



7 Shaping Virtues – Generosity Part 1 (Luke 12:13-34)

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How many of you have heard of Challenger Deep? It is the deepest point on earth, nearly 36,000 feet or 7 vertical miles below sea level. It's located in the Mariana Trench in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. According to NASA, the atmospheric pressure at its deepest point is "over 8 tons per square inch, or the equivalent of an average-sized woman holding up 48 jumbo jets." In pitch darkness, in water just above freezing, it's hard to imagine a more difficult place to explore in the natural world.

Truth be told, friend, there is a place even more mysterious, even more difficult to search and know within you. It's called your heart, the dynamic control center of the human person directing your thoughts, desires, and actions. Prov 20:5, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water..." Jer 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Left to yourself, you cannot make a reliable assessment of the spiritual condition of your heart. We think we're aware of all we believe. We think we're aware of all we feel. We think we're aware of all we choose to do. God says we're not. You are not all-knowing. You are not all-wise. You cannot know your innermost self for who you really are unless God reveals it to you. Jer 17:10, "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind..."

How does our all-knowing God search out and reveal what's in our hearts? Through the power of his Word. Heb 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word of God is like one of those scientific submersibles in the Marianas Trench. It plumbs the depths of our hearts. It reveals what's actually there, who we really are, what God himself sees.

Jesus' words in Lk 12 shine a bright light in an area of our hearts that often remains hidden in darkness. It's like the Marianas Trench. Part of me doesn't really want to know what sort of squiggly creatures are down there! I would rather leave well enough alone and keep minding my own business. Jesus loves us too much to not go there, friends. Because he cares for us, he shines a light on our relationship with money and possessions. Why? Because **the way you handle your money reveals the spiritual condition of your heart.**

Churches often make one of two mistakes in teaching on money and possessions. They don't talk about it at all because they're too afraid someone will get offended. Or it's all they talk about because they're fleecing people and preaching a gospel of financial prosperity. And yet, despite our tendency to misunderstand and misapply God's Word in this area, Jesus talks about our relationship with money and possessions again and again during his ministry. Why? Because **the way we handle money reveals the spiritual condition of our heart.**

One of our 7 Shaping Virtues as a church is generosity. We believe that when the gospel of grace takes root in our hearts, when we come to know and love the Savior who became poor that you might become rich, the Spirit frees us to joyfully and generously use our money and possessions to love God and his kingdom.

As Americans we like to say, "Hands off. What I do with my money is no one's business but my own." 1 Cor 6:19-20 begs to differ. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price." If you're a Christian, he already purchased all of you, money and possessions included, when he shed his blood for you on the cross!

But even if you're not a Christian, your money and possessions are still not yours. You don't own anything. The world and all its fullness, your financial assets included, are all his. When Jesus speaks to us about money it's not because he's dependent on us or our financial help. He's not a broke entrepreneur looking for an angel investor. We are dependent on him, and he created us to worship him with all that we are and all that we have.

Because the Lord loves us, he is faithful to equip us to steward his money and possessions for the sake of our joy and his glory. In fact, Scripture has so much to say that we're taking two weeks to focus on generosity as part of our 7 Shaping Virtues series. So, what do we learn from Lk 12? Jesus teaches us that **the way we handle money reveals the true spiritual condition of our hearts.** And he urges us to find our life in him by giving a warning and a promise. Let's start with the warning.

1) A FOOL SEEKS LIFE IN MONEY AND POSSESSIONS (vv. 15-21)

Jesus is surrounded by a whole crowd of people. And someone shouts, "Hey, Teacher! Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!" There's no desire to worship, serve, or live for God. The man simply wants to use Jesus to get what he really wants – his share of the family inheritance. His love of money made him treat God like a vending machine. "You're a means to an end, Jesus. Give me what I want."

The way he's addressing Jesus shows money is his functional god. So Jesus asks him a question in v. 14, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Translation? Sir, I'm not here to give you whatever you want. I'm here to rescue you from yourself. Your greatest enemy is not your brother. It's the sin in your own heart. V. 15, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness..."

