

THE JOY OF GIVING
The Joy of Receiving God's Blessings (1 Timothy 6:17-19)
Rev. Melissa Hatfield - First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, MO
"God's provision brings life that is really life."
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WATCH/LISTEN: fbcjc.org/sermon/one-heart-one-mind-hold-fast/

One Sunday a 7-year-old girl won \$2.00 for her memory work in Sunday school. After the morning service, the pastor's wife congratulated her.

The little girl proudly announced, "And I put it all in the morning's offering!"

"My, how wonderful!" the pastor's wife exclaimed. "I'm sure God will be pleased."

"Yes," the child replied. "Now maybe God will let me do some of the things I want to do!"¹

We certainly have some interesting and confused notions when it comes to God and money. Maybe we haven't said what the little girl said aloud but if we are honest, we've been tempted at times to think our offerings of money or acts of service for God have some transactional component to it. God, I give to you, and then you give to me. The more I give to you, the more you give to me. If I just pray the right way or live the right way, God will bless me. Prosperity Gospel, the false and harmful theology that teaches God rewards faith—and hefty tithing—with financial blessings, has grown significantly in recent years in the US and other nations around the world. To many it makes sense because so much of our world operates by the bottom line, a concern only with costs and profits. But as author Richard Foster once wrote, "For the Christian, the bottom line can never be the bottom line."²

An unhealthy relationship with money is a tale as old as time. Our text this morning is from I Timothy in the New Testament and is one of the pastoral care letters, letters written to address issues crucial to those shepherding the laity or regular folk in the church in the way of Christ. The early church was concerned not just for the poor, but for the rich as well. Individuals from all social and economic classes were drawn to the good news of Jesus, yearning to be set free from the entrapments of the world, and while struggles may vary between the classes, it was clear then, as it is today, that the presence of money as well as the absence of money can bring hardship and misery.

Now, some of you may think, Mel, wait ... these words are directed toward rich people? Well, then, I can check out on this one because I'm clearly not rich. My friend, on the contrary. I promise to someone you are rich. Maybe not someone you know or someone even nearby, but

¹ Genia Obal, Montrose, British Columbia. "Kids of the Kingdom," Christian Reader.

² Richard Foster in Money, Sex and Power. Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no. 2.

I promise you in our big, beautiful, diverse world there are several someones, countless someones who would look at your life – your possessions, your freedoms, your provisions – and say, “You, my friend, are rich.”

Let’s read I Timothy 6:17-19 together. *“As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, 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.”*

The Bible isn’t anti money; it is anti-**love of** money. Its concern is confidence in money instead of confidence in God. Its concern is hope in wealth rather than hope in Christ. In the New Testament, there is no ban on private property or making money, or even enjoying the good things in life. The command to the rich, however, is that they do not ‘put their hope in wealth’. A selfish accumulation of wealth and an unhealthy obsession with material things leads us away from God. What promises security leads to perpetual insecurity.

And while these were instructions given very specifically for how to guide the rich to live a life that is really life, they apply well to any thing we are tempted to place our confidence or hope in other than God. Any thing.

How do we know where our confidence lies? How do we know where we are placing our hope? One way might be to think about our reaction to events around us in recent days and months. What feels most threatened to you? What do you fear losing most? What are you grabbing desperately to? Is it wealth or financial security? Is it power and politics? Is it your personal health or the health of others? Is it family or relationships? Is it a position or title or job? Is it control? If we sat with those questions for a few moments and asked God to reveal what our confidence is in, what our hope is in, God, in God’s mercy, might help us see it is something other than God. For when we set our hopes on the uncertainty of riches or health or power or others or control or any other uncertain thing, we live on a shaky foundation. And every time the wind blows or a storm picks up, we feel insecure and threatened and fragile.

God has a better way of living for us. A life that is truly life. And the promise of God’s word in our text today is that those who ‘put their hope in God’ (v. 17) find ‘a firm foundation’ and ‘take hold of the life that is truly life’ (v.19).

Put your hope in God and you will find a firm foundation.

Put your hope in God and you won’t be tossed about by every storm.

Put your hope in God and you will take hold of life that is truly life.

These two verses in 1 Timothy 6 are packed with some great advice on how we can take hold of the life that is truly life.

1. Be humble. V.17 “As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty”. The apostle Paul tells the rich people not to feel like they are superior to other people. They should not exhibit pride and arrogance because they were blessed with wealth. The caution was that it is very easy for those with wealth to slowly find their confidence moving from who they are in Christ to what they have in the bank; to move from a posture of gratitude for what God has and is doing to gratitude for what you’ve done and what you’ve achieved. From humble to haughty. Of course, we all know rich people who are not arrogant with their wealth. In fact, how times have you heard someone say something like this? That person is worth a ton of money, but you’d never know it. Why do we say this? Generally, we are impressed that this person acts like a normal person. They don’t carry it on their sleeve. They don’t wear it. There is just something about them that is different. I think the best word might be “humble” or “modest”. Wealth can make you arrogant, it can make you think your better than others, it can go to your head. It doesn’t have to, but it can. So, Paul cautions Timothy, “make sure you instruct the rich people in the faith to not be haughty, to not be full of themselves if they want to take hold of life that really is life.

