

Children

Object: A checkbook.

Good morning, boys and girls. What have I in my hand today? That's right. This is a checkbook. None of you are old enough to have one of these yet. Some day you will have one. A checkbook is a good way to keep track of your money. You can write out checks to pay for things, and keep money in your checking account until you need it later.

If I had a million dollars in my checking account would I be rich? (Talk it over.) It sounds as though I would really be rich if I had that much money in my checking account. But now let me tell you what I think. I think that if I had a million dollars in my checking account, I would not be rich. I would simply have a checking account with a lot of money in it.

Sometimes we read stories about people who have a lot of money but they still are leading poor lives. They have a lot of money but they have no real friends. They have a lot of money but they don't have much happiness. They have a lot of money but they don't have the things that make your life rich.

How can we get rich? (Let the children offer some suggestions.) Jesus gave us a surprising answer in today's Gospel story. He said, "To be rich, become one of God's followers." Jesus was talking to a young man who had a lot of money. Jesus said to him, "Your money won't make you rich. What makes you rich is following God." So Jesus told him to give his money away and come follow after Jesus. The young man would not do it. He could not give up all that money. He had come to enjoy it too much.

The really rich people in our world may not have any money at all. They are the people who have learned what God wants the world to be like, and they are busy helping make it happen. They do things like help others who are in trouble, and share God's love with people, and talk to God each day and thank God for the good things in their life (things that money cannot buy).

If we want to be really rich, all we need to do is stay as close to God as we can get.

SHARING THIS WEEK'S GOSPEL THEME IN SUNDAY CHURCH SCHOOL

Teachers: Begin today's lesson with a reading of this week's Gospel. Ask your students to tell you what they think Jesus meant by "riches in heaven." Did he mean that people could earn gold and silver and money and bicycles and dolls and baseball gloves in heaven? Or did he mean other valuable things that we can enjoy on earth and in heaven - that come from heaven? Ask them to name some of the valuable things in their lives that can't be bought with money. Can some of them be bought with things like kindness, fairness, love, and honesty? Provide each child with an old coffee can

(with lid), a clean detergent bottle, or similar container, and some construction paper, crayons, markers, etc. Instruct each child on how to construct a "spiritual bank" by cutting a slot in the top of the container (you will want to do this for young children) and decorating the bottle appropriately. Have each child also cut several strips of dollar bill sized paper, then write or draw an item of spiritual value which is present in their lives on each strip. The strips can then be "deposited" in the banks. Send several strips of blank paper home with each child, and ask your students to continue to make "deposits" as new riches enter their lives.

Parents: You can encourage your children to be thankful for spiritual riches and to fill their "spiritual banks" at home.

I

Kids think that money just grows on trees, don't they? That's part of their overall innocence, and their trust in the abundance of life. When they're hungry, someone feeds them. Clean clothes magically show up in their dresser drawers. Toilet paper and soap magically appear in the bathroom. And so it's pretty normal for kids to assume that Mommy and Daddy or Grandma or some loving adult can also buy them whatever they want. Why can't we order pizza every night? Why can't we have a new car like the neighbors? Mommy and Daddy are rich, aren't they?

The late author and humorist Erma Bombeck's young son once asked her the question, "Are we rich?" And she stopped to consider what her definition of rich is. See if you agree with her. She wrote:

"You're rich when you can have eight people to dinner and don't have to wash forks between the main course and dessert.

"You're rich when your television set has all the knobs on it.

"You're rich when you can throw away a pair of pantyhose just because it has a large hole in it.

"You're rich when the Scouts have a paper drive and you have a stack of *The New York Times* in your basement.

"You're rich when your dog is wet and it smells good." (1) A few of you can relate to those. If so, you're rich.

Today's story of the rich young ruler may not be one of our favorite passages of scripture. For one thing, most of us probably don't think of ourselves as rich. Like Erma Bombeck, we have our own definitions of "rich." *Rich* is . . . carrying a lap dog as an accessory. *Rich* is having a TV screen the same size as your SUV. *Rich* is having no idea of the actual cost of bread or gasoline or insurance because your accountant just pays the bill for you. How would you finish the sentence, "*Rich* is . . . ?"

There is a humor website called *Stuffrichpeoplelove.com* that lists almost 100 things that rich people love. It gives us common folk a humorous glimpse into how "the other half" lives. Among the things on the list are fine wine, sailing, cufflinks, pretending to empathize (I like that one), designer cupcakes, extravagant parties, air kisses, and being right (all the time).

