

Defying Gravity

“#1 – Discovering Gravity”

[Matthew 19:16-26](#)

Ever since Isaac Newton identified what made apples fall to the ground in the summer of 1655, we have known that gravity is a consistent and unfailing force that orders our world. Just as gravity exists in the natural world, *financial gravity* exists in the economic world that we all inhabit. It is an invisible force that compels us to pursue our basic necessities, such as food, shelter, and clothing for ourselves and our loved ones. Like the laws of gravity, financial gravity is a basic and necessary feature that frames our modern existence.

The problem with financial gravity occurs when it exerts too much control over our lives. You begin to feel it as you are browsing the Internet on your phone or watching your favorite TV show. Advertisements for things that you did not even know you needed catch your eyes. You start to feel it when you enter a shopping mall, full of retail stores and specialty shops. Display items tug at you to take a look around at each store you pass by.

And, the impact of financial gravity can be measured when you examine your bank statements and notice that the balance is lower than you had hoped, or when your credit card bill is higher than what you can afford to pay in its full amount.

The key to negotiating the financial gravity in our lives is to experience the force in just the right proportion. Unfortunately, many of us can't seem to find this balance. Let's take a look at this video. (Showed the video clip #1: "Harness" in which a man tries to run with heavy weights tethered behind him.)

All of us feel the force of our needs. As adults, we have to figure out the right level of income that can meet those needs. Needs are like the weights, stacked on this training sled. A short list would include food, shelter, clothing, and things that allow us to work and live.

The problem is when we confuse our needs with our wants. We live in a society that constantly tells us we would be happier if we had more and better things -- a better phone, a better computer, a better TV, a better audio system, a better car, a better home, and the list goes on and on.

As we add these things to our lives, the added weight of our possessions increases the force of financial gravity holding us down. What we hoped would bring us freedom and joy actually brings us more exhaustion. Like the man in the video, we discover that we are harnessed to our possessions in ways that wear us out.

Financial gravity is especially strong here in the United States. Our marketing culture is so well developed that the message of "more and better" is everywhere. While the desire for spending has increased, at the same time, the value of *frugality* has decreased. And, the combination of these two changes has created a black hole of consumerism, with the force of financial gravity so great that it threatens to devour all of us.

But, our complicated relationship with money and possessions is not a new problem, as we see in today's scripture reading. The young man who came to Jesus, while rich, was a man of great devotion and commitment. He had faithfully kept all of the commandments, and even then, he still wanted to make sure that he was not forgetting anything to inherit eternal life. So, he went to Jesus, seeking his wisdom and guidance. And, what did Jesus ultimately ask of him? *"If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me."*

Actually, Jesus was making a once-in-a-lifetime offer to the young man -- an opportunity for him to become his disciple. As the thirteenth disciple, he could have heard Jesus' teaching every day, witnessed Jesus' miracles, and helped to grow Jesus' movement. He could have become a great leader in the early church, like Peter and Paul. Instead, he declined Jesus' offer and walked away from him. The young man was obviously serious about living a godly life. He knew Jesus could help him go deeper in his faith and become even more devoted. But, he walked away.

Did you notice the young man's emotional state as he declined Jesus' offer and walked away? The scripture said he went away *sad*. Other translations say that he went away *grieving*. The young man was torn between two worlds. He knew in his mind that his life must be fully given to God to have eternal life. But, he discovered that his heart could not commit to what Jesus was asking him to do -- which was to surrender his accumulated treasures and follow him. So, he wept, as the pull of financial gravity kept him in his old world.

Then, Jesus said to his disciples, "I assure you that it will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." (v. 24) - from the Common English Bible.

Jesus is pointing out that we have a choice between two worlds where we can live: the kingdom of the self or the kingdom of God. The kingdom of the self, is the world we see and touch every day. It is the world you have created, which includes your family and friends, your work and hobbies, and your home and possessions, based on *your* abilities and interests. You manage this world, and that is a good thing. God has created us to enjoy life and endowed us with the ability to have influence in the world.

The problem is that we often lose perspective and forget about the kingdom of God. You know this is happening when you hear yourself using the word "*deserve*." We say: "I know it's expensive, but I work really hard, so I deserve it." As we try to protect the boundaries of the world we have created and ordered according to our preferences, we can become very self-focused. We do not want to lose the total control we imagine ourselves as exercising on our lives. It is at these moments where financial gravity exerts the strongest pull.

Notice how Jesus says it's *hard* to enter the kingdom of God when we are caught in the field of financial gravity. This is what happened to the young man in today's scripture reading.

Gravity is a force that pulls all matter together—the greater the mass, the stronger the pull of gravity. The sun has such a huge mass that it can hold an entire solar system together. Money and possessions have their own mass, as well. They pull us in. The more we amass, the more we experience the gravity that comes from their mass. That is why serious Christians who are wealthy are often the most disciplined about doing good and living and giving generously. They understand that if they do not manage their money, it will soon control them.

Jesus said it is *hard* for people to escape financial gravity and move into the kingdom of God. But, he did not say it was impossible! In fact, Jesus ended his teaching on financial gravity with these words, “*For God, all things are possible.*” (v. 26).

Friends, you might be thinking, ‘I live comfortably but not well off. There are so many others who are wealthier than me.’ Or, ‘Financial gravity is not my problem because I do not have much.’ The truth about those of us blessed to live in the United States is that, compared to most of the world, we are wealthy. So, *defying financial gravity* is something that we all must accomplish if we are to achieve the goal of loving God completely and glimpse the eternal life to come here on earth.

The good news is that Jesus offers us a way to enter the gravitational field of God’s kingdom. Just as money and possessions can weigh us down, they also can be a part of what sets us free, so we will not be like the man in the video, laboring under the burden of the weight of things that we have accumulated.

This week and for the rest of the month of October, I invite you to undertake an experiment to see how you experience financial gravity in your life and try to participate in acts of defying its pull on your life. Discuss the subject of financial gravity with your loved ones and find ways to experience freedom from it. One of those ways can be intentionally decluttering your home.

Now, I know that many people feel overwhelmed, anxious, and defeated just thinking about it. So, I encourage you to start with a relatively easy task, like cleaning your closet or refrigerator. Give or throw away items that you have not worn or used for a while.

And try to have some fun with this. You might want to take some before and after pictures and post them on our church [Facebook page](#) with the hashtag:

#CampbellUMCDefyingGravity!

Or consider inviting your friends to be part of your decluttering project. When I had to downsize my belongings moving from the 4 bedroom parsonage in Illinois to the 2 bedroom home here, I invited my clergy colleagues and let them try on the clothes that I was not going to keep. I can’t tell you how much fun we had! It was like a mini fashion show. Watching them trying on different clothes and giggling like little school girls made me so happy! So, be creative with your efforts at defying gravity! I also invite you to attend worship the next three Sundays, so that we can journey together through this new worship series.

May God guide our journey toward freedom from financial gravity, so that we can enter the kingdom of God and joyfully live a life of generosity and happiness! Thanks be to God! Amen.