2. Trust God, not stuff. When you start to have more money, get that raise, get that bonus, something starts to happen to your hope. As your lifestyle increases, your hope begins to migrate. Paul says, warn those rich people don’t let your hope migrate from God to your wealth, your possessions. Don’t be confused and place your security in the things of earth.

The Proverbs in our Bible has a wealth of wisdom, and in 18:11 it wisely says, “The rich think their wealth protects them; they imagine themselves safe behind it.”

It is so tempting to put our trust in the things of earth and to imagine we are safe behind them. If we just have more than we’ll have enough. Yet, we never feel like we have enough, so we always want more. This unending, exhausting cycle is why so many Americans are burdened with incredible debt. According to financial experts, about 80% of Americans have some form of consumer debt, and the average American has \$38,000 in debt excluding mortgage debt. Owing money just seems to be a way of life for Americans.³

It isn’t the possession we’re really after; it is what possesses it means to us. It is because our trust is in stuff, and it creates a false sense of safety and security. Like the Proverbs says, we think stuff will protect us, and imagine ourselves safe behind it. Yet, we have surrounded ourselves with the very thing that destroys us. Paul cautions us in v. 17 don’t be haughty and don’t ***set your hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*** Trust God, not stuff. God will provide everything we truly need.

3. Live generously.

³ <https://shiftprocessing.com/american-debt/>

Let me tell you the story of Keith Taylor. Keith has benefited from the generosity of other people in different times and different ways. For example, while Keith was attending graduate school in Tennessee, his car broke down, and the subsequent repair bill caused him to be short on his rent that month. Fortunately for Keith, his boss at his part-time job paid the rent bill in full—a gift, not a loan.

One evening in 2002, Keith was reflecting on the kindness of his boss, and on the other acts of generosity that had contributed to the happiness and stability of his life. And like many American Christians, Keith decided that he would one day dedicate his life to helping others. "When I'm really rich, I'm going to start an organization to help the working poor."

But then Keith was seized by a remarkable thought. "It occurred to me all of a sudden," he says, "that no one who had ever helped me had ever been wealthy. They had just been nice. They'd just had compassion."

Keith decided he would try to help one person each month get through some kind of financial crisis, and he set aside \$350 to get started. He also set up a very basic website that invited requests for assistance. But when that site was featured on a popular blog, Keith's plans went out the window. He received 1,100 emails the next day—most were from people requesting assistance, but a surprising amount were from people who wanted to help.

A short time later, Keith incorporated a nonprofit organization called Modest Needs. The organization's first official grant saved a woman's life—she received money for a mammogram that discovered a tumor—and Modest Needs has been gaining steam ever since, giving millions in grants to thousands of individuals and families.

One more exciting thing about Modest Needs is that almost 70 percent of individuals who receive money from grants end up donating money back to the organization sometime later. In other words, kindness produces more kindness and generosity produces more generosity—which sounds like a great way to love your neighbor.

Paul's words of wisdom to the rich in versus 18 and 19 is this: when you live generously, you'll become rich in the things that really matter and you'll gain life that is truly life. Generosity is the way to break the hold of money in our lives. In this upside-down world of the gospel, we measure wealth not by what we have but by what we give away. Want to be rich? Be rich in works of love. Want to be wealthy? Be wealthy in caring for your neighbors in need. Want to be secure? Put your hope in God, not the things of this world.

God's command for us to give faithfully and sacrificially is an invitation to be set free from the love of money and set free from dependence on anything or anyone other than God. The joy of being humble, trusting God and living generously is invited us to live as people absolutely dependent on God for everything. And while that goes against everything in our nature, it is the path toward life, real life.

Late 19th century English pastor H. William Webb-Peploe wrote, “Don’t try to hold God’s hand; let Him hold yours. Let Him do the holding and you do the trusting.”

When our hands are too full of ourselves and too full of our stuff, there is no more room in our hands for God to hold. The joy of receiving God’s blessings is that it teaches us to lay down the cheap imitations and to let God do the holding and us do the trusting. Be humble, trust God, live generously and be set free to live a life that really is life!

BENEDICTION:

Go now and take hold of the life that really is life.

Shun the eagerness for money

but be rich in good works.

Pursue righteousness, godliness,

faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

And may God be your refuge and fortress;

May Christ Jesus free you from all that ensnares you;

And may the Holy Spirit provide you with everything
for godliness and contentment.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

In the name of Christ. Amen.⁴

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