

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

## An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 12- Luke 12:13-21** 235- How to be Rich Toward God

---

March 30, 2014

### Luke 12:13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me."

14 But He said to him, "**Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"**

15 Then He said to them, "**Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.**"

16 And He told them a parable, saying, "**The land of a rich man was very productive.**

17 "**And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'**

18 "**Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.**

19 '**And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'**"

20 "**But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?'**

21 "**So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**"

To the Glory of God

Now Jesus and the apostles considered money to be both hazardous and helpful. And so they taught us how to *minimize* the hazard and *maximize* the helpfulness. And that's what I hope to do today. I would like to help you *minimize* the tragedies that money and

possessions can bring into your life, and I would like *maximize* your joy in the way you make your money to be helpful.

Now right up front- I want to say that the Holy Bible is crystal clear about money and possessions, dear friends. The Biblical Teaching about money and about material possessions are not vague or uncertain- they are very clear and very precise and very easy to understand.

What has made the issue of money to be hidden or to be unclear is all the terrible teachings that abound in the modern Church about money and about possessions that, for the most part, have made wicked aspects of human fallenness like "greed" and "covetousness" and "materialism" to appear to no longer be the horrible sins that they are, and to actually make them appear to be admirable qualities to which we all should aspire.

So, first of all- we need to establish that money in itself is simply pieces of metal and pieces of paper. It is neither "good" nor "bad"; it is an *inanimate* object that has no emotion and no soul. And while it is true that money can do enormous "good" or "bad" in the world in the way it is used- we need to put all that in perspective from an eternal standpoint.

For example- money can buy food to feed your children- but money cannot cause your children to love and serve God. Money can buy medicine that helps you to feel better- but money cannot forgive your sin. Money can allow you to live in a safe and secure neighborhood- but money cannot save your soul. Money can help you purchase books and tapes and software and tools that will help you to understand the Holy Bible better and easier- but money cannot produce the righteousness in you that the Bible demands. Money can allow you to live a life that is better and easier, but money cannot give you lasting peace or joy. And while money can change the lives of many people for good- money also can make your heart and soul hard and cold toward God.

And the reason that money and possessions are of any concern to us at all is- that in our culture- we have established that these pieces of metal and paper will function as "currency". So our money represents value. So money is significant for us simply because we exchange it for what we value. So what you do with your money shows what you value with your heart and where your treasure is.

For example- we value life and taste- so we exchange money for food. We value education- so we exchange money for books and tuition. We value entertainment (probably way too much)- and so we exchange money for Netflix and ballgames and concerts. And we value the ministries of the Church and the spread of the Gospel, and so we give money to the Church and other Ministries. Jesus said here in **Luke 12:34**,

**Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also**

... so the overall movement of your money signifies the movement of your heart. Where your money goes, your heart has already gone. So the things that you place enough value on to exchange money for- the things that are important enough to you to put your treasure in- those are the things that your heart leans toward and pursues. So we exchange money for what we value and what we treasure.

And that is why the New Covenant no longer speaks of the tax on the Jews called "the Tithe". The Old Covenant imposed a tax on people and even though it is commonly thought that it was 10%- it actually varied between 10%- 30% depending on the circumstances.

But the New Covenant speaks of an entirely different concept called "Giving"- that we give to God out of a grateful heart, and so the amount a person gives to God under the New Covenant is based on the amount of value he places on God. And I want you to look at a very important Passage about this subject found in **2Corinthians 9**- so let's go there- **2Corinthians 9:6-15**:

**6 Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.**

**7 Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

**8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;**

**9 as it is written, "*HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.*"**

**10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;**

**11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.**

**12 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.**

**13 Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for *your* obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all,**

**14 while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.**

**15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**

Now look again closely at verse 7:

**Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

We cannot and we must not ever give to God with the attitude that we are somehow “buying” God, or that we are making God *obligated* to us in some way or that now that we have given- God owes us something in return.

But on the other hand- we must also guard our hearts so that we do not give to God *reluctantly*, or as Paul says here “**grudgingly**”, because if you give reluctantly- it is as though you didn’t give at all. We must remember that God doesn’t need our money, dear friends- He owns all the gold and all the cattle on a thousand hills-along with all the dirt of those hills as well. God flung stars out into the blackness of space and they held there; God speaks and light is created; God draws a line in the sand and the seas do not come any further- even though the water pressure from the center of the oceans is enough to push the water up over the land; God opens the eyes of blind people and makes cripples walk and God touches mountains and they smoke and God saves unworthy sinners- so God doesn’t need your contribution to His Well Being.

