

RESETTING LIFE'S COMPASS

Investing Wisely

1 Timothy 6:17-19

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The Bible is not against wealth or money or accumulating things. It's more about perspective. Money can also become a drug, numbing us to life's pain. In his book, *Simplify*, Bill Hybels reminds us that when we go through a painful season of our lives, we can try to self-medicate the pain away--through alcohol or other drugs, through food, through spending (what some call "retail therapy") [p. 240]. Listen to Brian McLaren: "...we consume time and produce fatigue, consume art and talent and produce entertainment and amusement, consume work and leisure and produce paychecks and heart attacks" [*Everything Must Change*, p. 130]. If we're not careful, we forget why we work at jobs and why we make money. It's not to numb the pain!

But believe it or not, this is not a new problem. Fairly early in its existence, the church started reaching all social and economic classes of people. So in our New Testament, there is not just a prophetic concern for the poor, but a pastoral concern for the wealthy. In other words, the poor should not be defeated by poverty and the rich should not be defeated by wealth! [I am indebted to William Sloane Coffin for this thought, *A Passion for the Possible*, p. 37].

This very issue is addressed in our text. FIRST, don't be haughty: "As for those who...are rich, command them not to be haughty" (v. 17). Money doesn't make you better, smarter or more spiritual than others! Is ambition good or bad? It depends. If our ambition is for our own ego, to promote ourselves and impress others, it is not good. On the other hand, a healthy ambition urges us to do our best, reach our potential honor God.

SECOND, trust God, not stuff: "not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (v. 17). Here is the narcotic danger of wealth--it leads to illusions of self-sufficiency, and of immortality (we will live forever here, as things now are). Things can delude us, insulate us from real life and its fragile nature. We aren't here forever! Bill Hybels has written about the realization he had one day as he mowed his lawn, "My lawn will outlive me!" [*Simplify*, p. 65]. I remember standing in the front yard with a church member years ago. His wife was gone, and he was lonely. He said, "I never realized how useless money was. You can't buy health and it can't bring back loved ones." To put it bluntly, stuff will let you down; God won't.

THIRD, consider wealth as a sacred trust, a huge responsibility: "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share..." (v. 18). Now, I know most of you fans of "Spiderman" thought Peter Parker's Uncle Ben coined this phrase, "With great power, comes great responsibility," but it actually comes from scripture! Jesus, "To whom much is given, much is required," (Luke 12:48). Note v. 18 of our text again: we are to be rich in creative in caring.

Creative caring--that means a) we anticipate needs; b) we build relationships; c) we grow God's Kingdom.

Branch Rickey, the famous baseball executive who led in the racial integration of baseball, once told about his father, who was in his 80's at the time. His dad was out planting peach trees and saying, "I don't care who picks the fruit; I'm going to live each day as if I'll live forever." He died a short time later. Time for a gut check. Are you using your material blessings to do these three things?

FOURTH, redefine success: "thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life" (v. 19). An international study in 2012 measured the happiness scale of nations. Do you know where the U.S. ranked, with all our wealth, gizmos, gadgets and technology? Thirty-second! And the top seven countries were from Latin America, a part of the world which we often consider to be riddled with much poverty and deprivation [*Simplify*, p. 65].

Note the end of v. 17 mentions that God provides for us for our enjoyment. Now note the end of v. 19, to take hold of life that is really life, really living, spiritually, not just biologically. I know you're biologically alive, but are you spiritually alive? That's what Jesus came to bring (John 10:10)--the spiritual life so that the biological will make sense and have purpose.

The great Russian writer Tolstoy once told a beautiful story. A man was told he could have as much land as he could run around and encircle in one day. But he had to close the circle by day's end. So he set off to encircle and claim his plot of land. As the day wore on, the loop got larger and larger. Driven by the thought of all the land he could possess, he kept widening his circumference. Mile after mile. Stride after stride. Finally, at sunset, he dropped dead of a heart attack. He ran himself to death. This story gives new meaning to the phrase, "Running around in circles. Anyone you know running herself to death? "God gave us all things for our enjoyment. Grab hold of life that is real life."

Today's takeaway: What useless, selfish circle do you need to quit running? What new, creative thing could you do with what God has entrusted you?