



Luke 12:32-34  
Practicing The Way  
“Generosity”

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February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025

Before we get to today’s passage (Luke 12:32-34), I want to set the stage for what Jesus says. The teaching from Jesus this morning really is the culmination of a larger teaching that begins back in verse 12. A guy asks Jesus to help him and his brother divvy up their inheritance. After Jesus refuses to get involved, he uses this as an opportunity to teach on greed. And the first thing he says is that life is not all about having an abundance of possessions. Then he tells a parable to let the teaching sink in even further. It’s a parable about a guy who has a grain farm, and he ends up with so much grain that he has to build bigger silos, and with all that surplus stored up he can kick back, and, as Jesus says, “Eat, drink, and be merry.” But in the parable God tells the guy, “you fool, you’re going to lose your life tonight. Who’s going to get what you’ve prepared for yourself?”

Then Jesus goes into teaching that’s usually summarized as “don’t worry.” Bobby McFerrin, back in the 1980’s, recorded a song with that phrase in the title, but then augmented it: “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” And in Jesus’ teaching, the “be happy” part is worded a little differently. So instead of worrying about our life, Jesus says, **“But seek his kingdom [God’s Kingdom] and all these things will be given to you” (Luke 12:31)**. In other words, be concerned about your relationship with God first, and the rest that we all worry about will sort itself out as God provides and takes care of you. You can trust God for this, and don’t need to worry.

That sets the stage for his concluding words on the relationship we have with worldly stuff that we worry about and our relationship with God, as we read Luke 12:32-34. This is our passage for today, as we continue in our sermon series on “Practicing the Way” where we are looking at the habits of Jesus that kept him in connection with his heavenly father, and living his life in a way consistent with God’s word. So, let’s turn to **Luke 12:32-34**. This is God’s word to you and me this morning....

Pray. So, there are essentially two things linked together in this discipline of Generosity. **It’s like two practices in one, really: Simplicity, and**

**Generosity.** It is very difficult to practice generosity when our living is complex. Jesus addresses this in today's passage when he says, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor." Selling your possessions is the first step. When we do that, we simplify life.

This really cuts against the grain of our culture, which is all about "more" of anything and everything except helping those in need. I'm preaching to myself on this one as much as any sermon in this series. I grew up with a lot of recreational gear – a lot of equipment for music and sports and other recreational kinds of things. And when that's been part of your life going back to your formative years, it is, to quote another 1980's song...it is a hard habit to break. The problem with all this stuff is that it takes up time and money. Not just purchasing things, but the maintenance of them. And then finding the time to use them. And organizing and storing the gear. Like when it comes to boat ownership, there's a reason for the saying, "The day you buy a boat is the best day of your life; the second-best day is the day you sell it."

And like the guy in Jesus' parable who had to build bigger silos for all his grain, what we do is build bigger garages, or sheds, or buy property to store stuff at, or rent a storage unit. **In 2023, the people of the United States spent almost \$24 billion renting storage units. Why? The number one reason is, "Excess consumer goods and materialism."** That reason why is not even from a Christian source where you might expect an answer like that – rather, it's what the Internet told me when I asked "Why do people need storage units so much?"<sup>1</sup> So, we're spending more time organizing and storing all our stuff, cluttering our homes and our garages and sucking up time and money maintaining it all in addition to original purchase costs. The cost of owning something is always more than the money you pay.

Now, we do need to take personal responsibility for our own choices...but, the fact is: **We live in a culture of consumerism.** According to John Mark Comer and the research he's done, this culture in our country was established a little over a century ago. One journalist he quoted, wrote this in 1927: "A change has come over our democracy. It is called consumptionism. The American citizen's first importance to his country is now no longer that of citizen but that of consumer."<sup>2</sup>

Paul Mazur, of Lehman Brothers, was a key figure in shaping American retail and consumer culture after World War I. He wrote a book in 1928 titled, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*. He writes: **“The community that can be trained to desire change, to want new things even before the old have been entirely consumed, yields a market to be measured more by desires than by needs”** (Paul Mazur, *American Prosperity: Its Causes and Consequences*). That mentality from the 1920’s led to the advertising that was birthed soon after the first world war, where advertising began moving from stating how a product would meet a *need* (such as, “Are you thirsty? Drink Coke”), and instead started appealing to desires, particularly the desire for happiness, but also respect, acceptance, and more. And so, this culture of consumerism has been the leading cultural influencer of our country for the last 100 years or so. We have been indoctrinated by advertising, to desire things. French sociologist Jean Baudrillard (probably butchering the pronunciation) argues that it’s not atheism that has replaced Christianity, but shopping.

In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* John Mark Comer writes, **“Shopping is now the number one leisure activity in America, usurping the place previously held by religion. Amazon.com is the new temple. The Visa statement is the new altar. Double-clicking is the new liturgy. Lifestyle bloggers are the priests and priestesses. Money is the new god”** (John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*).

So, the reason for this brief cultural historical lesson is to highlight that Jesus’ teaching on the subject in today’s passage and in others as well, goes completely against the grain of society and what has been embedded in us since the day we were born. But what’s interesting is that Jesus doesn’t say you “shouldn’t” give into consumerism. **He says much more simply that stuff *won’t* make you happy, and that you *can’t* serve God and your stuff.** If you want to be worry-free and happy in life, sell your stuff and pursue God. It’s just simply stated as a fact. Elsewhere Jesus says, “You can’t serve both God and money.” He doesn’t guilt us by saying “you really shouldn’t try and serve both;” Instead, he just states it as a fact of life, that you can’t serve both God and money. You gotta make a choice.