Jesus isn't warning us against desiring things across the board. He's warning us about desiring the wrong things or the right things in the wrong way. Coveting certainly includes envying what someone else has. "How come they got the job instead of me?" In a broader sense, however, it covers any form of discontentment. If only I had a bigger house or a nicer car or kids that actually cleaned up after themselves! That would make my life so much better!

Discontentment reveals we're seeking life in someone or something else instead of God, in many cases, our money or possessions. Why is that a problem? Because of the second half of v. 15. "For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And then Jesus tells us a story to help us understand.

There once was a rich farmer who had the crop yield of the century. He already had the food he needed. He already had the shelter his family required. And then he receives even more blessing, even more provision. Now he has a dilemma. What am I going to do with all my stuff? V. 17, "I have nowhere to store my crops?"

His first thought isn't how he could bless others or serve the Lord with his wealth. His first and only thought is for himself. V. 18, "And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'" Notice how many times the word "my" appears. There's not awareness that all he has is the Lord's or any sense of accountability to God. V. 19, "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

After all these years of hard work, I've finally arrived! This means life. This means happiness. This means I'm set. No more anxiety about the future. My standard of living has already been pretty good. But we are definitely going to kick it up a notch. I mean, look at my portfolio. Look at my liquid assets. I don't have to stress out anymore. I can finally enjoy everything I've always wanted.

Does that sound familiar, friend? What do most people do when their salary increases by 30%? They raise their standard of living by 30%. They build bigger barns. It's the American success story. The man was convinced the word of his material desires and



financial plans would carry the day. He looked to the future with joy and peace. Why? Because he had enough money and possessions to satisfy any potential needs and every conceivable want! But there was something he completely missed. He was about to give an account of his life to God. That very night, he died.

For the rest of eternity, none of that stuff would be his to enjoy. No barns. No storehouses. No cash reserves. No fine wine or foods or cars or vacations. V. 20, "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"

You chased life in money and possessions during your days on earth and now, for the rest of eternity, you have nothing, nothing but the divine judgment and condemnation your selfish heart deserves. Job 27:19-21, "He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more; he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone. Terrors overtake him like a flood; in the night a whirlwind carries him off. The east wind lifts him up and he is gone; it sweeps him out of his place."

You invested in the wrong kingdom. You sought life in the wrong place. You thought you held your future in your hands. That you were safe because of your money. That you were secure because of your barns. In reality, from the moment you were born to the moment you die, your future is in my hands. Your money and possessions cannot give you life or uphold your life. They never have. They never will.

Brothers and sisters, you don't have to rich to seek life in money and possessions. Even the poorest of men can live dreaming, hungering, thirsting, and spending himself in anxious longing for earthly riches. 1 Tim 6:9-10, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

When it comes to money and possessions, who's the fool? It's not the guy who lost a fortune when GameStop, bitcoin, or the housing market collapsed. Look at v. 21. It's "the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." How do we lay up treasure for ourselves? By looking to our stuff for joy and security such that achieving or maintaining a certain standard of living becomes our top priority.

What does it mean to be rich toward God? To look to him for joy and security, to trust him as the One who upholds our life, such that we freely and faithfully invest all our resources to advance his purposes. Being rich toward God means taking every dollar,

every possession, and asking, “Lord, how can I use this to make much of you? How can I use this treasure to honor and glorify you?” Who are you rich toward, friend? God or yourself? The answer, the way you steward your financial resources, reveals where you think you will find life. A fool seeks life in money and possessions.

2) A DISCIPLE SEEKS LIFE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD (vv. 22-34)

I imagine at this point Jesus disciples may have thought, “Good thing we’re not fools! We’re not storing up any wealth. And we’re not chasing inheritances like that guy. We’re following, you, Jesus.” But Jesus turns to address them directly in v. 22. “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.” Hold on, Jesus! We’re not talking about anxiety. We’re talking about hoarding and selfishness!

Jesus hasn’t changed topics. The rich man and the anxious man have the same problem at a heart level. Whether you’re anxious because of what you *don’t have* or at rest because of what you *do have*, you’re still looking in both cases to money and possessions for life! The only difference is that the poor man anxiously longs to acquire them so he can find life, while the rich man is consumed with selfishly protecting them so he doesn’t lose the life he thinks he’s found.

