

## Series: The Spiritual Practices of God's Outliers

VBC

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Luke 12:13-21, 32-34

June 27-28, 2009

### "Possession Obsession"

We're going to be looking in Luke 12  
about a subject which I have called, "Possession Obsession"

It's about the practice of having Open Palms  
with our money and our stuff.

Introduce the Prestons as "outliers" to tell their faith story.

And there's your sermon.

Let's do a little review.

As you may recall, the Spiritual Disciplines train us.

Some of you may know I like to run marathons.

Nobody decides to go out and run 26 miles without starting with a smaller goal.

Maybe 1 mile, then maybe 2 miles.

If you stick to it, and are a bit crazy, you can get to 26.

The training helps us get to higher place, something otherwise out of reach.

The spiritual disciplines aim us toward the kingdom of God;

Help us be less distracted by this world, and more in sync with God.

Pastor John – "They awaken us to God."

"The Spiritual Disciplines re-center us

so that Jesus takes the central place in our lives."

This week we are looking at Financial Stewardship as a discipline ...

or

The Discipline of Relinquishment

If the spiritual disciplines are primarily for our training ...

Then this one teaches us to have open palms toward God

Perhaps more accurately, toward our stuff.

This discipline touches our everyday life.  
 In this *culture-of-hoarding-stuff*,  
 some here may find this one challenging.

I actually asked John if I could speak on this subject.  
 And here's why –  
 Because, in my opinion, this discipline comes closer to our hearts than any of the others.

Luke says, "Where your Treasure is, there your heart is also."

Now I want to be really clear about something, up front:  
 This sermon has nothing to do with Village's budget.  
 It is not connected to our construction.  
 It's not connected to whether you ever have or ever do give a nickel to Village.  
 This is entirely about you, and your walk with God.

And this subject is mainstream.  
 Did you know that 15% of all that Jesus said in the Bible relates to money?

You might ask why that is? Because ...

"There's a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money.  
 Which is why it qualifies as a spiritual discipline, worthy of our discussion.

My story about financial stewardship is similar to the Prestons'.  
 I learned early - to give the first part of my income  
 My early number was 10%.

I didn't think my financial obedience obligated God to bless me,  
 I also didn't want to risk that my lack of obedience might *keep* God from blessing me.

I transferred from PCC to Biola University.  
 Expensive college, zero support from my family, no scholarships,  
 Nothing but my belief I was in God's will and 50 bucks in my pocket.

God always provided what I needed financially.  
 Got a part-time job – faithfully tithed 10% or more.  
 And through a series of mostly unexpected provisions by God,  
 enough to pay for all as I went.  
 Two years later, I returned to Beaverton  
 with a degree and fifty bucks in my pocket.

(I didn't even realize what a big deal that was until later in my life.)

Let's read Luke 12:13-21, 32-34

Life is more than what we own.

Here Jesus describes a man whose possessions became his poison.

To this guy Jesus makes some significant statements.

"Be on your guard against greed"

"A man's life is more than his possessions"

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

For many of us, our possessions can become our poison.

Maybe even *have* become our poison.

Listen carefully:

→ There are a lot of believers in Wash. County who are lifeless because their wealth and possessions have shoved more meaningful things aside.

Jesus' choice of words is important here ...

Look in vs. 16,

(Outline, point 1) We Didn't Produce It.

He says "the GROUND produced a good crop"

Notice what it says the man contributed to the crop – Nothing!

And yet he is quick to say, "my crops, my grain, my goods"

Did the farmer overlook it is God who created the soil, the sun, the rain, the seeds?

The ground produced it – not him –

Without God's blessing, his crop would have been a failure

How many times have we ever asked God to bless us; asked Him to step in when we are trying to get a job, hoping to get a raise, when we need wisdom for a specific situation, want to be successful in this or that

It is so easy to receive what God alone can give, and then later take Him for granted and think, "I did this!" "Hey, look what I did. Wow, look at all my stuff."

The reality is, it is all God's. Everything belongs to Him

Scripture says He owns everything we own.

1 Cor. 10:26 "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."

Including everything you and I possess.  
 (I hope you're wearing your steel-toed boots,  
 because I'll be stepping on some toes today.)  
 Everything belongs to him, not us.  
 That's the nice car you drove today,  
 Your nice home,  
 The clothes you chose from this morning,  
 Whatever is in your wallet, purse, your bank account,  
 Your retirement funds,  
 And ... Et cetera!

King David understood this. Upon building the temple, he said this ...