He does the same thing in today's passage again when he says, "**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**" (Luke 12:34). What you treasure is what you *desire* and is up to you. This is 2,000 years before the advertising world went that route. Jesus is way ahead of them. Jesus wants our heart, our desire, to be with him and with our heavenly father. But rather than teaching with "shoulds" and "should nots" he just states what the facts are: where your treasure is, that's where your heart is...and then leaves it up to us to make a choice. If what you treasure is stuff, then that's where your heart will be. All your time, energy, money, and your very soul, will be lodged right there with your stuff. If you think "He who dies with the most toys wins" and you aim to be that person who wins, then that's where your heart is. A lot of people, including a lot of Christians, are there. So, what do you desire? What do you treasure?

For those who struggle with consumerism, Jesus gives us the steps to take to get out from under it, and get our hearts aligned with Jesus. **The antidote to the consumer mentality is to simplify.** Sell your stuff and give to the poor. To another guy at another time he gives this same answer but fills it out even further. He says "Go, sell all you have, give to the poor, and then come, follow me." We are then told that guy left Jesus sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus uses it as a teaching moment and tells other folks there who are listening in, that it's harder for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Even in their day, material wealth was a major obstacle to following Jesus.

But clearly, it takes a radical change so our identity is not wrapped up in what we buy or what we do or in any other desire, but is instead our identity is in Jesus. We want to desire him. Jesus is so worth desiring. His love, his grace, his forgiveness...yes there's a cost, but following Jesus is worth the cost. And when our hearts are with him, and we simplify our lives from all the other stuff, it allows us to be generous. If we find that we *can't* be generous with our time, our energy, and our finances, then there's a good chance our hearts are tied up too much with other things; our identity is found in them instead of Jesus. We need a change of heart. We need hearts

for Jesus first and foremost. And it might very well be that we need to sell some stuff, simplify life, so we can give generously in different ways.

Generosity is at the heart of God. Probably the best-known verse in all of Scripture lays it out: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).** We sang those words just a few minutes ago. When it says “God so loved the world” it doesn’t mean that God loved “worldly stuff” as if God needs a boat and a vacation home or two; it means God loves you and me. God loves us. God treasures us, and so that’s where his heart is. And so he gave to us. He gave what he had, and that was his Son. Jesus. Jesus gave all he had, all the way to the cross. He gave his life so that you and I might find true, abundant, and eternal life in Him. Not in our stuff, not in our money, but in him. That’s why he gave, and gave generously in Jesus. **Generosity is at the heart of God, and at the heart of the gospel.**

God asks us to give generously as well – and when we do that, we reflect the very heart of God. But too often, the complexity of our lives gets in the way. All the stuff crowds out Jesus, and crowds out our ability to be generous as he is, because our hearts are with something else. A great example of living simply and being generous made the headlines just a little over a year ago, by a guy



named Geoffery Holt (**Picture**). He lived in Hinsdale, New Hampshire – population, 4,000. He had a job at a grain mill for a while until the mid-1980’s when he was bought out by the company, which gave him a little nest egg of money to invest. He put it in a few mutual funds, and 35 years later or so, it had grown to be \$3.8 million at the time of his death in June of 2023. He didn’t have any close family – no kids, a sibling but he wasn’t really close with her – and so about 20 years before his death he drew up papers to bless the city of Hinsdale with his money once he died.

And what stands out is how his generosity came about, because money and stuff was not what he really treasured. **He lived a very simple life – in a trailer park. No one knew he had wealth like this because he didn’t buy stuff beyond what he really needed.** He didn’t make his life complex and

have it drain all his funds. He could have cashed out when he hit \$1 million or \$2 million and used the money on for travel, or to buy a more substantial home or a vacation home or both. Instead, he was generous.

Now, I'm not suggesting that the only way to be generous is to do so from the grave in your last will and testament, or that you have to give millions to be generous. Luke 8:1-3 names a handful of women, who probably were pretty well-off based on what he tells us about them...and they financially supported Jesus and the disciples by giving out of their own financial means. Jesus also highlights a woman who puts a couple of pennies in the offering at the temple, and says she's being generous. But this guy, Geoffery, is a great example of simple living leading to generosity. Acts 20:35 says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Giving brings joy. It's a blessing to be a blessing for the cause of Christ. This guy seems to have understood that. He didn't really have possessions to sell – he just lived simply. And so, he was able to give generously. In "Practicing the Way" John Mark Comer puts it like this, **"Once you are living *under* your means rather than chronically overextended, it opens up all sorts of new possibilities"** (*Practicing the Way*, p. 187).

So, I don't know where life is complex and maybe you need to simplify so you can be more generous. If it's complex because of your kids...don't get rid of them. OK? I mean, I have five kids, and I know kids make life complex, and it's a complexity Jesus didn't experience. But if life is complex because of stuff, because of over-planning the vacation schedule, because of the sports schedule, because of money – consider if that's where your heart is, and if simplifying might be needed. Pray about it. Ask God to show you where you are over-scheduled, over-toyed, and over-spending...sucked into the consumer culture of America. And then ask him to give you courage to be counter-cultural and let go of some things, or wiggle out from their grasp on you, so you can bless others, follow Jesus, and practice generosity with your time, your talent, and your treasure. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Both the dollar amount spent and the number one reason for renting that I mentioned here came from simple queries in Chat GPT.

<sup>2</sup> Comer states in the endnotes of his book that he got this from a BBC 2002 documentary online called, "A Century of Self" though he also references a book by Wayne Muller on the topic of Sabbath as another source.