

Looking In



You might ask yourself, “I wonder why I have this habit of ‘retail therapy’ then I get depressed?” It can be a question helping us to compassionately uncover a false belief about the power of things to make us feel secure. Jesus speaks about this (“earthly treasures”) in Matthew 6:19-24 from the Sermon on the Mount.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

The scripture says that every one of us is storing something up. The question is what and where we are keeping it. And notice how well Jesus knows us. Moth, rust, thieves. In his day, wealth was stored in fine clothing, in metal and coin, in a house that could be broken into.

Here is what the world tells us, repeatedly, in a thousand clever voices: your worth is what you own, what you earn, what you can display. Security is a number. If you have enough, then you will finally be safe. Do you believe this? It is a lie of the worldly spirit.

There is never a number that feels like enough. According to statistics, all people, whether rich or poor, don't feel they have enough. When they are asked, “How much increase of possession will make you happy?” In all income levels, people say always more, in my memory around 20%. It means, if you reach the goal, you still feel like you lack something. You are never satisfied with the number or things you own. It is the very nature of worldly whippers.

So, the retail therapy question has a deeper answer than “I like nice things.” Underneath, it is a hunger and emptiness of the soul for true comfort, worth, security, and belonging. These are all only God can give.



They're God-given longings. It cannot be filled by purchasing and owning. Then, what does Jesus' word mean, “Store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven.”? Does it mean a heavenly bank account? I think so. However, how does it function? Jesus is telling them that it is about how to live now. So let me offer my own interpretation, and then I'll invite you to wrestle with it.

I think “treasures in heaven” means investing our lives in what belongs to God's way of life and the things that cannot be corrupted. Things like right relationships: being rightly connected to God, to neighbor, to ourselves, to creation. Love, given and received. Grace, the gift we never earned and can never lose. Generosity, which loosens the grip of fear. And the mission of Jesus: good news to the poor, release to the captive, welcome to the stranger, healing for the broken, living in the Holy Spirit.

Consider the enduring impact of these things over time. They reside eternally within someone's life. Truth, love, and grace provide strength and empowerment, becoming treasures beyond the reach of moth and rust. If you yearn for this life, the Holy Spirit offers an infinite supply of heavenly resources.

Now I'd like you to ask yourself a question; what does it mean for YOUR life “storing up treasures in heaven”? What would it look like for you to invest in something that lasts?” You don't have to answer out loud. Just let the question sit. It may take more than a morning.

Exploring those questions demands profound self-reflection. By becoming more attuned to what genuinely nourishes our lives and what instills dread, we can gain valuable insights into our long-term desires and, consequently, how we allocate our time and resources—which, in turn, determines our priorities and “treasures.”



One of the oldest spiritual practices is looking death squarely in the face. It is an unfamiliar practice for us. Some of the monastic mothers and fathers would sit in caves staring at skulls. One of my friend’s pastors has purchased a plastic skull from Amazon, put it on the desk to contemplate the reality of death. It clears the fog of our journey on Earth. It clears our sight and helps us to see what is most important.

Regarding this practice, I want to invite you to a short and gentle version of guided meditation. If you’re comfortable, close your eyes. Let your feet touch the ground. Take a deep and slow breath in and out. I will slowly let you be guided by some questions.

Imagine that you have been given a piece of news. Not frightening, just true. You have somewhere between five and ten years of life left. You have these years, and they are a gift. Let yourself notice what rises in you. Don’t judge it. Just notice.

Ask yourself: What would I stop doing? What have I been spending my hours on that I would gladly set down?

What would I want more of? Who would I want to be with? Who would I call?

What would I want to say to someone before it’s too late? What would I want to forgive or be forgiven for?

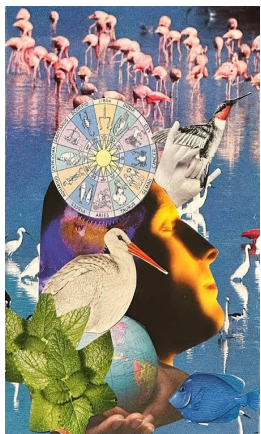
Now ask the money question, gently. If this were true, how would I spend my money? What would I no longer need to buy? What would I want to give?

And now the deepest question: When my years are finished, what do I want to have loved?

Take one more slow breath. Whatever came to you, thank God for it, even if it was uncomfortable. And when you’re ready, open your eyes and come back to this room.

Thank you. I’m grateful you stayed with it. This practice gives us the most essential idea of life. It lets us remember what we truly value, and what’s the most important thing in your life. How can you reorder your lives with that awareness in your life?

Here is the next practice of self-awareness. Think about **when you felt most alive, most yourself, most near to God.** Hold on to that. It’s a clue to your treasure. The first is to make a list of your gifts and your defining moments. Take a sheet of paper this week and write down the things you’re good at, and the things you love to do even when no one is watching. Then write down the moments that shaped you: a loss, a joy, a turning point, a moment of grace. Look for the thread that runs through them. Often your gifts and your defining moments are telling the same story about what God has placed in you. It invites us to ask not only “How much do I have?” but “What is my money for?”



The next tool is a **collage**. When I did this as a chaplain, it was fun, and surprisingly true. Gather some old magazines, scissors, and glue. Don't think too hard. Cut out images and words that draw you in and put them together on a page.

When you step back, you may be surprised at what your heart has chosen. A collage lets us notice what we treasure without having to argue ourselves with it. Then ask, with that same compassionate curiosity: I wonder why this image caught my eye? What is it pointing to?

Jesus doesn't leave us staring at our hearts. He turns us toward the world. So, let's move from seeing to doing. Let me offer you a few simple tools to take home. A heart that has learned where its treasure is will begin to look outward. And the more clearly we see ourselves, the more we see our neighbor, and the stranger, and the one at the edge of the table.

So, here's my invitation. I'm asking you to envision a small, honest change. This week, identify one change in your spending habits or financial decisions. Perhaps it's a single purchase you'll delay and redirect the money to someone in need. Alternatively, it could be an hour you'll reclaim from screens and dedicate to a lonely person. Choose one action and commit to it in the next few moments while you're still here. If you're open to it, share your choice with someone close to you before you leave. When it's expressed to a friend, your courage grows remarkably.

Jesus says that your heart will follow your treasure. If you place your treasure in love, your heart will learn to love. If you place it in generosity, your heart will grow generous. If you place it in the mission of Jesus, your heart will begin to beat in time with his.

So where will you put your treasure this week? God is inviting you into something that cannot be taken from you. May God give us a generous heart and a courageous vision. And may we find, together, that the treasure we were searching for was always the love that was searching for us.

Amen.