1 Chronicles 29:11-14

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power  
 and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,  
 for everything in heaven and earth is yours.  
 Wealth and honor come from you;  
 you are the ruler of all things.  
 Now, our God, we give you thanks,  
 and praise your glorious name.  
 But who am I, and who are my people,  
 that we should be able to give as generously as this?  
 Everything comes from you,  
 and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

The problem comes when we forget whose it all is.  
 So the question about giving is never:  
 "How much of my money should I give to God?"  
 But rather, "How much of God's money should I keep for myself?"

So, not only did the farmer not produce it.  
 Jesus also makes it clear ...  
 He couldn't keep it.

And We Can't Keep It (point 2 of outline)

However, this is a picture of someone who gave it a good shot.  
 He decides his plan – vss. 18-19  
 He'll build bigger barns.  
 He'll STORE "*his* grain" and "*his* goods."

This is Possession Obsession.  
 You can almost hear him say, "Mine! Mine!"

Again, this is a temptation we all come by honestly.  
The world pounds this into us.

"Store up for the future. Amass wealth. Eat, Drink, be merry.  
Reward yourself. You deserve this."

God says, "That's not quite what I had in mind when I gave that to you."  
God says our security is in the kingdom of God.  
Give your stuff away, and trust me to care for you.  
This will make your heart ... rich.

OK everyone, brace yourselves.

If I haven't already stepped on your toes yet, I'm about to take another swing  
at it.

Mine included.

Many of us are the common day equivalent of this farmer.  
We might say, "Whadd'ya' mean? I don't even own a barn."

No, in today's environment it goes like this ...  
Wow, look at all my stuff.  
Where will I put it all? I need more room.  
I know, I'll get a bigger house. Maybe build another garage.  
Or ... maybe it's time for the epitome of stuff storage ...  
yes → \*the rented storage unit\*

It is no different than the man in this story.  
Here's a possible definition of Materialism:  
"Paying a monthly fee to store stuff we do not need and may never use."

Jesus describes the man in this story as one who has become rich with stuff,  
but is not rich toward God."

Our possessions can become our poison.

Here's a third principle from this passage,  
and this is the main idea.

We CAN Invest It In Eternity (point 3)

We didn't produce.  
We can't keep it.  
But we can invest it in eternity.

Let's read again vss. 33-34 –

<sup>33</sup>Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

<sup>34</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

He has something much better for us.  
It's only available through *relinquishment*  
Through Open Palms.

Thus the value of this spiritual discipline  
It's training that helps us be less distracted by this world,  
and more in sync with God.

It's tough, because wealth and stuff can be so intoxicating.  
It can distract, even mesmerize us.  
But it just won't last.

God has much more for us,  
that is better, deeper, eternal.

And thus the antidote offered in this passage.  
Giving.

"Giving is the only antidote for materialism" – Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*

Some might say, "Okay, I get it.  
But it's hard to get started when all my income  
is already accounted for, already budgeted."

Let me offer a few guidelines  
about how to find release from the grip of stuff:

First – a note to those who already have this Discipline down.  
Who have already discovered the joy of Open Palms.  
Keep on; and focus on some of the other disciplines.

### Getting Started

A couple of suggestions ...

How can we become Outliers as regards the spiritual discipline of relinquishment?

#### 1. Start giving.

Plant your flag.

Make a plan.

What's a good place to start?

Maybe 3% or 5%, but with the aim for God to grow your faith.

Some might do well to start with 1%.

But start.

And Give First – write the check 1<sup>st</sup>.  
A symbolic act that helps us set our priorities.

2. Aim High – God is eager to stretch your faith.  
10% is a good goal to aim for, even if you start with something less...

In actuality, every NT example of giving goes beyond the tithe (10%).  
Most people are surprised to learn that 90% actually goes farther than 100%.

3. Consider Giving More  
If you already give faithfully, and maybe even a lot,  
just *ask* Him if he would have you give more, and if so, where to?  
We can't out-give God.

4. For some, quit the debt trap  
(My ... talk about "*poison*")  
Do what you need to do to get back to zero,  
and start working from the positive integers.  
but keep giving a portion while solving that problem

Clip board Assignment:

Here's your assignment for the next 7 days.

This is really simple, and powerful.  
Identify a ministry you care about,  
or a person or family in need you know about.  
And write a check for them. This week.  
You decide the amount. Ask God first.  
If you want to be anonymous, cash is ok.

Then do two more things:  
Tell God, this doesn't end here.  
And then do a little happy dance,  
Because you just stuck it to materialism.

This week. Write a check. A big step of Relinquishment.