The website's founder writes a short article explaining each subject and why it appeals to the rich. On extravagant parties, he writes: ". . . when rich people party, they spare no expense . . . An entire industry has been launched from the wallets and purses of the rich driven by their need to outdo the party at the forefront of A-list minds . . . Paris Hilton (heir to the Hilton Hotel fortune) loaded her closest friends into a Gulfstream and circumnavigated the globe on her 21st birthday including stops in New York, Las Vegas, London, Hollywood and Tokyo." (2) Now that's rich!

One of the funniest items on his list is rich peoples' love of "being aghast." *Being aghast* basically means being shocked or stunned, but with an edge of disapproval. The website author writes, "Despite the surprising ineffectiveness of changing the world by appearing shocked, the power of being aghast is significant . . . While appearing surprised may seem easy, knowing *what* should astonish is the true talent." He goes on to list four things and asks the readers to choose which one would create shock and disapproval in a rich person: "unjust war, wearing gloves lined with baby seal pelt, buying day-old roses and American states with no minimum wage laws."

Then he writes, "If you were aghast at buying day-old roses, you are a natural." (3)

What if Jesus appeared to you right now and told you to sell everything you have, give the money to the poor, and then follow him? Would you be aghast? Our Bible passage says that the rich young ruler's "face fell" and he went away sad over Jesus' words. The Greek word used in this passage was also used metaphorically in Jesus' day to refer to the gloominess of clouds covering the sun. This young man's life was all sunshine and good times. He was wealthy. He was powerful. He was morally upright. If he were single, you'd fix him up with your daughter (no question about it). And then Jesus had to come along and steal his fun. What was this rich young ruler missing? And what did he give up when he walked away from Jesus? That's the truly scary question that you and I need to consider today.

Compared to most of the world's people we are rich. That may be one reason why this text will not be one of our favorites. We don't think it applies to us. We may dream of being rich someday, but most of us do not think of ourselves as being there now.

Many of us are having a difficult time financially. Still, we need to confront the fact that Jesus did warn time and time again against the danger of materialism. He says in this passage that a rich man will have a hard time getting into heaven. On another occasion he talked about a rich man who built barns to hold his surplus crops and then died in the night. Jesus called him a fool who had not prepared for the world to come. If we took Jesus' words seriously in these passages, we might get a cloudy, gloomy perspective on our lives too.

In another story he describes a man who woke up one day in Hades because the man had great wealth and he ignored the needs of a beggar who lay at his gates. Jesus told his disciples not to be anxious about what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on. You are not to worry about these. You are to trust in God, not in your bank account. Jesus warned time and time again about reliance on money.

He did not say that it is impossible for a rich man to get into heaven. There are many wealthy figures in the Old and New Testaments who were good people and who were not condemned. But again, to be fair to our religion and fair to our responsibilities, we need to be reminded from time to time of the dangers of wealth.

In the first place, wealth is dangerous when we learn to overvalue things and undervalue people. It is important that we develop a sense of perspective about life. For some of us, accumulating things has blotted out the importance of the people around us.

Marjorie Holmes was a best-selling Christian author who wrote a prayer many years ago asking God to help her deal with her desire for possessions. I want to quote a couple of lines from this prayer:

“My senses are tormented by the dazzling world of things.

Lord, cool these fires of wanting. Help me to realize

how futile is this passion for possessions.”

She goes on to say in the prayer that recently one of her best friends died “in the midst of her possessions.” This friend and her husband had worked so hard to decorate their home with the finest furnishings and china and Oriental rugs. Now her friend was suddenly gone, and her pretty possessions remained as a sad reminder.

Holmes ends the prayer, “But let me learn something from this loss; that possessions are meant to enhance life, not to become the main focus of living.” (4)

I think that I have money and possessions in their proper place until I read this story of the rich young ruler. And then I wonder if Jesus were to make the same demand of me at this very moment . . . “sell everything you have, give the money to the poor, and follow me” . . . would I make excuses? Would I be aghast? Would I walk away from Jesus and from abundant and eternal life? Lord, let us learn something from his loss . . .

Sometimes we are forced to make choices. Many of us in this room have to make hard decisions about the time we spend earning a living and the time we spend with our families.

