

*Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after. 1 Timothy 6:10*

### **Introduction: What Is the American Dream?**

Let's talk about the "American Dream."  
But what precisely is *that*?

To be sure, there have been many lofty dreams  
in our nation's history:

- Consider the founding fathers dream about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
  
- Or consider the dream of freedom and new beginnings so beautifully expressed in an inscription inside the Statue of Liberty:  
*"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free ..."*
  
- Or think about the speech Dr. Martin Luther King gave, speaking in "I Have A Dream" of equality and opportunity for all of God's children.

And yet, when most people in America and abroad think of the "American Dream" they do not generally think about any of these lofty dreams and ideals.

No, the "American Dream" is about measuring our success by the amount of "things" we possess. We try to buy happiness with immediate gratification.

In 1835 the French political philosopher and historian Alexis de Tocqueville published his book *Democracy in America*, based upon his extensive travels and observations of America and Americans.

In it, de Tocqueville offers this observation:

*"[Americans] are extremely eager in the pursuit of immediate material pleasures and are always discontented with the position that they occupy. ... They think about nothing but ways of changing their lot and bettering it."*

Consuming, acquiring, buying—that is what the “American Dream” has come to mean.

For many of Americans today what is commonly understood as the “American Dream” is more accurately called the “American Nightmare”?

## **I The American Nightmare**

How did the dream become a nightmare?

The “American Dream” has been fuelled to a large extent by two distinct but very related illnesses that impact us both socially and spiritually: Affluenza and Credititis.

### **Affluenza**

Affluenza is the constant need for more and bigger and better stuff.

Here are three definitions of Affluenza:

1. *The bloated, sluggish, and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses;*
2. *An epidemic of stress, overwork, waste, and indebtedness caused by the dogged pursuit of the American Dream;*
3. *An unsustainable addiction to economic growth.*<sup>1</sup>

Most of us have been infected by this virus to some degree. If we're honest, we all must admit that we've struggled with the desire to acquire at one time or another.

Consider this:

In 1973, the average American home was 1660 square feet.  
In 2004, the average American home increased to 2400 square feet.

But even while our homes increased in size, our need to store the stuff we have has also increased!

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<sup>1</sup> Visit <http://www.pbs.org/ktcs/affluenza>

The self-storage industry has grown by 24% in recent years, providing us now with an estimated 1.9 billion square feet of self-storage space to store the stuff we were enticed to buy with money many of us actually don't have.

Which brings me to the second illness plaguing us today.

### **Credit-itis**

Credit-itis is the opportunity for us to BUY NOW and PAY LATER.

It is an illness brought on by promises of  
"12 months same as cash,"

Credit-itis is the idea that you can enjoy something today and pay for it tomorrow, a scheme that feeds on our desire for instant gratification.

Let's face it, who doesn't know this slogan from television advertisements?

*"There are some things money can't buy,  
but for everything else, there's \_\_\_\_\_."*

Ok. here are some sobering statistics:

In 1990 the average credit card debt in America was \$3000.  
Today it's over \$9000.

The average sale is approximately 125% higher if we use a credit card to pay instead of paying cash.

The "American Dream" has become the "American Nightmare" because we simply cannot afford to pay what we so often buy on impulse alone.

Think about it: Many credit card companies allow you to make a 2% minimum payment on your outstanding balance. That sounds good until you realise that if you have a \$9000 balance on your credit card, and you pay off your existing balance by making 2% monthly payments while paying 18% annual interest, it would take you about **240 years** to pay off your balance!

HELLO???

Is it any wonder Timothy wrote these words we heard earlier today for our scripture reading?

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## **II The Deeper Problem Within**

Timothy points us to a deeper problem within: Sin.

Inside us there is brokenness.  
Each one of us is created in the image of God,  
but something has been distorted.

We were created with a restless heart.  
Our heart is always desiring...

We were created to desire God,  
but we have turned that desire toward possessions.

We were created to find our security in God,  
but we find it in amassing wealth.

We were created to love people,  
but instead we compete with one another.

We were created to enjoy the simple pleasures of life,  
but we busy ourselves with pursuing money and possessions.

We were created to be generous and to share with those in need,  
but we selfishly hoard our resources for ourselves.

Last week I talked about that five out of the 7 deadly sins  
are at the root of our current economic crisis.

Let me say that three of these 7 deadly sins  
are directly related to the problem many of us  
have with money and possessions:

### **Envy**

We want what others have, and we will do  
whatever we can to get it—whether that means taking it  
or buying it for ourselves.

### **Greed (or avarice)**

We have an intense desire for more

and don't want to share what we have.

### **Gluttony**

We keep consuming, even when we are full and our needs are met. we make ourselves sick either by overeating or by overconsumption of "stuff."

### **III The Bible's Solution**

So what is the answer?

Very simply put, God invites us to change our hearts. Changed hearts is what God specialises in!

We need a changed heart, which results in changed desires and a changed sense of our life purpose.

But how does God create a new and changed heart within us?

Undoubtedly many of us carved a pumpkin for Halloween. If you've ever picked a pumpkin off a field, then you know that no pumpkin is perfect.

Your task as "Master Pumpkin Carver" is to incorporate your pumpkin's imperfections into the design you carve into it.

You look at the pumpkin and imagine what it can be.

Next, you draw a face on it of some sort.

Then you come to the first step in the actual transformation of the pumpkin, which is also the messiest.

You open it up, and you begin to scoop out all the nasty, slimy, smelly stuff inside.

Then you carve the face or design, which is no doubt a bit painful for the pumpkin.

And, ultimately, you replace all of the muck that was inside with a light that shines from within.

This is an illustration of what God intends to do with each one of us as we allow God to change our hearts: God can take all of that greed and envy and gluttony and replace it with God's light that shines within us in a way that it gives light to others.

Here is how the Apostle Paul explained the transformation that takes place when we let God change our hearts. From Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome (Romans 12.1-2):

*"Here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you."*

**Let's pray together:**

I invite you to put your hands on your lap, with your palms upright. We put our hands up because we expect to receive from God. Put your hands out so you are ready to receive.

I also want to invite you to say this prayer with me, just quietly under your breath. This confuses me??? are they reading it from the screen? – I currently have it being put into projection.

Change my heart, O God,  
make me ever new.  
Clean me out inside.  
Heal my desires.  
Help me to hold my possessions loosely.  
Help me to love you.  
Teach me simplicity.  
Teach me generosity towards others  
Help me to have true joy.  
I offer my life to you.

In Jesus' name, **Amen.**