

Do You Want What is Right?

by

Rocky Fleming

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

You may not think this devotional applies to you, for you do not covet any of things mentioned above. But, before you throw it away without reading this devotional, allow me to make a case that you might be coveting more than you realize. Sure, the passage above focuses on neighbors, and their life's goodies. It speaks to the neighbor who sees these things across the fence of his neighbor's property and wants them for himself. However, the neighbor, or his things, is only a small example of where this passage applies. It has greater application. Therefore, before I make my case, please realize that God is not as concerned about protecting another man's possessions as much as He is concerned about protecting the soul of His child. You see, earthly possessions burn, rust, rot, are stolen, depreciate and for sure, do not go with us after death. But the soul of a man continues on. God is more interested in the soul of a man. He wants His man to be *soul healthy* at all times, and there are things that can make our souls unhealthy. So, you need to have this understanding really nailed down? It is important to understand that God is concerned about things that you do not see about yourself. He wants to bless you more than you can understand. Now if you do understand these things about God, then you will trust Him when He tells you that coveting, and its broader application to many forms other than oxen and servants, can destroy a life by taking away the joy of being contented with what He wants to give you. You might need to also understand that God may be protecting you from riches, or at least how riches could ruin your life? Let's ask a question and see where you fall with coveting:

If you had sudden riches that fell on you, what would you do with them? Would these riches change your lifestyle, your perspective, your values? It does for most people. Readers Digest made a claim about lottery winners who, whether it is \$50 million or \$1 million, about 70 percent of them lose or spend all the money in five years or less. Would you be any different? Another example is NBA players who make outrageous fortunes for playing basketball. These guys file for bankruptcy 60 percent of the time within five years of retirement. NFL players are better with only one of every six players filing for bankruptcy after five years. But there are many examples like Warren Sapp who made more than \$50 million during his career, even so according to salary tracker Spotrac, he filed for bankruptcy within five years of his final game. These people made ridiculous sums of money, but it wasn't enough to satisfy their insatiable hunger for more. Where is the disconnect? Where is the true problem with these people, or people in general? I believe it will prove to be in the area that God is most concerned about. It is in their soul.

Most of you, including myself, are thinking that these athletes and lucky lottery winners are stupid and we would handle our riches better than they did. But, we would be making a mistake in thinking that it is their lack of education or naivety with handling their money that did this. We think we would handle it better, but

would we? Let's get back to my question and see: *If you had a lot of money suddenly dumped on you, what would you do with it?* Now be honest, for you are the only one who will know the answer. It is important for you to see where you fall of the subject of *Coveting*, for it may head off a major fall that is ahead for you. I'll start by being blatantly honest with you about my past struggle with coveting, so you will be honest with yourself.

I grew up with a lifestyle better than many of my classmates, but still hungry for the things riches could buy. Poor kids in Mississippi could only dream about these things, and therefore an obsession for cars, houses, boats, guns, and material things in general came to represent success. It defined success for us. This was my perspective. Hard work and education became the way out, and if someone had athletic ability, which I did, it was a quick way out. I think it would be safe to say that my college education would have been very difficult for my dad to pay for. Therefore, playing football and baseball for Ole Miss paid the price of a degree and education, but not preparation for life. My objective of being a professional athlete was the first step for getting above the crowd and for obtaining success, or so I thought. The truth is, God loved me far too much to let me be tested by quick riches. Had He allowed it, my misuse of riches and success at the time would have made me one of those financial casualties mentioned above. Even so, I still coveted. Boy did I covet and want more.

My athletic career ended way too soon from injuries, so my way out into the fast lane of success hit a detour. This forced me to do something I had never done before. I was newly married, had very few dollars saved, and had to go to work. I went to work in an industry that was commission driven, and espoused a philosophy that greed is good. Yes I heard this philosophy twenty years before Gordon Gekko stated it in the movie, *Wall Street*. I fell into that philosophy and agreed with it, for I was covetous and I wanted what most successful people wanted. It was the *American Dream*. It was about success. It had to be good as long as it was honest work, right? Wrong. It is wrong, for God said it is wrong, and there is a reason He wants to protect us from it. But man did I get a big dose of it and allow it into my life.