In other words, we have to make a choice about what’s important to us. Wealth is dangerous when you begin overvaluing money and undervaluing people.

Wealth is also dangerous when we see our possessions as an end rather than as a means. When the accumulation of great wealth is our primary reason for living then we are in trouble. Wealth is simply a means to improve the world, to improve our community, to improve our lives, but when it becomes an end then it is dangerous.

Writer Ernest Hemingway had one very wise practice. On the first day of each New Year, Hemingway gave away some of his most prized possessions. When asked about this, he said, “If I can give these things away, then I own them. But if I can’t give them away because they have somehow become so important to me, then they own me.” (5) It’s not necessary for wealth to keep you out of the Kingdom of God, but wealth can be a snare that can stop your spiritual progress if it becomes an end rather than a means.

This brings us to the final thing to be said this morning. **Wealth can be dangerous if we print on our money “In God we trust” but in our hearts we trust in mammon—our money and our material things.**

In his 2005 commencement speech at Kenyon College, author David Foster Wallace said something really thought-provoking. He said, “. . . in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.”

Think about that for a moment. The only choice we get is what to worship. He went on to say that whatever we worship will eventually consume us. If we worship appearances or money or status, we will spend all our energy on these things. Whatever we worship eventually comes to control our lives. And most of us aren't even conscious of what we really worship. Until, like the rich young ruler, we are asked to give it up.

Foster ends this meditation by saying, “They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing.” (6)

There are many of us, if we were asked, who would say, “Oh yes, I trust God,” but in our heart of hearts we know that we are much more concerned with the value of our IRAs, our pension, our Social Security, our property, and our investments. We have slipped into worshipping wealth, security, certainty, control. What does our anxiety about these things teach us about our relationship with God? Jesus told us not to be anxious about life, that God would provide.

That does not mean that we are not to prepare for our old age. It does mean that wealth is not our ultimate security. Our ultimate security is God. I'm aware of how glibly we often say, “Trust the Lord” when we really mean we're going to trust in our own devices. Yet there needs to come that time when we settle the issue once and for all. What is the source of our ultimate security? Is it our bank account, our investments, our property, our status, or do we trust in the love and providence of God?

“It is harder,” said Jesus, “for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

That's strong symbolism, but we need to recognize the dangers of wealth. It can keep us out of the Kingdom of God if we overvalue money and undervalue people, if we see money as an end and not as a means, if we write upon our money, “In God We Trust” but within our hearts we trust in our material accumulation.

At some point in our lives, we all have to choose who or what we will place our trust in. We all have to choose what we will value, what will take first place in our lives. Jesus didn't try to make this choice any easier. In every generation, following Jesus means giving up the things that our culture values. It means giving up our own security and comfort and control. But Jesus also ends this passage with the promise that whatever we give up for him will be returned to us a hundredfold, through the riches of knowing him and sharing eternal life with him. Learn from the loss of the rich young ruler. Decide now that following Jesus is worth more than anything else in life and discover the rich blessings he has for all those who put their total trust in him.

1. *From Forever, Erma*, by Erma Bombeck, found in *Stories for a Cheerful Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), pp. 17-18.

2. *Extravagant Parties* by Chas Underwood III, July 23, 2009, <https://stuffrichpeoplelove.com/2009/07/23/extravagent-parties/>.

3. "Being Aghast" by Chas Underwood III, January 18, 2010, <https://stuffrichpeoplelove.com/2010/01/18/being-aghast/>.

4. Marjorie Holmes, source unknown.

5. Bruce Larson, *What God Wants to Know* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. 98.

6. "This is Water" by David Foster Wallace. David Foster Wallace's 2005 commencement speech to the graduating class at Kenyon College, Farnam Street blog, https://fs.blog/2012/04/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/?utm_source=morning_brew.
ChristianGlobe Network, Inc., [Dynamic Preaching Fourth Quarter](#), by King Duncan

II Fr Desiano

One often hears a very neat description of the cost of addiction: “Addiction is when I give up everything in my life for the sake of one thing; recovery is when I give up one thing in my life and then find I have everything else.”

This is a way to talk about how one aspect can change our approach to everything. We don’t have to think of addiction. Think, for example, of a serious medical diagnosis. “You have pancreatic cancer.” Think how much that would make you look at everything else differently. Or imagine you were elected to a very public and very important position—would you not begin to view everything from that perspective.

