

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, July 15, 2017

There's so much emphasis on personal pleasure and there are so many distractions from what I consider to be most significant in life. Everywhere we turn we are bombarded by the Enemy's attempts to entice us with the things of this world. I'm not saying that all these things are bad, but when we start focusing on our perceived needs for such things it blurs Reality. Early in my business life I considered a career in advertising. Then, the more I looked at the possibilities, the more I realized that I disagreed with the approach used by many advertisers. And, over the past thirty years it became obvious that the major thrust presenting the product in a fashion that truly represents its value had become overshadowed with somewhat humorous entertainment and misrepresentations of competitor's products.

In my opinion, the advertising expenses of many industries are truly out of control. According to Nielsen Company, the predominant advertising expense leaders are automotive, fast food restaurants, pharmaceuticals, department stores, wireless telephone services, and the alcohol/tobacco industries. These industries are competing for the same dollars and their products are often very similar in price and quality. Their strategy is to use cunning advertising techniques to sway customers to purchase their brand over another.

As an avid golfer, I'm amazed at the present price of new golf equipment and how many golfers will spend \$450 or more just to get their hands on the latest driver to hopefully pick up ten to fifteen yards more distance off the tee. When you consider that more than half the price can be attributed to advertising and player endorsements, you can see why I get a queasy feeling about the direction of the industry. By the way, there's also no guarantee you'll actually gain any distance at all with that new club, but you can show it off to your fellow golfers so they can be envious of your purchase!

So, let's go to the Bible to get a better handle on the pleasures and distractions of life. In Ecclesiastes 5:10, King Solomon shares *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless."* Tell me, can you relate to having your eye on something that has been advertised to the point that you just have to go out and buy one for yourself? It's easy to justify something we feel we must have as something we really need! One of the best-known scriptures dealing with this subject is 1 Timothy 6:10. Paul exhorts *"For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."* That's not saying that money or these things are necessarily evil, but loving such things is a snare that can draw us away from what is truly important in life.

There's an interesting account found in 2 Kings 5 that many Christians have possibly never heard. The prophet Elisha was confronted by Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram. 'Naaman was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.' In the story we hear that Elisha sent a messenger to instruct Naaman to 'Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.' Reluctantly, he finally did as the messenger had instructed him and his leprosy was healed. In appreciation, he attempted to give Elisha a substantial gift which Elisha refused to accept. Later in the chapter, we find Elisha's servant Gehazi hurrying after Naaman to ask him for a gift for two young men in need of two talents of silver and two sets of clothes, which he planned to take back to his master's house. Then Elisha confronted Gehazi and he denied he had ever left the house. In response to his servant's disobedience Elisha said to him 'Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and your descendants forever.' In the final verse we are told 'Then Gehazi left Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.'

In the bible, leprosy is often considered a representation of sin. When confronted with temptation, do you stand up under it or impulsively succumb to its call? In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we're instructed by Paul that *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."* There's not a thing we can do to remove the pleasures and distractions that will always be around us, but we can stand fast and realize they represent the things in this world that we'd be wise to deny. Keep your eyes on Jesus and the things above!

Passages to Ponder: Proverbs 8:12-21, 10:2-3, 9, 22-25; Matthew 26:14-16; Ephesians 5:6-11; James 1:13-15

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Proverbs 8:12-21 New International Version (NIV)

¹² I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence;
I possess knowledge and discretion.
¹³ To fear the LORD is to hate evil;
I hate pride and arrogance,
evil behavior and perverse speech.
¹⁴ Counsel and sound judgment are mine;
I have insight, I have power.
¹⁵ By me kings reign
and rulers issue decrees that are just;
¹⁶ by me princes govern,
and nobles—all who rule on earth.
¹⁷ I love those who love me,
and those who seek me find me.
¹⁸ With me are riches and honor,
enduring wealth and prosperity.
¹⁹ My fruit is better than fine gold;
what I yield surpasses choice silver.
²⁰ I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
²¹ bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me
and making their treasuries full.

Proverbs 10:2-3 New International Version (NIV)

² Ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value,
but righteousness delivers from death.
³ The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry,
but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

Proverbs 10:9 New International Version (NIV)

⁹ Whoever walks in integrity walks securely,
but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.

Proverbs 10:22-25 New International Version (NIV)

²² The blessing of the LORD brings wealth,
without painful toil for it.
²³ A fool finds pleasure in wicked schemes,
but a person of understanding delights in wisdom.
²⁴ What the wicked dread will overtake them;
what the righteous desire will be granted.
²⁵ When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone,
but the righteous stand firm forever.

Matthew 26:14-16 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Ephesians 5:6-11 New International Version (NIV)

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.
⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

James 1:13-15 New International Version (NIV)

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own vile desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.