So God is not benefited when we give- we are benefitted when we give and all humanity is benefitted when we give because what we do with our money is a reflection of the condition of our heart, and we transfer money into that which we place a high value on. So, if and when we give- we must give with a cheerful heart and not out of simple duty and not because we are trying to twist God’s Arm behind His Back so He will do something for us. But notice the middle part of verse 7-

### ... or under compulsion...

Now the word “**compulsion**” was rendered “**necessity**” in the King James- and it comes from the Greek word, *anangkee*, which means: *something imposed by the external condition of things or by the law of duty or having regard to one's advantage.*

The OT Tithe was *imposed* on the people by God's Law but this verse *prohibits* that kind of contribution. So that is why I tell you that NT Giving is infinitely superior to OT Tithing- even though your gifts to God might be 10% of your income- because NT Giving is based on the value that you place on God and is not a percentage of your income imposed by Law. NT giving is produced by Grace and is carried out in love through the heart of the grateful and cheerful believer for all that God has done for him and therefore is a reflection of the relationship between that person and God.

Notice also that this word prohibits the very foundation of the false teaching of “seed- faith giving” that Oral Roberts *invented* back in the 1950's. This heretical teaching says that as you give to God- God is then *obligated* to give back to you- and this teaching has now almost universally been accepted into the lexicon of the modern Church as though the Bible actually teaches it. But the Bible does *not* teach this, dear friends- the Bible condemns it. The teaching of “seed faith giving” is a lie, it is a false doctrine, and besides the fact that it makes merchandise out of God and the things of God, and besides the fact that it places Man in charge and makes God to be the funky, and besides the fact that it allows people to use God for their own lustful and carnal desires- besides all that evil- this teaching simply does not work, and like the false doctrine that says that God will always heal the bodies of his children as long as they have enough faith- the people who give based on being deceived by this false doctrine - expecting things in return from God- are many times very disillusioned and left high and dry.

It is an incontestable fact of Church History that the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ did not preach this heresy or teach it for the first 1,950 years of its existence until this wayward man just made it up to raise money for his ministry. And the lasting legacy of Oral Roberts' false teaching about “seed faith giving” is not prosperity for the believer, and it is not even the financing of godly Ministries- it is that many,

many genuine believers are routinely taken advantage of and used by very bad leaders and it has encouraged the people of God to lust after more of this world's goods.

And like the false teaching about physical healing- the teaching about "seed faith giving" preys on the weakest and the most vulnerable and desperate group of people- who will say or do anything to gain financially or get ahead in life. Beloved- we must know that this is not Biblical Christianity and we must cry out against such things.

The Holy Scriptures are clear that the one, true, living God is never in any way *obligated* to do *anything* for us- including forgiving our sins- even when we ask Him. For example- **1John 2:12** says

**I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.**

So God does *not* forgive sin simply because we ask Him to or even because we *need* Him to- that is *not* what the Bible teaches. God absolutely *does* forgive our sins and thank God for that- but the Holy Bible says right here that God forgives our sins "**for His Name's sake**", or for the sake of God's Name and Reputation and Glory. But God never *owes* us forgiveness or anything else.

And because that is true- it is, therefore, wrong to say "*If I do this- then God will do that*". God may, in fact, do that- but He may not- that all depends on His Will. And it is also wrong to think that it really doesn't matter if you sin or not because God will always forgive you later on because when Simon was impressed with the Power of God and tried to buy the Holy Spirit with money- Peter told him in **The Acts 8:20-22**:

**20 ...May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!**

**21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.**

**22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.**

... so never *presume* upon the Mercy of God. Do not ever *assume* that simply because you want God to do something- that He also wants to do it as well. Always come to God humbly- in an inferior and weak

position- begging for a Mercy that you do not deserve and a Grace that you cannot earn.

God Almighty is never in a position where He *has* to do something. God is never under any pressure; God is never in a "bind". God is the only truly free Being in the Universe and everything that God does is entirely free of any obligated or compulsion, and it is free from any debt to anyone or any imposition by anyone.

