



## MARY SOUTHERLAND

The Stress-Buster and Women's Ministry Motivator



### The Stress of "Stuff"

Greed is contagious! If we spend time with people who are prone to jealousy and greed, it will be easier for us to be jealous and greedy as well. When anyone in my house gets sick, they know what is coming. The war is on! The battle against sickness begins, mom against the germs! I head to the store in order to stock up on necessary supplies. The list is usually the same; juice, soup, crackers, yogurt, throat lozenges, tissues, cold medicine and last, but certainly not least, several cans of Lysol. I then implement my battle plan. The "sickie" is confined to their quarters. They are allotted one bathroom, one sofa and one bedroom for the duration of their illness. The ailing one is not to enter any other area of the barracks without my permission. I then go room to room; spraying every surface that they may have touched or even thought about touching. While the patient is allowed to continue breathing, I tend to follow the feeble one around, spraying the air that borders those breaths. This procedure continues until the patient is completely well. I know. I am obnoxious, but I am also successful more times than not. I do not want to catch their disease and feel it is my responsible to quarantine the sick ones in order to halt the progression of the sickness.

Greed is a noxious disease, one that demands immediate and fierce spiritual quarantine. We must be careful that we do not *catch* the spirit of greed and jealousy. Steer clear of those people who are prone to this deadly disease.

Greed is an inside job, invading our thoughts and then taking up residence in a discontented heart as it opens the door for other deadly sins. The warning of Proverbs 4:23 is clear, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do" (NLT). Greed and honesty cannot exist in the same heart and God wants us to give with an honest heart. "I know, my God, that you test people's hearts. You are happy when people do what is right. I was happy to give all these things. I gave with an honest heart" (1 Chronicles 29:17 NCV). In this verse, "honest" literally means "with integrity". To give with integrity means to give the right thing at the right time, to the right person for the right reason, a reason that always originates in love - God's love - a love that has been given to us in order for us to give it away in His name. The circle of giving is a circle of love and it all started with God when He gave His one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

*John 3:16 "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son..." (NCV).*

We are loved, so we give love and because we give love, we will receive more love. Matthew 7:2 says "the amount you give to others will be given to you" (NCV). Luke 6:38 offers a clear picture of God's giving plan. *"Give and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you"* (NCV). What and how we give determines what and how much we receive. We simply cannot out-give God! I have heard it said that the Lord loves a cheerful giver but He will even accept it from a grouch! I have also heard it said that plenty of people are willing to give God credit but few are willing to give Him cash. The truth is that the Father looks past the gift and examines the heart behind the gift because the motive of the heart determines the acceptability of the gift.

The true story is told of a self-made millionaire who had lived in New York City his entire life. Born and

raised in a ghetto, he worked hard and achieved much. Anyone who knew this man would testify to the fact that he was generous - to a fault, some would say. One year, the man was disturbed by an attitude of selfishness and greed that seemed to pervade the Christmas holiday season and everyone around him. Not one to condemn, the millionaire decided that since he had been given so much, it was up to him to do his part in combating greed and came up with an unusual plan. Wearing a disguise, this man stuffed his pockets with \$100 dollar bills and set out for a walk on the streets of New York City. When he saw someone in need, he whipped out one of the bills, pressed it into that person's hands and with a "Merry Christmas", made his way down the street. "It was the most wonderful part of my holiday season," the man reported, and he has been doing it every since.

The apostle Paul writes, *"Each one should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily"* (2 Corinthians 9:7 NCV). Giving with joy is Kingdom giving! When we practice Kingdom giving, we are making eternal deposits "taking hold of real life" here on earth! If, however, our motive is wrong, our gift will be wrong and will not count in the Kingdom of God. Before you give, ask yourself, "What's in it for me?" If the answer is "nothing", then go ahead and give the gift. Choosing to examine heart motives will guard our hearts against greed, celebrating the commitment that "He is all I want".

Greed can be very stressful in that it is never satisfied and never at rest. There is always something more to be gained and someone else to outdo. Sheep are dumb enough to eat until they are sick. They simply do not know when to stop. A heart that is filled with greed behaves the same way.

Cantaloupe may very well be my favorite food. When it is in season, I stock up and always have some on hand. Last summer, on a particularly hot day, a lunch of cantaloupe sounded luscious...and it was. Afterwards, I was gone for several hours, running errands. When I walked back in the front door that afternoon, a foul stench nearly knocked me down, it was so strong. A dead animal was my first thought. A plumbing problem was my next. I began a room-to-room search that ended abruptly at the kitchen sink. Opening the cabinet underneath, I nearly gagged at the stench that slapped me in the face, making my eyes water. I instantly remembered that I had thrown the cantaloupe peels in the garbage before running errands and forgotten to take them to the outside garbage can as I usually did. The house reeked and the delicious cantaloupe was forgotten as I threw the peels away, lit every candle I could find and opened every window in an effort to eliminate the odor of rotting fruit. Nasty!

Greed acts the same way. It is the gangrene of the soul. If not quickly dealt with, greed will contaminate every emotion and create a foul stench in every part of life. *"So get rid of all malicious behavior and deceit. Don't just pretend to be good! Be done with hypocrisy and jealousy and backstabbing"* (1 Peter 2:1 NLT). Greed must be treated like garbage! Deliberately throw it away! Remove it from your life immediately! In 2 Corinthians 7:1 we find the apostle Paul's strong warning to *"purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God"* (NIV). When the first hint of greed and jealousy comes, reject it! Get rid of it! Take it to the garbage! Choose against it! Fight it with Scripture and bombard it with prayer. Nail it to the cross and count it dead. *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20 NIV). Every motive in our heart must be nailed to the cross and considered dead. "Consider" is an accounting term and literally means to "reckon" or to "calculate". While we will never be free from wrong motives this side of Heaven, we can and must "reckon" those very human and very wrong motives to be dead and through God's power, allow them no power or place.

Everything in life is either an idol we choose to worship or a tool we choose to use for either good or bad. The choice really is ours to make. We need to hold our "stuff" loosely while investing financial resources in the things that are eternal. To stay away from idols and avoid greed we need to change our focus from what we want to what we have and choose to be satisfied with whatever that is.

If we want to eliminate stress, we must choose to put "things" in their proper place, refusing to attach importance to them. Greed is serious business in God's eyes. Greed reeks of idolatry and ulterior motives. Greed lies easily and fervently urges an already disobedient heart on toward sin, the breeding ground for stress. In order to manage stress, we must control our wants and honor God, depending upon Him as our source for every need. To manage stress, we must guard against greed.

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