But that’s not where life is ultimately found, and Jesus knows it! V. 23, “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” Real life, enduring life, life that abounds beyond the grave and doesn’t slip through your fingers on the day you die, isn’t found in something gold can buy. It’s found in God.

Deut 30:19–20, “...Choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days...” Do you need food and clothing to live? Yes. Life isn’t less than those things. But it is infinitely more. It’s found in a relationship with God, for even those necessary things ultimately come from his hand.

Pastor, I appreciate the sentiment, but relationship with God won’t pay the bills. I realize you get paid to talk about spiritual stuff. I live in the real world where cash is king. Cold, hard, cash. You either have it, or you don’t. Trust me, I believe in Jesus. I’m sure everything will be great in heaven. But we’re not there yet. We’re still living here in a dog-eat-dog world, which means I’ve got to make a way for myself and build up the cash pile for my family. I’m just being realistic.

Jesus begs to differ, friend. The life he offers you isn't just a future, once-you-get-to-heaven thing. It's life right here, right now. The joy of knowing him, trusting him, and being cared for by him. In vv. 24-28, Jesus gives his disciples three reasons to look to God for life right now, not your money and possessions. Whether you're prone to selfish spending or anxious striving, listen up! This is why a disciple seeks life in the kingdom of God.

First, God delights to provide. Where did the rich man place his hope? In sowing, reaping, and filling big barns with the fruit of his labor. The ravens flying over the church parking lot this morning don't own a single barn. So where do they get their food? Look at v. 24. "God feeds them." Jesus reveals the implication. "Of how much more value are you than the birds!"

If God provides for the ravens, how much more will he provide for his own people, created in his own image. Your barns are not your Provider. I am your Provider. Your financial planning, meticulous saving, or willingness to work three jobs do not hold all things together. I do. Trust me.

Second, God controls the measure of our days. What does all our anxious striving for more stuff actually achieve? V. 25, "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" The rich man was completely deceived. For all his planning, all his storing, he had absolutely no control over the measure of his days. You don't either, friend. You never will. Past, present, and future, your life is in the Lord's hands.

So if you're not ultimately in control of your life, why are you running around chasing stuff as if you are? Jesus isn't modeling cynicism. He's calling us to humility, a humility as creatures that embraces our complete and utter dependence on a Sovereign God.

Third, God's provision is abundant. The Lord's care for his creation is not miserly. It's not MRE style. Choke this down and then chew some gum so it doesn't get stuck in your gut. No! The Lord's care for all he has made is gloriously exquisite. V. 27, "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

If you stop and think about it, the cellular processes and aesthetic beauty of a single daylily is stunning. The way the chloroplast and mitochondria work. The curvature and color patterns of each flower, perfectly designed for pollination and reproduction. To study biology is to behold the wisdom and wonder of God! And what does Jesus tell



us? There is more of God's glory in a lily than the all the splendid clothing King Solomon's weavers and tailors constructed for him.

If that is the kind of attention to detail God has for grasses of the field, how much more abundant is his goodness toward those he redeemed by his own blood and with whom he will spend all eternity! Christian, will you not trust him? Will you not rely upon him? "O you of little faith!"

Will God use your hard work to provide for yourself and others? Yes. But where's your confidence? Why are you working in the first place and who are you trusting while you work? Yourself or your Creator? Yourself or your Redeemer? Behind all our selfish spending, worried striving, and automatic lifestyle upgrades, is a profound lack of faith in God as the One who gives us life and sustains our life.

When Jesus declares in v. 29, "Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink," he's not contradicting 2 Thess 3:10. "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." He's putting his finger on the idolatry that turns our work and our pursuit of money and possessions into a quest for life. And Jesus isn't just saying that's wrong. He's saying, in light of our Father's provision, our Father's control, our Father's goodness, it's completely unnecessary and spiritually deadly.

I love the tenderness in the second half of v. 30! Speaking of our basic necessities, Jesus says, "Your Father knows you need them." He knows when your rent is due. He knows how much the electric bill will be before you even get it. He's aware your son needs to go to college. How then shall we live? V. 31, "Seek his kingdom, and all these things will be added to you."

