit more- begins with something everyone, regardless of whether or not you are a disciple of Jesus needs to learn.

Instead of believing that buying a Powerball ticket in hopes of getting just a little bit more; can I tell you what Solomon learned? The antidote to greed, according to Solomon, is satisfaction. Satisfaction in what God has provided you for each day of living, satisfaction in your work and your current possessions.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

18 This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. 19 Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. 20 They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

Look at this passage. The gift of God is the ability to be satisfied and joyful with what God has provided for you each day. And Solomon sums it all up in that last line; there is no brooding over the past or worrying about the future when your heart is occupied with gladness.

Again, Paul trumpets Solomon's wisdom when he writes in 1 Timothy 6:8 *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.* And in Hebrews 13:5 the writer says: *Keep your lives*

*free from the love of money and be content with what you have, [now that would be a good word if we just stopped there, but I want you to listen to what comes next.] because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

Be content, because God will never leave you, nor forsake you.

Sadly, the reason we aren't content is because we have yet to believe that God's promise is really true.

Why can you be content with what you have; why can you be satisfied with whatever God has seen fit to provide you in life; because God has promised to never leave you nor forsake you. I can't tell you how many times I've seen that promise lived out, personally and in the lives of others.

Last week, when we dropped Aaron and Marcie off at Asbury Seminary, Rita and I had the opportunity to do some reminiscing about our days there. One of the dearest families we ever met while in seminary lived by these words from Hebrews 13. George and Patty Lewis lived each day content and satisfied with the little that they possessed because they knew the promise that God would never leave them or forsake them.

We watched with wonder and awe as God provided them with groceries when the cupboards were bare. We marveled at their faith when the rent was due and they believed that God would provide. We watched with joy as their family grew and God provided for every need.

I always took great joy in knowing that George and Patty were content and satisfied with God; no matter what their outward situation looked like.

Are you content with what you have?

Are you content with what you have knowing that God has promised to never leave you or forsake you?

While I would always like to have a little more; I've learned in my life to be content with what God has provided. I hope that is why I try to live as a good steward of what God has provided me with; to be content with my possessions and to be glad each day with the lot in life that God has blessed me with.

Why don't I buy a Powerball ticket every time a big jackpot comes along; because I'm content with what God has provided me. But really it is not about whether or not you buy a lottery ticket from time to time with a little pocket change; the question is why?

Do you buy the ticket because you want just a little more; because you are not content with what God has provided you for today?

May I encourage you to take a chance, not on the long shot that you'll win the Powerball; but that God will be faithful to his promises and always provide bread for each day and gladness of heart as we reflect on that which God has provided for us to enjoy today.