

Sermon for Sunday, October 24, 1982 by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, Senior Pastor
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WHEN ROOTS POP UP THE SIDEWALK
I Timothy 6:1-10

Text: "For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs." I Timothy 6:10

Most of us have seen a neighborhood at one time or another where the trees along the street have grown large and beautiful. However, we always discover in such a neighborhood that those trees grown large have also spread out their roots, the sidewalks have buckled and popped up and have become a menace to the unwary person. The sidewalks are no longer smooth and even, leading the walker where he wishes to go. Instead, they have become dangerous and able to catch the heel or stub the toe and send the traveler spinning in a disastrous fall.

Many a Christian who long ago made a commitment to Jesus laid a pathway through his life that led him to God. He put his feet on the straight and narrow way that leadeth to the kingdom of heaven. But over the years something happened to that pathway. Now it is buckled and twisted, it has become a menace to his spiritual safety. What has happened to that commitment, to that dedication, to that resolve to follow the way of the Lord? Jesus said that he was the way, but now one finds himself tripped up and fallen as he tries to follow it. What has popped up the sidewalk of his commitment?

Well, the Bible tells us plain enough. The roots that are popping up our spiritual roadway to God are the roots of a love growing in our lives. That love is the love of money. And the roots of that love are disturbing our pilgrimage, ruining our travel along the king's way. Yet, the love of money is the root of all evils and because of it, too often we are tripped up on our way to heaven.

It isn't new Christians who have this problem. For the new Christian everything is so fresh and exciting, this new life is such a tremendous adventure that for the moment they are not tripped up by things like roots. No, the person in danger is the one who has been a Christian for a while. Just as a new neighborhood has nice level sidewalks because the trees are small and young, so the old neighborhood has the trees grown large and the popped up side-walks.

Had you ever thought of it just that way? If you have been a Christian now for awhile and if you still haven't settled your finances with God, the pathway of your commitment is being popped up by those roots of a bad love. In our Scripture this morning, the Bible tells us that two things happen to us in sequence when our love focuses in on material things. First, it says that we wander away from the faith. When you don't keep the faith, when you are not obedient to the faith, you begin to lose interest in it--you turn from it--you wander from it. Has that already begun to happen to you? Do you find in your spiritual life that you don't look forward to coming to church anymore, that you don't enjoy Sunday School or Bible study as much as you did, that you don't pray very often and that being God's person doesn't seem quite as important

as it was? If you discover any of those warning signs in your life, your sidewalk may be buckling. If you find any of those things are true for you, it may very well mean that a misplaced love is creating travel problems and potholes in your life.

So, first, if we are not keeping the faith, we wander away from it. But second, the Bible tells us that the next thing that happens is that our hearts are pierced with many pangs. Trouble comes to us. And even when trouble doesn't come, there is such a void, an emptiness, a vacuum in our lives that the joy goes out of life. Hasn't that been true in your life? Once you have been a Christian and followed Jesus, once you have made a commitment to him and walked with him along the way, you can never go back to your old ways, to your old friends, to your old places again. Somehow the fun or joy you thought it would bring has become empty and hollow.

Well, that is what the Bible says. It says that if we love money, its roots bring all kinds of evil into our lives--we wander from the faith and our hearts are pierced with many pangs.

Let me ask you, mature Christian, how are the sidewalks in your spiritual life? Two weeks from today is our annual commitment Sunday here at Central when we make our financial commitment to our church's program for 1983. Now, there are two things I am not worried about. First, I am not worried about meeting our 1983 budget. I have been here for 13 commitment campaigns and we have never once failed to meet our goal. I have no reason to think we will fail this time and I am not concerned about that. The second thing I am not concerned about are our new Christians in this congregation. They are young in the Lord, but they are being taught Biblical principles and they are under good influence. Because they want to do the right thing with the Lord, I'm not so concerned about them.

But let me tell you who I am concerned about. I am concerned about those of us who have walked for a time--sometimes for a long time--with the Lord but who have never settled our tithe, our stewardship, with Him. Those of us who are not new Christians, those of us who long ago made a commitment to him but who have failed to commit our money to the Lord are the ones who are in danger.

