

# **life group study guide**

**November 23, 2014**

## **The Gift: Treasure**

**Read: Matthew 6:19-24; 1 Timothy 6:2b-10**

Q: What do you think of when you hear “tithing,” “giving,” or “stewardship” from the pulpit or from church leaders? What is your reaction when you learn that sermons on these topics are coming up?

Q: In our society, how is success generally measured? Do you feel pressure to meet this standard, and if so, from whom or where?

Q: Do you believe you are rich? Would you like to be? If not, why not? If yes, how would you reconcile your desire for riches with Jesus’ words in Luke 18:24-25? Just for fun, or because we want to make you feel even guiltier (a joke, sort of); check out these wealth ranking calculators: [www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com), [www.worldwealthcalculator.org](http://www.worldwealthcalculator.org). How do you measure up? What is your reaction? What excuses or defenses do you want to make? Well, I, for one, like to look to those who are much richer – Bill Gates or Warren Buffett. And there is something to that. Did you know that the 67 richest people in the world hold as much wealth as the entire bottom half of the world’s population – 3.5 billion people!?! Are we to admire that or flee from it?

In these verses, Jesus and Paul teach revolutionary ideas about money, treasure, and mastery. If you have been a Christian for even a short time, you have probably read or heard these words before. Their statements are plain, simple, easy to understand, but O so hard to put into practice. In America, we have been taught many times that if we just give more, God will bless us more. But what does that really mean? If true, are those blessings material or otherwise?

*“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small . . . For many of us the great obstacle to charity lies not in our luxurious living or desire for more money, but in our fear – fear of insecurity.” C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity.*

Q: Lewis makes two separate points here. What are they and do you agree with them? Which barrier to giving is biggest for you – reluctance to give up things/money, or fear?

Let’s take a closer look at Jesus’ words in Matthew 6 and Paul’s in 1 Timothy 6.

**Matt 6:19-24.** I don’t mean to ignore verses 22-23, but I want to focus on verses 19-21, and 24, because it is so easy for American Christians (me especially) to soft-pedal what Jesus tells us.

1. *“Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and*

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*rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being."* Matt 6:19-21, The Message

Q: Assets, money and stuff, give us a sense of control don't they? The more we have, the more we can exert a little control over our little part of the universe. But at what cost? Besides moths, rust, and thieves, what eats away at our earthly treasures today?

Q: What is entropy, and how does it affect everything we try to do to make our lives easier, more secure, and risk free?

Q: How much time, money, and labor do you spend maintaining your assets – your earthly treasure? So who owns whom here? In your 16 or so awake hours each day, where is your heart and mind most often? Where is the place "you will most want to be"?

Q: I heard this quote from a Christian speaker once (can't remember whom): "Every single thing you ever buy or own will require your time and attention." Is he right? Why or why not?

Q: If Jesus were to analyze your life, what would He say your "treasure" is?

Q: What comprises "treasure in heaven?" What are some ways we can "stockpile treasure" there?

2. *"You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both."* Matt 6:24, The Message

Q: Isn't it so tempting for us to try and prove Jesus wrong about God and money? Do you try to do this sometimes? How often do you try to make "deals" with God about money? How often do you buy something you don't need and don't really ever use? Who is the master? How often do you fail to give generously either because of greed or fear or anything else? Who is the master? How much time do you spend in anxiety over your finances? Who is the master?

I'm certainly not trying to lay a guilt trip on you. These questions apply to me more than anyone. But these are the words of our Lord and Savior, "the way, the truth, and the life."

Q: What or when do you struggle with serving money? If you have had some victory in this area, what have you found that has freed you from slavery to money and stuff?

**1 Timothy 6:3-10.** Consider reading this passage in the New Living Translation or The Message. Then consider these questions.

Q: How is "true godliness with contentment . . . great wealth"? How have you seen this at times in your life? How or when have you seen this in the lives of others? Why is it, do you think, that Christians in the third world, missionaries, and people like Mother Theresa seem so much at peace and have this kind of contentment?

Q: Look at the very strong words of warning in verse 9 concerning people who desire to be rich. What are those temptations, harmful desires, and the ruin and destruction that follow? How do you think the longing for wealth could cause you to fall into a trap and temptation?

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Q: Paul says that the “love of money” is the root cause of “all kinds of evil.” What are some of the evils that you see that are caused by a love of money, both today and throughout history?

Q: Is there a difference between being an “enjoyer” of money and a lover of money? If yes, what is it? What are some ways in which you can enjoy money but not be a slave to it?

Q: What is the shocking conclusion which Paul sees for “some people, craving money” (verse 10)? Is it really that serious? So to repeat an earlier question, do you really “long to be rich”?

In A.W. Tozer’s classic work, *The Pursuit of God*, he has a chapter entitled “The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing.” Reflect on these excerpts from that chapter and also on his prayer which closes the chapter:

*“There is within the human heart a tough, fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets things with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns my and mine look innocent enough in print, but their constant use is significant.”*

*“There can be no doubt that this possessive clinging to things is one of the most harmful habits in the life. Because it is natural, it is rarely recognized for the evil that it is. But its outworkings are tragic . . . We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety . . . But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which is committed to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed.”*

This is the beginning of his prayer to close the chapter: *“Father, I want to know Thee, but my cowardly heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival . . . In Jesus’ name. Amen.”*

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