

“Veering Off Course”

Matthew 6:19-24

Series: In Not Of Week 5. Invest Eternally

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Sabine Moreau just wanted to do a friend a favor. In January 2013, the Belgian woman agreed to pick up a friend at the train station in Brussels, the capital of Belgium, just 90 miles from her home. She entered the address in her GPS and took off. The journey seemed to be taking longer than she expected – a lot longer. Yet Sabine is a faithful friend and she faithfully followed her GPS even when the road signs changed from French to German. She couldn't let her friend down, so Sabine stayed the course, stopping several times to get gas and take naps. By the time she reached Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, Sabine had crossed five international borders over two days. She was a thousand miles from her intended destination. Her worried son called the police and then tracked her by following her bank transactions. When she returned home safely she told a Belgian reporter, “I was distracted, so I kept going. When I passed Zagreb, I told myself I should turn around.”¹ So apparently it's not just men who refuse to stop for directions.

You can't blame Sabine Moreau for listening to a GPS that's gone wonky. It's easy to get off course when you follow the wrong directions. Jesus says, No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Matthew 6:24

He gives us an either/or choice – follow God or follow money? If you ask most people, “Do you love God or money?” many will say they love God over money. Yet it's easy to intend to love God but veer off course following the world's directions. There is so much pressure from the outside to acquire and accumulate stuff. Ads pop up on every webpage. We see the shiny new things sitting in our neighbors' driveways or their family rooms. Our kids and grandkids tell us they need new sports equipment, the latest fashions, a better game system, the recently released phone.

These outside pressures scratch our inner preferences and pleasures. We all want stuff – for various reasons: status, security, self-esteem. Truth is: I don't really own stuff. I just manage the flow. Stuff comes in the door. It settles somewhere in the house. It eventually obeys the law of gravity and winds up in the basement. Then the flow of stuff backs up in my house and I sell it, store it, trash it or give it away. And let me warn you, when your kids move out, they don't take their stuff with them. When people ask me, “How do you like living in an empty nest?” I reply, “I don't know. It's not empty yet.” We begin by loving God but gradually focus on stuff. We start serving money. We veer off course and eventually find ourselves far from the mark.

¹ Ryan Grenoble, "Sabine Moreau, Belgian Woman, Drives 900 Miles Off 90-Mile Route Because of GPS Error," The Huffington Post (1-15-13)

How do we get back on track? Jesus speaks a lot about money. Why? He knows money can become an idol which controls our hearts, a malfunctioning GPS which gives me wrong directions. Money is the cause of many marriage and family conflicts, love of money is at the root of many troubles and wars in our world. To be free, we need to get back on course. To love God over money, here are 3 midcourse corrections.

First, **Choose Prayer over Panic.** You may be saying, “Pray over my finances? I’m panicking because I don’t have a prayer.” Others say, “People shouldn’t pray about money.” Correction: people shouldn’t pray to *get* money. That’s selfish. Yet we need to pray for God’s wisdom on how to handle what He places in our hands. You are the manager of God’s funds. They’re His. A Financial Planner asks the owner of the funds for directions so they know how to invest it. When we pray, we ask the Lord, the Owner, how He wants us to use His funds. That’s why in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus put the most famous prayer of all, the Lord’s Prayer, in between His teachings about giving to the poor, storing up treasure in heaven and serving God instead of money

When you choose prayer over panic you receive God’s peace. In our study of Philippians last Spring, the Apostle Paul described his roller coaster life. Yet he wrote,

Do not be anxious about anything, *but in everything*, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

We are concerned about guarding our dollars and cents in the bank. Then we hear banks fail and markets crash. God guards your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. He fills your heart and mind with peace. We think if we can just get more money, we’ll stop panicking. We have it backwards. We’ll stop panicking if we first pray for God’s peace. You’ll probably never say, “I have enough money.” But today you can know, “I have God’s peace. He will help me ride life’s roller coaster. He’s more than enough.”

Second, **Choose a Plan over a Plunge.** In the book of Proverbs it says, Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run; hurry and scurry puts you further behind. Proverbs 21:5 The Message

Most Americans have no financial peace because they have no plan. They just take the plunge. They spend first and decide how they will pay later. They buy now with easy one-click shopping, give no thought for tomorrow, and hope it works out. A plan helps you lower your debt, live without fear, provide for your loved ones and serve God more. You may need a coach to help you put together a budget, pay down your debt and, most of all, stick to the plan. Look for a godly financial advisor who will help you work out a specific plan instead of a plunge.

Choose Eternity Over Temporary. When making financial decisions, advisors often tell us to take a long view. Start early and invest for the long term. Jesus focuses on the really long term: eternity. He says,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus doesn't say it's wrong to buy stuff. It's just not your best investment because it doesn't last. Moths chew up clothes, rust eats up metals and thieves steal the rest. Stuff is temporary. The earth is temporary. It will not be here forever and neither will you.

Recently I arrived very early for a funeral. It was a lovely day. As I sat there and surveyed the headstones, it gave me a new perspective. All these who rest in peace below the turf were once like you and me. They lived and learned, worked and played like us. Many have been dead longer than they were alive. They all are spending infinitely longer on the other side. We act like this life is all there is. Yet compared to eternity, your whole lifetime is only the first sentence in a never-ending story.