Yet God gives and God forgives and He blesses and heals and moves towards us in a thousand different ways all the time. But He does so by His Grace- by His unmerited Favor- by His unearned Special Treatment, by His undeserved Love to unworthy sinners. God acts in unencumbered Love and unhindered Mercy towards people who have no right to receive it and therefore all that God does- He does *willingly* and He does *freely* and He does to His Own Glory and in His Own best Interests- all according to His Own Will based upon His Own Counsel.

But Roberts and all the charlatans who came after him- taught that the more money you "sow" into a particular ministry- preferably his- the more you will "reap" from God because your gift makes God *obligated* to bless you.

So when I say that money is hazardous and helpful- what I mean is that the pieces of metal and paper that you have in your pocket or purse have the capacity to show that you value things more than God (which is hazardous), or that you value God more than things (which is helpful). The paper is nothing in itself but is simply an expression of the treasures that you hold in your heart- which are everything.

So the conviction behind this message is threefold:

- That where a people (I'm thinking of you now- this Church) treasures God above all that money can buy
- Where a people understands the Biblical teaching that the movement of your money expresses the movement of your heart
- Where a people grasps that the local Church is crucial for God's Work in the world

... that people and that church — will have what it needs to pursue God's Mission of Mercy and Evangelization, and to build up the Body of Christ, and all the while every member and family in it will be cared for.

So my job, week in and week out, is to point you to the supreme Value of God in Jesus Christ and to reveal how the heart moves with its money, and to highlight the preciousness of this local Church in our lives.

Now the context of the Passage before us today is that there were literally thousands of people here- all stepping on one another- according to verse 1. But *why* were these people gathered around Jesus at this time? Back in **Luke Chapter 11**- we see that Jesus was having a confrontation with the Pharisees. And the subject of the confrontation was His Deity and their false teaching. And all these people had gathered around to witness this conflict, this fight, this battle over the souls of men.

On the one side there is Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, the fulfillment of almost 400 specific Old Testament prophecies, who in the mind of the Pharisees was nothing more than a rebel, and a demon, and a false prophet, who needed to be confronted and exposed discredited and perhaps even publicly killed.

On the other hand there were the Pharisees- the religious establishment of that day, highly educated, learned men- who saw the moral decay of their culture and took it upon themselves to stop it. These men considered Jesus to be part of the problem- because they saw Him as being far too liberal, far too easy with sinners, far too forgiving to be of God- and they considered Him a mortal enemy of everything they believed in.

Jesus on the other hand saw the Pharisees for exactly what they were- self-righteous, unsaved hypocrites- who had taken the partial Truth of the Old Covenant and had perverted it into a completely man-made, harsh, and brutal religion- that subjugated people, that brought no one to Salvation, and that dishonor God.

Now we must understand that the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees was not a simple difference of opinion; this was not a theological discussion that was simply offering two different views of equal value- no, Jesus was right and the Pharisees were wrong; Jesus was Holy and they were unholy; Jesus was Pure and they were impure. Jesus was God Almighty in human flesh and they were fallen and rebellious and enemies of God- who loved darkness rather than light; Jesus was Truth and they were a lie; Jesus was the Son of God and they were children of the devil.



As I have told you many times- the Pharisees are the only group of people in the entire New Testament that Jesus never said anything good about- and yet they were the ones who supposedly represented God to the people.

Now in the first part of **Luke 11**- Jesus is responding to the Pharisees attack against Him- by explaining to them about His Deity. And in the last part of **Luke 11**- Jesus is bringing forth the most stinging diatribe and rebuke against these people that is found anywhere in the Bible.

Jesus is not telling these people that they are a sincere and well-meaning group who are just a little bit off in their theology. No, Jesus is categorically and specifically damning the Pharisees to hell. And the longer Jesus talks- the harder their hearts become and the more the Pharisees hate him. Look at **Luke 11:53&54**

**53** When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects,

**54** plotting against Him to catch *Him* in something He might say.

So *that* is the setting as we approach **Luke 12**. And that is *why* there are thousands of people gathered around Jesus- because they have come to watch this confrontation. And they realize that there was going to be a winner and a loser to this confrontation- someone was going to win and somebody was going to lose- there would be no surrender no retreat and no negotiation- only the inevitable showdown.