See how it works! Judas walked with the Lord for three incredible years, but what wrecked Judas? The Bible says he loved money and was a thief. Money was his downfall. Or what about the rich young ruler? He wanted to follow Jesus, so Jesus told him to get rid of what was first in his life--his money--and then he could follow him. But the Bible says he went away sad because he owned a lot. Money was his downfall. Or here were two respectable church members who owned some property. They sold it in order to give the money to the church. But I guess inflation was present then, because they apparently got a lot more for it than they expected. So Ananias and Saphira decided not to give it all and they held back part of what they had committed. Their greed led to their deaths. What got them? Money! Or here is a young assistant professor studying under the most famous teacher of that era--and perhaps of any era. But young Demas betrayed professor Paul. What tripped him up? Or here is a business man who is prospering. His grain

bins are full and the harvest is coming. He tears down his old buildings to build large, new ones. But that night his soul is required of him and all is lost. What was his downfall? The love of money.

As a Christian I believe in tithing for a lot of different reasons. This morning I would like to share with you three of those reasons. First, I believe in tithing because God commands it. The Bible teaches us clearly that the tithe is the minimum standard taught in the Bible. Sometimes people will say to me, "Well, pastor, I'll admit the tithe is taught in the Old Testament, but we live under the grace of the New Testament." And do you know, that is true. We do live under grace. But do you know what grace leads us New Testament people to do? Let me tell you! Grace always carries us beyond the law. Grace never stops short of the law. Grace is never less than the law. So if you want to live under the law of the Old Testament, you must come up to the tithe to obey the law. But if you want to live under the grace of the New Testament, you can never fall below the tithe. Grace just costs more!

A second reason I believe in the tithe is because I love Jesus, my Savior. Is there anything or anyone you love more than you do Jesus? Now, suppose I know the Bible teaches me to tithe but I don't want to do that. I don't feel that I want to give that much money away to the church. Am I loving money more than Jesus? Am I putting my love for material things ahead of my commitment of Jesus? The point is this: when I am obeying Jesus in relationship to my money--when I am doing the thing he asks me to do with my material goods--then I am putting the focus of my affection on Him and not on my money. Jesus once said that where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also. If I don't give him what he asks, I am putting my affections, I am focusing my heart, on my money and where my heart is, that's where my real treasure is.

Does that make sense to you? When you obey Jesus and tithe, he is the treasure of your heart. You try that and see if it doesn't work that way for you.

The third reason I believe in the tithe is that I need the promise in my life. Do you know what the promise is? Do you have the promise in your life? Here is the promise, from Malachi 3:10, "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of host, (here is the promise) if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing."

I don't know about you, but I need that blessing. I'm too poor to get along without it. You see, when God blesses me, I have no way of knowing what sickness I have been spared; no way of knowing what tragedies I have missed; no way of knowing what disasters I have avoided, of what pitfalls I have been spared. You see, when I tithe God blesses me and protects me and prospers me. I could never afford all the things that might have happened to me if God had not been blessing me to fulfill his promise. Do you think you can't afford to tithe?

Sometimes people give to the Lord expecting to get back some profit or some tangible material blessings. I think the greatest blessings in my life have been the things that never happened to me. How many times has God spared me or protected me? I have no way of knowing. But I do know this, I'm too poor not to tithe. And when those bad things do come into my life from time to time, I know I could never handle them except for God blessing me in the midst of them. And even out of the worst of things he promises that he will bring good to those who love him.

Do you love Jesus? If you really love him and if he is really important in your life, you will want to show your love by your obedience to him. You see, when we fail to love him above all, other loves begin to creep into our lives and other loves begin to take the first place in our lives. Then it is that those other loves begin to take root. As those loves grow more and more important to us, those roots begin to pop up the sidewalk of the straight and narrow way.

The Bible says that the love of money is the root of all evils. It makes us wander away and pierces our hearts. Who--or what--do you love most of all?