Don't focus only on the temporary. Invest in eternity. What is eternal? Heaven and people. When you store up for yourself treasure in heaven you are investing in the lives of people so they can be there in heaven with you. That starts with your family. Make no mistake, God calls you to invest in and take care of your family. But it doesn't stop there. You also invest in your church family and reach beyond that to your neighbors and the world. If you invest in people – caring for their needs, helping the lost and lonely, the hungry, homeless and hurting, sharing the Good News so they become followers of Jesus – you make it possible for them to receive God's gift of eternity with you. That's what Jesus means about putting your treasures in heaven. The treasures are people and no moth, rust or thief can touch them. Jesus concludes this teaching with an amazing truth:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

What does He mean? Your heart goes wherever your money does. If you invest your treasure in Microsoft stock, you will start to follow Microsoft. You will watch it go up and down. You wonder how Windows 11 is doing. You will wince when it crashes. Your heart goes to the place where you invest your treasure. Your heart will ride up and down with the stock market. But if you invest more of your treasure in people and in eternity, that's where your heart will go. The more you invest in people and eternity the more you will focus on people and eternity, care about people and eternity, and look forward to seeing people in eternity, because that's where your heart will be.

One time I celebrated a wedding. At the reception a guest came up to me and said, "Hey I want to compliment you. I don't like weddings because the pastors are very boring." I think there was a compliment buried in there. He continued, "But that was a wonderful wedding. Now I don't go to church. I frankly don't like organized religion." I said to him, "Well then come to my church – we're very disorganized." I asked, "Why don't you like church?" "Because they are always asking for money."

Well consider this: the church is one of the only places in society where you can have everything we offer for free. Even when we charge a fee we often offer a

scholarship or waive the fee. The wedding venue didn't put on the party for free. The grocery store doesn't let you take food for free. The clothing store doesn't let you grab garments off the rack for free. Even so called free benefits like education, the police, highways are paid for by your taxes. Yet the church offers worship services, children and youth ministries, small groups, even our space to be used by AA, Scouts, the Bloodmobile and elections for free. This doesn't included all the money and mission we give away to people in need in Trenton, India, Zambia, Mozambique, DR, Bahamas and around the world. How can we possibly do this? Through your generous gifts. You make a difference when you give. I want to encourage you to do two things.

Give a Percentage. The Bible teaches percentage giving – a tithe which is 10% of your income. My wife and I tithe to Woodside and then give to other causes over and above this. I say this not to brag but so you know I'm not asking you to do something I'm not. And I can testify that our financial fears started to disappear when we made the decision to trust God and tithe. We've been able to bless our children with educations and weddings, fix and expand our house, take vacations, save for retirement and even put away funds for our grandchildren all while tithing. If you want to take on a challenge trust God and take the step of tithing. If you are not ready to take that step then take the step of increasing your giving by a percent of your income – 1, 2, 5% Try it for four months and see what happens. Percentage Giving is fair because it doesn't ask everyone to give the same amount, just the same percent.

Get Into the Practice. Giving is a spiritual practice like prayer, Bible reading, worship and service. The more you do it, the more it becomes a lifestyle. The best, easiest way to practice Giving is make a plan for what you will give to God's work in 2025. Whether you start with a small regular gift or a tithe or more, that one step will start you on the road to growing in the spiritual practice of giving. More than half of our givers use some form of Recurring Giving, through your bank or our website. This helps you make a commitment to God and keep it. Recurring Giving gets you into the practice of putting God first in your finances. You can change it or stop it at any time. The only reasons to give are because you love God, you love people and you want to help more people love God and receive God's love. Right before our eyes lives are being transformed by you with the love and truth of God.

There's Marcie Kohl who attended the Alpha course.

I'm taking this opportunity to say I absolutely love Woodside!! I had been living with a bit of a hole in my heart during the past three years. My Alpha experience, the women I met in my discussion group, and the Saturday Retreat Day ... that was the moment I knew I was home!! Please know how very grateful I am to have found Woodside, this amazing congregation!!! I am sooo looking forward to continuing my spiritual journey with Jesus and all of you! God is good!!! All the time!!

There's Ava Ruland who, quite honestly, was struggling in her relationship with God before she went away on the Woodside Summer Youth Camp

Before camp I was not doing well with my relationship with God. I was disconnected from him and didn't know who I was supposed to be and why I was even here. But the first lesson of camp was about how your identity is in Christ and not in the world. That's when I started to feel he was with me. We were asked to pray and tell God to be near us and guide us. I felt him when I prayed that prayer. It felt like his arms were around me and I knew everything was going to be okay. I recommitted my life to Jesus after that!

And there's Tim Cagle. A scientist by training, Tim resisted and rejected many Christian beliefs. He felt they were irrational. He also struggled with personal demons. But many here were willing to walk with him and talk with him about his questions and struggles until he came to believe that the Gospels are true and Jesus endured hell for us because He didn't want to go to heaven without us. Last Sunday, Tim was baptized here surrounded with the love and support of his brothers in Christ and his Woodside family. Marcie, Ava and Tim, each in their own way, felt they were veering off course. Through you, Jesus put them back on the journey home.