And it was in this context that Jesus turned to the thousands of disciples who had gathered and said in **Luke 12:1**:

**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**

And as He went on to instruct them further- the crowd pressed closer to hear His Words. But suddenly- out of nowhere- a man from this vast crowd walked up from the back and interrupted the Savior. And as this man began to speak- many in the crowd must have wondered, *"Who is this guy? Does he seek information from the Messiah or a blessing or maybe a healing? Why is this man interrupting Jesus? Surely it must be something vitally important."* And in **Luke 12:13** we

find out what was so important to this man that he would interrupt the Incarnate God:

**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me.**

Are you kidding me? *That's* what this man was bothered about? *That* is what this man had on his mind that was so important that he was interrupting the Savior of the world in His teaching?

Now remember what is going on here. In verse eight- Jesus just told these people that He is the Son of Man. And in verse 10- He said that He was the One Who stands as the only Reconciler between the Holy God and sinful Man. He is the Deliverer out of bondage- and the One Who will reign over all. And no one, no Man, no human can make this claim but the Incarnate God. And everybody who was in that crowd knew that- except- apparently- *this* guy.

What in the world could be so urgent, so earthshaking, and so important that he would interrupt the Messiah in His Teaching and air his family's dirty laundry in front of all these people? I mean, if you're going to interrupt Jesus- shouldn't it be about something important or significant or life changing? If someone was dying- that would be understandable. But to air a petty family squabble in public by interrupting Jesus' Teaching- are you kidding me? And yet what is more surprising than this man's interruption- is Jesus' response.

Now if you have been saved for any length of time at all- and you have read the Bible- especially in the Gospels- then you know that when Jesus takes note of individuals in the crowd- especially when they come to Jesus with a concern about somebody else's sin- then you know that those people become the very next teaching from the Mouth of our Savior. So let's watch and listen. Read **Luke 12:14&15** with me again:

**14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"**

**15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."**

Now that's the Biblical equivalent of the referee throwing the flag on the field. This kind of comment is meant to stop everybody dead in

their tracks. The Greek word translated here as “**beware**” is an imperative present active verb carrying considerable force for a warning- “**beware**”. So do not bypass this statement quickly. Linger on this word- for this is a severe warning from the Savior of the world- your Lord and your Master:

**Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.**

Now before we get too uppity and look down our nose on this man- we might want to remember that we have a whole lot more in common with *him* than we do with Jesus. In fact, if you didn't know any better you would think that Jesus sovereignly *allowed* the situation to develop so that He could make the statement- for all of us- and not just this man. And if you know anything at all about the Sovereignty of God- then you know that that is exactly what is going on here. Jesus is warning us about greed, about the stuff that we accumulate in this life, and about our material goods- and He is giving us a very severe warning about how those things connect to God and to our hearts-

**Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.**

So Jesus is standing here among these thousands of people and teaching them about the Value and the Worth of God- that the Son of Man- Jesus Christ is to be cherished above everything that is made, above everything that we buy, above everything that we own, above everything that we make- up to and including our very lives. Jesus is more precious than our children, more lovely than our wives, more valuable than our money, more lasting than the universe, and more important than anything in all of Creation.

So Jesus sees a man losing his grip on his portion of the inheritance. And he sees in him some evidence that the hazard of the inheritance is deceiving the man. This is why Jesus refers to some strange thing called “**the *deceitfulness* of riches**” in **Matthew 13:22**. This inheritance was lying to the man. This is why money is so hazardous. It lies to us. It tries to deceive us. So in this case- what was it saying?

In this case the riches of this man's inheritance was saying: "If you lose me, you lose a very large part of your life. If you lose me, you lose what life can be for you. I am your life. Do you realize how big I am? Life will be *real* life — truly life — if you have me." That's what this man's inheritance was saying. Some of you here today are very familiar with this kind of statement from wealth and riches.