I once heard a seemingly “successful” sales manager in my former industry brag that the way he gets the most out of his commissioned employees was to hire them, and immediately go with them to buy the biggest car, and the best house their credit could purchase. He wanted them to first look the part of being successful, and he wanted them so leveraged in debt that they had to work excessive hours and be under excessive pressure to pay for their things. When a bonus came to them, he had them spend it on another toy before they got it in the bank. He didn't want them to save money. He wanted them to work for it, earn it, and spend it immediately so they would become addicted to material things. He wanted them in a vicious cycle that would never let them rest from the pursuit of money and material things. He wanted them competing with each other, trying to outdo each other. He wanted them addicted to success, as he defined it. Sure his philosophy and manipulation made him more money, but many of his employees lost their marriages and lost their way through dishonest gain until they saw through his schemes and escaped. He eventually failed financially himself, for his formula was bound to fail. Know any people like that?

I bet you hate this manager without meeting him. In case you think this manager is the devil himself, it is not. This man, and people like him, or industries and businesses like him, has simply learned to tempt our *coveting* nature. He was a ruthless guy, and just like the devil, ruthless people use a strategy like this to prey on this tendency in all of us. We see it in Wall Street to Madison Avenue, the center of commerce to the

center of advertising in America. They tempt us to covet and make us addicted to want more and better. What we do not see is that they are the personification of the evil manager I spoke of, and he the personification of the devil himself. To keep us safe from this scheme of the devil, God made it clear in the Tenth Commandment that coveting is something that we must not do, for it will make our souls very, very sick. We will find ourselves bowing to the idols they create, and when we try to get away from these idols, a force will try to take us to the depths of Hell and hold onto us like an anchor to a boat. I've been there. I know.

I mentioned that God protected me from the negative consequences of riches until I could learn the truth about coveting. It was a long road that required my breaking, my tears, my sacrifice and my diligence to get out of the hole I had dug for myself. It also took some sound wisdom to see the nature of the problem, which my humble father gave to me.

I was about three years out of college, faking my success with a lot of debt to "look the part." The fact is, I was scared to death. I was ashamed of myself. I was in my family's home talking to my dad and asked him how much he earned as a union wage earner in the job he had for the last 35 years. This was in 1971. He answered by telling me he was paid an hourly union wage of \$2.75 per hour. Since he was on late night call as a fireman, he was paid time and a half for overtime. On holidays when he was called out on cold nights to repair frozen fire prevention pipes, he was paid double time. He asked for and was given a lot of overtime. This helped him get by. I was shocked by what my dear old dad was being paid for tremendously hard work. I thought to myself that he must be an underachiever? I knew my father to be partially educated and very smart. So I asked him why he had settled for such low pay and such hard work? After all, he could earn so much more? The truth is I was earning more than him in only three years of employment? I'll never forget his answer and it served to reshape my perspective of what a truly successful life looks like. He said:

"Son, I don't think you understand what success is. You see, this house that you grew up in since you were six years old? I paid cash for it. I have no mortgage. The new car in the garage? I paid cash for it. The truck parked outside? I paid cash for it. I owe no one, anything. We saved and sacrificed to be able to do this. I go to work at 7:00 am and I am finished by 3:00 pm. I leave my tools and my job concerns behind me. I go home with plenty of time left in the day to go fish, or work in my garden, or play golf, or anything your mother and I want to do. I could make more money, but what would I do with it? Buy more things? Get in debt? Become addicted to more things that we really don't need? Spend my time and money to keep those things repaired and let them own me, rather than me owning them? No, you do not understand. The fact is, your mother and I live a great life. We are rich in ways that count. We are successful by the right measurement. We would not want it any other way. I hope that you find what we have discovered for yourself, for you lack the very thing I have. You lack being content with what you have. Until you find this, you will never achieve the kind of success you deeply long for."

That was a great lesson on perspective, and it helped me see how deep my coveting was. I asked God for His help in getting this condition broken in my life. But, it required me to change my appetite for the material things that I was pursuing, before God and I broke the chain the devil had on me with coveting. I can now say that I have truly found the success I had hoped for. I have found the riches, the true riches that God wants to give me, and these riches are not limited by the world's counterfeits.

While being led to this freedom I also learned a big, big misconception about coveting. I have discovered that I mistakenly thought that coveting meant that I wanted more than what God wanted for me. I have come to see the truth about coveting. **Indeed, what I have come to see is that I was pursuing less than what God wants to give me and I was cheating myself.** Are you ready for the "more" that God wants to give you? It begins by ending your coveting.

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”
Philippians 4:11-13 (ESV)