Our scriptures are presenting precisely this question before us: what is the one thing that you allow to dominate your view of everything? This rich young man comes to Jesus. The account in Mark is particularly powerful: “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” This probably means that Jesus embraced the man, but the language is still powerful. But as the encounter progresses, it turns out to be pretty disappointing.

“There is one ore thing you need,” says Jesus. What is this one thing? Well, we say, the obvious answer is money. The man has to sell what he has in order to gain eternal life. But the invitation might be more nuanced than this. Jesus is asking this man to give up the one thing that colors his approach to everything else. As long as money is the most important thing for him, he cannot begin to see how he can serve the Kingdom.

Look at our contemporary world. We all think money is most important. We all know what lack of money does to people who are extremely poor—how steep a mountain the children of the poor have to climb to get anywhere in life. Yet we know how conflicted we are about the poor by the language we use, how often they are seen as lazy, or unambitious, or morally limited.

But we can also look at how we let worry about money take over our brains. Every twitch of the stock market, the direction of interest rates, housing prices, minimum wage, national debt, unemployment rates, the GDP . . . our absorption about money makes it look like our nation was founded only to help Americans make as much money as possible. We cannot even begin a conversation about how else to promote prosperity for most people, especially the poor.

So this rich young man, with money figures dancing in his brain, provides an opportunity for us to think about our own priorities. The first place to look is in our own personal lives. The Scriptures are saying that if God is the priority of our lives, then everyone and everything else falls into place. The second place to look is at our society. Does it make sense to think about ourselves primarily in economic terms? Or should it be our common humanity, or the greatest needs, or our greater unity?

What helps us cut through the confusion in our lives and our society is God’s Word which not only forces us to look at ourselves but also gives us a way to clarify the paths we believe are best for the future. God has a vision for us—the fullness of life and love—and wants us to have that vision for ourselves. With that vision, we can see more clearly. Without it, we are stumbling in the dark.

Jesus has loved and embraced us. What will we make the most important reality in our lives?

III

Comedienne Joan Rivers who died a few years ago once said something with which many people would agree. “People say that money isn’t the key to happiness,” said Joan Rivers, “but I always figured if you have enough money, you can have a key made.” “I always wondered if you have enough money . . .” says Joan Rivers. How much is enough money? That is a good question.

A Hollywood film editor once said, “I had this date the other night with a woman who wanted to walk along the beach. I’m wearing a twelve hundred dollar suit, a seventy five dollar tie, a hundred and fifty dollar shirt, and a pair of two hundred- dollar shoes. It costs me fifteen dollars to clean my suit and six dollars to have my shirt hand washed. “I don’t even want to think about what it would cost if I should get a drop of spaghetti sauce on my tie. And this woman wants me to roll up my pants and walk along the beach! All I can think about is how much it’s going to cost me if she wants to sit down on the sand. Here’s the bottom line that I have to ask myself: Can I afford to wear my own clothes?”

A twelve hundred dollar suit, a seventy five dollar tie, a hundred and fifty dollar shirt, and a pair of two hundred dollar shoes . . . When is enough . . . enough? That, by the way, is from a book titled, *Lives without Balance*. (1)

So you want to buy a little carry-on. You know the size and the quality you want. You go to one store, and the price is, say, \$70; you go to another store, and the price for the same bag is \$65. It’s pretty clear which bag you would buy, all things being equal. Because we certainly do not want to spend more than we have to for things we want or need.

This obvious trait is the root of analyzing human nature as fundamentally economic, homo oeconomicus, as some professionals call humankind. This view says there’s a part of us that simply calculates what is going to be in our advantage, and we take it. Adam Smith, who wrote about the “invisible hand” of economic laws at work in daily life—the economic rules we follow by instinct—helped modern scholars and governments come to think of economics as an almost invariable set of rules that hold sway in human relations. There’s a way we operate—and it’s mostly for our own favor. Debates about economics now run through all of modern life; the US Presidential debate essentially revolves around economic theories, as do Europe’s issues. What set of rules will get the most money for the most people, without bringing on inflation, or bubbles that eventually crash?

Author and sociology professor Tony Campolo in his book *Everything You’ve Heard Is Wrong* tells about a young idealistic student he once had in one of his classes named Ralph. During his undergraduate years, Ralph was committed to becoming an advocacy lawyer who would champion the rights of the oppressed and stand up against the exploitation of the poor. Ralph was full of passion for justice and radiated a compassion for the underdog that inspired all who knew him.