And the Apostle Paul was also familiar with what riches say and that's why he told those who were wealthy in **1Timothy 6:18&19**:

**18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,**

**19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.**

... in other words- *"Don't be deceived by the message of money that woos you with the words: 'I give you life. Your life will be drab and boring and empty and meaningless and unhappy without me. I am your life.'"*

And to this Jesus says in verse 15b,

**... for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.**

... in other words- what money and possessions say to us is a lie, it is deception, it isn't true. So don't listen. Jesus said,

**Beware, and be on your guard...**

Because we are fallen- the lie that money and possessions tells us will awaken covetousness in us and the Bible says in **Colossians 3:5** that **covetousness is idolatry**. Therefore the hazard here is huge. Not only is this inheritance *not* the most important aspect of your life- it is about to *take* your life. Which is exactly what Paul said about the hazard of money in **1Timothy 6:9** when he said:

**... those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.**

So Jesus tells this man, *"Beware and be on your guard! This inheritance is about to kill you."* And this is more or less what I said in a

dispute that I was asked to be involved in a few weeks ago. I told a man who had called me, "*The real issue here is not mainly whether you get your fair share but whether wanting it so much will destroy you.*"

O, how vulnerable the fallen human heart is! I know mine is. The deception of money and possessions is that it makes us feel that having lots of things equals being really alive. And Jesus is urgent and passionate in verse 15 to respond to that deception by saying,

**...for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.**

We must know that true Life consists in knowing God. **John 17:3** says,

**This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**

... so Life is not having things. Life is knowing God. And Jesus is coming to that. So He tells them a parable- not just for the man who asked the question, but for *all* of us. We are all listening in to what Jesus is saying here because we really *need* to listen in. So Jesus begins this Parable in **Luke 12:16:**

**Luke 12:16-20**

**16** And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive.

**17** And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'

**18** Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

**19** And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'"

**20** But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?'

**21** So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Now first of all- we have to understand that it is *not* a bad thing when your "land is very productive." It is not a bad thing to receive a

promotion and with it a pay increase. It is not a bad thing when your investments increase in value. That is not the evil in this parable. The man in the Parable is not called a fool for being a productive farmer. God knows this broken world needs productive farmers and profitable businesses.

So why is this man called a "fool"? That's the main question in this parable. And he is not only called a fool- but a fool who loses his soul.

### **Luke 12:20b**

**... You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you...**

So why did God call this man a fool and take his soul away? What was this man's sin? The Bible gives us no indication that this man was an adulterer or a homosexual or a thief or a liar. There is no reference to him worshipping totem poles or sacrificing his children or being a mass murderer. So what was his sin that was so great that we can say two things about it:

- It is recorded in the Holy Bible as a warning to us
- God Almighty calls this man a fool

The way this man used the increase of his riches- he gave no indication at all of being rich toward God. That's it. This was his sin. Now we can argue about this all day long- but can we agree that Jesus said this was wrong? Can we agree that God called this man a fool? Can we agree that God's Way of looking at riches are far different than ours, and that we would be wise to consider what Jesus is saying here?

This man kept building bigger barns. And that might be OK- if you're storing the grain for a use that shows God is your real Treasure. But what does the farmer say? Verse 19:

**And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry."**

... so the use he plans to make of his wealth says one thing: *"My treasure is relaxing, eating, drinking, and fun. That is my life. And the riches in my barns will make that possible."*

But wait a minute. What's wrong with that? Nothing- *if there is no infinitely Valuable God and no Resurrection*. That's why Paul said in **1Corinthians 15:32**,

**... If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.**

... but there *is* a God, and there *is* a Resurrection. So Jesus is saying here that what's wrong with this man's way of handling his riches is that he fails to use them in a way that shows he treasures God *more* than his riches- and God called him a fool because of that.

Now here's the key concluding verse that makes this point most clearly (verse 21):

**Luke 12:21**

**So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."**

Now the phrase "rich toward God" is very unusual. What does it mean to be "rich toward God"? The meaning is plain from the contrast:

- Being rich toward God is the opposite of laying up earthly treasure for yourself
- Being rich toward God is the opposite of treating the "self" as though it were made for things and not for God.
- Being rich toward God is the opposite of acting as if life consists in the abundance of possessions not in the abundance of knowing God.
- Being rich toward God therefore is the heart being drawn toward God as our riches.

So, from this we can say:

- Being "rich toward God" means moving *toward* God as our riches increase
- "Rich toward God" means counting God *greater* riches than anything on the earth.
- "Rich toward God" means using earthly riches to show how much you value God.

... and this is what the prosperous farmer failed to do. And the result was that he was a fool and lost his soul. That is what I meant when I said Jesus considered money to be very hazardous. It lures us out of love for God. It lures us away from treasuring God.