The kingdom of God is his redemptive rule. To seek his kingdom is to place ourselves under God's rule by honoring his priorities and purposes. So instead of using our money and possessions to please ourselves, we say, "Lord, how can I invest this money in a way that pleases you?" God makes a precious promise to all who do in v. 31. If you are faithful to love him, trust him, serve him, and honor him with your wealth, he will not fail to provide everything you need to do my will.

At a fundamental level, what we do with our money and possessions reveals our kingdom loyalties. Are we pursuing our kingdom like all the nations of the world by seeking life in money and possessions? Or are we pursuing God's kingdom as true disciples by seeking our life in him?

But Matthew, what if I try the whole trusting God thing, the whole finding my life in him thing, and I come up short? What if my faith isn't strong enough? What if my futile quest for life in money and possessions is simply replaced by another futile quest for life in the kingdom of God?

KingsWay, our Shepherd does more than prepare table before us. He makes us lie down in green pastures. It won't be futile. V. 32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." If you seek life in him, God will not fail to give it to you. When we pursue God by using our wealth for his priorities and purposes, we will not fail to find life – the joy of loving him and his people, and the joy of experiencing his faithful care for us as we do.

CONCLUSION

So how do we do it? What does it practically look like to seek God's kingdom with our money and possessions? It looks like a lifestyle of radical generosity on earth that stores up eternal treasure in heaven. V. 33, "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail..."

Jesus is describing the eternal rewards God has promised to those who devote themselves and all their financial resources to advancing his kingdom. It's the same exhortation Paul gives in 1 Tim 6:17-19, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

There's a sense in which Jesus and Paul are appealing to a good kind of self-interest. Don't enrich yourself for the fleeting moment that is this life and, in the process, impoverish yourself for eternity! Use the fleeting wealth of earth to store up imperishable wealth in heaven! Don't invest in a perishing kingdom. Invest in an eternal kingdom. Use your money to love others, to provide for my church, to advance the mission of the gospel, and I will richly reward you!

James Petty writes, "Jesus meets those who are concerned with money on their own ground: How do we preserve, invest, and grow our wealth? We send it ahead, by doing God's will now. He will repay us many times over."



But what if I feel trapped, Matthew? What if this whole radical generosity thing you're talking about feels like something I know I should do, but part of me doesn't want to do it. It feels like letting go. It feels like surrendering control. Besides, there's always another bill. There's always a new toy. I don't have a financial plan for consistently and generously investing in God's kingdom. I kind of wait to see whatever's left over after I buy the stuff I want, and frankly, it's not much.

Friend, growing in generosity begins with repenting of unbelief. Repent of looking to money and possessions for life instead of the Lord who faithfully provides for his own. And then don't wait for your heart to love God's cause, God's glory, and God's people before you give to them. Give sacrificially as the Lord provides for you, and your affections will follow.

V. 34 is a remarkable reality. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If you sink a bunch of money into your house, remodeling room after room, what happens? Your affection for your house increases! If you sink a bunch of money into a new car, what happens? Your affection for your car increases!

If we devote the first and best of our resources, not our leftovers, to God's kingdom, what will happen? Our affection for the Lord will grow! We don't wait to feel love for God's kingdom before we give to God's purposes. We remember we have been graciously brought into his kingdom through the gospel and give generously so that our love for him would continue to grow!

Devote your wealth to pursuing the good life, and your love for Jesus will remain strangely cold. But if you are rich toward him instead of yourself, you will find your love for the Lord growing by leaps and bounds! Think of it this way. Your wallet holds the reins of your heart. Where your money goes, that's where your heart will go because our hearts follow our treasure.

Caleb's going to preach next Sunday from 2 Cor 9 and help us think biblically about how much we give. But the virtue of generosity doesn't begin with numbers, friend. It begins a heart that is eager to be rich toward God because we've found our life in God, we're seeking his kingdom, not our own, and we value the eternal reward of pleasing him more than earthly treasure.

The way we handle our money reveals the spiritual condition of our hearts. Let's be a people who love him with all we are and all we have, for on the cross he became poor that we might become rich.