By the time he graduated from law school, however, Ralph was deeply in debt. So he took a job with a large firm that specialized in corporate law and did as little pro bono work as possible. The pay was mind boggling, and Ralph convinced himself that he would only stay with the firm for as long as it took him to make enough money to pay off his school bills. He assured his former professor that the yuppie subculture into which he was jumping would not rub off on him. He was certain that who he was had

been so firmly established that the surrounding culture couldn't change him one little bit.

Well, you can imagine the rest of the story. When Tony Campolo met Ralph a few years later he was a transformed person. His idealism was gone. He was on the verge of becoming a partner in the firm, he had a live-in relationship with one of his colleagues, and they had just moved into a "super place up on the East Side." What saddened Campolo most was that the excitement that had once sparkled in Ralph's eyes seemed gone. "Oh," says Campolo, "Ralph still went to church regularly. He had found one of those churches that served, as they say, 'a better class of people.'" (2)

I guess that Ralph discovered that once you get on the treadmill of material success, enough simply is never enough. When is enough . . . enough for you?

A wealthy man came to Jesus to ask what he needed to do "to inherit eternal life."

Evidently, this man was where many of us are. His material needs were being met, but not his spiritual ones. He was not a bad man, just an empty one.

His approach to Jesus, however, was a bit of unbecoming flattery. He addressed Jesus as "Good Teacher." This was a violation of proper Jewish etiquette.

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone."

Jesus was probably cautioning this man not to put his ultimate confidence in teachers or powerful people, but only in God. The arm of flesh is frail and will fail, but God remains true.

"You know the commandments," said Jesus. "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother."

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

This man believed that, if he just kept the Mosaic Law, he would have it made spiritually. So, here's his situation: He thought money would make him happy. But it didn't. He thought minding all the rules of his faith would make him happy, but it didn't. All his life he had been taught that if he had enough money and if he was a good guy, that would be enough. But it wasn't.

Mark tells us that Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus knew this man was trying to live as his society told him he ought to live. And Jesus appreciated that. And Jesus wanted to give him the key to what he needed. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

"At this," says the Gospel of Mark, "the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." At least one Bible scholar says that this may be the saddest verse in the Bible. This young man was in the presence of the Master himself. He could have made his life something magnificent. His name would have been called blessed by hundreds of people he might have helped. He could have written one of the Gospels perhaps. His name would be revered even today. But he turned away because he couldn't let go of the good in order to grasp the best. God gives us the freedom to do that, doesn't He? We don't have to accept what God has to give us. "He went away sad," says the Gospel, "because he had great wealth."

Can you imagine that? We could understand it if we read, "He went away sad in spite of his great wealth." Many people are sad in spite of their great wealth. But it says, "He went away sad because of his great wealth." Is it possible to be sad because you have

great wealth?

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

The disciples were even more amazed, says Mark, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

That’s a good question. If accumulating toys won’t bring you happiness and keeping the rules won’t buy you salvation, what’s it going to take? If we take everything we have and sell it, and give the proceeds to the poor like Jesus was telling this man to do, will that do it? Well, that depends. Is money what’s most important in your life? Is it your money that’s keeping you from giving your all to God? When Jesus told this man to sell everything he had and give to the poor, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus was simply telling this man the truth about what came first in this man’s life--and that was his money.

What is it that comes first in your life? Let me phrase it another way, what is it that keeps you from doing something great for God? Is it your job? Is it your family? Is it time playing computer games, or watching sports on TV, conversing with your friends on Facebook, or some hobby? Could I look at your Visa statement or your computer log, or your Day planner and discover what really matters to you? Where do you devote your time, your money, your dreams, your energy? Is it the accumulation of ever more wealth, ever more toys? Jesus said, “Where a man’s treasure is, there will his heart be also . . .”

Jesus knew where this young man’s heart was. He was a nice guy, he kept all the commandments. That may be more than you or I do. Jesus looked at him and loved him, but Jesus knew that God did not come first in this young man’s life. Again, what is it that comes first in your life?