And let me say again that the issue is not that the man's fields prospered. The issue is that God ceased to be his Supreme Treasure. If God had been his Treasure what would he have done differently? Instead of saying, "*Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry,*" he would have said something like, "*God, this is all yours. You have made my fields prosper. Show me how to express with my riches that you are my treasure, and the riches are not. I already have enough. I don't need a bigger and bigger safety net. I don't need better food, better drink, better parties. I do indeed want to make merry, but not in self-indulgent parties with rich retirees. I want to make merry with the people who have been helped by my generosity. I want the fullest blessing of giving. Because you taught me, Lord, it is 'more blessed to give than to receive'"* (**The Acts 20:35**).

Now that's my exposition. And so here's some application. And I am going take the risk that Paul took several times in his letters and give my own testimony with regard to Rhonda's and my handling of money, and I want to begin with what the Apostle Paul told the Elders in **The Acts 20:33–35** that says:

**33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.**

**34 "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me.**

**35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**'"**

Now it is always risky to speak of yourself (**Matthew 6:2–4**), but hear me like this as your shepherd- as a father. So I am testifying now- not commanding. I am trying to inspire you with God's faithfulness- not coerce you with demands. And I am taking my cue from **2Corinthians 9:7** that says:



**Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

I want you to be radical and generous people who are "rich toward God" because God is your Treasure- not because I demanded that you tithe. So Paul tried to inspire the Corinthians with the example of the Macedonians in **2Corinthians 8:1–7** and with his own example in **1Corinthians 9**.

So here are five things that I do to guard against the hazard and maximize the helpfulness of money. I hope they inspire you to figure out your own way.

**1. I study to see and savor the supreme Value of Jesus above all earthly things.**

This means I read my Bible daily so that I can say with Paul in **Philippians 3:8**, **I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.** So I am on a daily mission to see Jesus this way.

**2. I pray that God would free me from the love of money.**

**Psalms 119:36**

**Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to *dishonest* gain.**

**Psalms 90:14**

**O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.**

I pray on a regular basis- *"O my Jesus- expose the deceitfulness of riches to me by revealing Your Own superior Value."*

**3. I trust in God's Promises for every need to be met (for my family and the Church)**

**Philippians 4:19**

**And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**

**2Corinthians 9:8**

**And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;**

**Matthew 6:33**

**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**

**4. I set aside our regular gift to the Church, and then add spontaneous gifts during various times of the year.**

And I take my cue here from Paul's teaching that giving should be both regular and free- disciplined and spontaneous. For example, he says in **1Corinthians 16:2**,

**On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.**

This points to the wisdom of planned, regular, and disciplined giving. Sporadic giving with no plan will probably mean you are not treating giving as an integral part of your worshiping life. So to secure the disciplined part of our giving I don't give if I have money left over- I plan to give. So you need to know that your Pastor gives.

And since we want to make plain and teach our children and remind ourselves that giving is an essential aspect of our heart's worship- we have always built it into our regular family operation.

The main reason for allowances to our children as soon as they could count was to teach them that regular, disciplined, proportionate giving to the church is normal Christianity.

And if you ask "how much should I give?" my answer is to start with the Old Testament Standard and then build on that, as God prospers you. It is hard for me to imagine the children of God after the glories of the Cross giving less to the Church than the saints of the Old Testament.

**5. Finally, I put protections in place against "bigger barns" and I turn the prosperity of my fields into blessings for others.**

I limit my income to what the Church pays me. And that *forces* me to trust God- especially when Pastoring a small Church- where you have chicken one day and feathers the next. But if I don't put something like this in place- I have the opportunity to call more and more and more things "needs" which are in part only "wants".

Now the reason for this limitation on our income takes us back to the beginning of the sermon. Jesus and the Apostles considered money to be both hazardous and helpful. It's hazardous, and, therefore, I encourage you to put limits on how much of it you keep for yourselves- not how much you make- but how much you keep. And it's helpful, which means you get the incredible joy of giving more and more to the Causes that you truly love.

And lest there be any misunderstanding- if you are a businessman and turn a \$200,000 business into a \$200,000,000 business not by glittering your lifestyle, but plowing profits back into job creation and the expansion of worthy goods and services- you have done a good and right thing. So the issue here was not that the man's fields prospered. The issue was: *What did he do with his riches and why?*

Amen. Let's pray.