In many people’s minds Paul Tillich was the twentieth century’s most perceptive theologian. Tillich once said that whatever is our ultimate concern in life, that is our God. Among these concerns might be our personal success, or our allegiance to our country, or the quest for scientific truth, or a host of very important concerns. Or, our ultimate concern could be the God of the Bible. All but the latter are forms of idolatry. That is a hard teaching. You mean God must come before my job, my family, my concern for my health, even my allegiance to my country? Yes, nothing in this world can come before God. Let me hasten to add that God rarely asks us to choose, for example, between our family and our faith in God--or our allegiance to our country and our faith in God--or even our job and our faith in God. But it can happen. And when it does, we must choose God.

Leadership guru John Maxwell notes that there are only a handful of important decisions people need to make in their entire lifetimes. Does that surprise you? It shouldn’t. He says that most people complicate life and get bogged down in decision making. He says his goal has always been to make it as simple as possible. He’s boiled the big decisions down to twelve things. Once he’s made those twelve decisions, all he has to do is manage how he’ll follow through on them. He says if you make decisions in those key areas once and for all--and then manage those decisions daily--you can

create the kind of tomorrow you desire. “Successful people make right decisions early and manage those decisions daily,” says Maxwell. “The people who neglect to make those decisions and to manage them well often look back on their lives with pain and regret--no matter how much talent they possessed or how many opportunities they once had.” (3)

Of course, the ultimate decision is what or who will you worship? Once you decide to worship the God revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth, then all the other important decisions can be made quite readily. If you choose instead to worship an idol--whether wealth or comfort or work or any other temporal god--then life becomes much more complicated and the end result will only be sadness. That is not the message of our culture, but it is Christ’s message, even to those of great wealth.

Pastor Ray Stedman puts it this way: “I have been privileged to travel extensively and to speak oftentimes to rather wealthy audiences. I was in Hollywood, Florida . . . on the so-called “gold coast” of Florida. Every morning I taught the Scriptures to a crowd of five hundred or more. These people, I was told, represented well over a billion dollars’ worth of accumulated wealth.

“I had the opportunity to talk with many of them individually. I found that most of these, by their own testimony, though they had all the money to buy anything they wanted, had arrived at the place where they were suffering from what someone has so aptly called ‘Destination Sickness’--the malady of having everything that you want, but not wanting anything you have, and being sick and empty and lonely and miserable.” (4)

The wealthy young man who came to Jesus probably suffered from this malady-- Destination Sickness. He had arrived. He thought he had it made. But, in truth, he was a slave to his wealth. Jesus was offering him a lifeline, but he couldn’t see it. All he could see was what he would be giving up.

Are you ready to put God first in your life? Are you tired of the emptiness of living life your way and not God’s way? Have you discovered that there’s not enough money, not enough work, not enough sex, not enough narcotics to ease the pain of an empty and unfulfilled heart? Sir William Beach Thomas said, “To achieve happiness by a succession of pleasures is like trying to keep up a light all night by striking successive matches.” Happiness comes not from pleasure but from purpose. The happiest people I know are people who have given their lives completely and unreservedly to God.

The disciples were amazed at Jesus’ words about the difficulty of the wealthy entering the kingdom. Jesus looked at his disciples and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age . . . and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Please do not misunderstand. Jesus does not say that it is impossible for people with money to enter the kingdom. He said, “All things are possible with God.” The only people in danger are those who put their wealth before God. The only people in danger are those who enjoy their wealth while turning a blind eye to the needs of the poor.

The only people in danger are those who have no greater purpose in life than the

accumulation of more. When is enough . . . enough?

Over the past 15 years, a businessman in New Jersey has anonymously given away more than \$600 million to universities, medical centers, and other beneficiaries. Recently, a legal complication forced him to reveal his identity. He explained his generosity this way, “Nobody can wear two pairs of shoes at one time. I simply decided I had enough money.” That is very rare for a person with great wealth to say: “I decided I had enough money.”

A friend of the donor described him as a man who doesn’t own a house or a car. He flies economy class, wears a \$15 watch but “didn’t want his money to crush him.” (5) Could that happen to you, that your craving for material success could crush you, or your family, or your health, or your relationship with God? The wealthy young man in our scripture turned sadly away from Jesus because he had great wealth. Is your craving for material success taking you from Jesus as well?

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1. Steven Carter and Julia Sokol (New York: Willard Books, Random House, Inc, 1991), pp. 125, 194. Cited in God’s Little Lessons for Leaders (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2005), p. 121.
 2. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), p. 128.
 3. John C. Maxwell, Today Matters (New York: Warner Books, 2004), p. 15.
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