

*You Can't Take It with You*

**Matthew 25:14-30**

John Breon

"You can't take it with you" is almost a proverb in our culture. That saying is based on something the Apostle Paul wrote: "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Timothy 6:7). We like to illustrate this idea by saying that you won't see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. Then some smart aleck comes up with something like this:



Still, whatever's in the trailer won't be any use to the person in the hearse.

While we can't take it with us, we can manage money and possessions wisely and we can put to good use what God entrusts to us. "Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can" is intended to help us deal wisely with the gift of money. Today our focus is on "save all you can." That is, don't be wasteful, don't throw it away, don't squander it.

The Scripture we've read is a parable of God's kingdom. Jesus is encouraging his disciples to live faithfully and watchfully between the times of the kingdom's entering history and its final fulfillment. We're to use what God has entrusted to us wisely and purposefully.

Jesus says the kingdom will be like a man going away for some time and leaving his servants in charge of his property. There are three servants in this story—one receives five "talents," one receives two and one receives one. A talent was originally a unit for measuring weight. Its use in this parable to talk about amounts of money entrusted to servants led to its being used in English to refer to abilities we have. The amounts of money

the servants are entrusted with would have been unimaginable. If the servants lost or wasted this money, there's no way they could have paid back the master. This speaks to us of whatever God has entrusted to us: life, new life in Christ and all the privileges, responsibilities and opportunities that go with it, including the resources God gives us.

The master gave to the servants according to their abilities. We don't all have equal abilities and resources, but every one of us has opportunity and ability. God has entrusted every one of us with responsibility. God will hold every one of us accountable for our life and service and stewardship in God's kingdom.

While their master was gone, the servants with five talents and two talents *right away* went to work and gained more. They planned, they worked, they invested and they doubled their master's money.

But the servant with one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Burying money to protect it was a common practice in those days. That was the safe and prudent thing to do. This way, the servant didn't risk losing his master's money.

Finally, the master returns and settles accounts with the servants. The servant with five talents came and said, "Master, I've doubled your money."

The master replied, "Good work! You've been faithful with a few things, so I'll put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. Come feast and celebrate with me."

The servant with two talents, though he had less to begin with and produced less, still was faithful with what the master had given him. He receives just the same reward as the first servant: affirmation, more responsibility, and a joyful partnership with the master.

Then the servant with one talent starts making excuses. Thinking he knew the master's character, he was afraid and so hid the master's money and now gives it back to him.

The master rebukes this servant for being wicked and lazy. He tells him he should have at least invested the money with the banker so it could earn some interest. Then he took this servant's money and gave it to the servant with (now) ten talents. This third servant is denounced as worthless.

He doesn't share the master's joy. Instead, he's tossed out into the darkness to mourn his lost opportunity.

If we're wise, we want to be like the first two servants and not like the last one. We want to be faithful disciples whose faithfulness leads to our being affirmed by our Lord and receiving even greater opportunity and responsibility. We want to know the ever-increasing joy of partnership with the Lord. We don't want to be unfaithful disciples who squander our opportunity and lose it and so miss out on our Lord's joy.

What makes the difference? The contrast between the first two servants and the third shows that the first two were willing to risk while the third was paralyzed by fear.

We're talking about saving money today. It seems like that's what the third servant did. But it may be that wise saving involves some risk and using money instead of hoarding it.

The difference between the servants seems to be that the first two acted in faith and confidence, while the third acted in fear. It's easy to have fear about money, isn't it? Where will it come from? Will we have enough? What if we don't?

John Wesley's call to save all we can isn't based on fear. Wesley was saying to use money wisely, not to throw it away, not to waste it on things that are unnecessary or merely for show.

There's a difference between saving and hoarding. In recent years, hoarders have been featured on TV shows. There's a disorder that leads to that behavior, but we're still stunned at what people keep and how they can live with all that in their homes. A famous example from many years ago is the Collyer brothers. Homer and Langley Collyer became infamous for their bizarre natures and compulsive hoarding. For decades, the two lived in seclusion in their Harlem brownstone at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 128th Street, where they obsessively collected books, furniture, musical instruments, and innumerable other items, with booby traps set up in corridors and doorways to ensnare intruders. In March 1947, both brothers were found dead in their home surrounded by over 140 tons of collected items that they had amassed over several decades

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collyer\\_brothers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collyer_brothers), accessed 11/1/16).

Hoarding is a fearful, disordered, accumulation of massive amounts of stuff that *might be used* some day. Homer Collyer had gone blind in the early 1930s and Langley saved daily newspapers for years so when Homer regained his sight, he'd be able to catch up on the news.

Saving is keeping something for a time so that it *will be used* in the future. Saving makes wise use of resources. That can involve investing as well as spending wisely and giving to help others.

Dorothy Ebersbach was someone who knew how to save, but also how to give to bless others. She was born in Ohio in 1914, but moved to Tampa, FL, in the 1930s to work with her family's construction business. She got a pilot's license in the late 30s. During World War II, she was one of a select group called the Women's Air Force Service Pilots, or "WASPs." These brave women served as test pilots. They also helped ferry planes from one strategic location to another and frequently towed targets for gunnery practice. After the war was over, most of the women found it difficult to find jobs in aviation, so Dorothy Ebersbach went back to school and got a degree in nursing at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. She worked as a nurse in Tampa until her retirement in 1975.

In 2010, when Dorothy was in her 90s, she and other surviving members of the WASPs were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for their service in World War II.

Throughout her life, Dorothy Ebersbach was devoted to her church. Furthermore, she seemed to practice the Wesleyan adage to "earn all you can, save all you can and give all you can."

Upon her death, she endowed two scholarships at Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa and donated \$100,000 to the Together! Campaign for Kids and Camps, a gift that was matched by a challenge grant. Her estate also left donations to The United Methodist Higher Education Foundation, Feeding America Tampa Bay, and the International Women's Air & Space Museum in Cleveland, Ohio. In true pioneering spirit, she also established an academic center for flight nursing—the only one of its kind in the United States—at her alma mater, Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. After a lifetime of contributions to flight and nursing, Dorothy Ebersbach and her estate dedicated a total of \$4.7 million in gifts

to the flight nursing program at the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing to further the center's mission of educating nurses to provide advanced care. Her legacy will make a difference to future generations for years to come (<http://www.fumfgift.org/?pageID=3&storyNum=2>, accessed 11/1/16; <https://nursing.case.edu/flight/dorothy-egersbach/>, accessed 11/1/16).

We'd like to do good like that, to have a legacy like that. But it is tough to save these days. It takes effort to manage our finances wisely. We have to determine our priorities, what's really important, and set our budget. We have to examine our spending and cut what's wasteful. We have to find ways to be generous. Where and how does God want us to give? The tithe, ten percent, is a biblical model for giving. But that ten percent is really a reminder that everything is God's and we give all to God by using it as God directs.

James Harnish, the author of our stewardship book this time, suggested a way of practicing financial stewardship. It's called the 10-10-80 plan. Ten percent goes to God. Ten percent goes to savings. We live on the remaining eighty percent. That's a suggestion. Find a method that works for you.

Our financial stewardship does provide for the church's ministries and that's important. But, the greater purpose is to help us grow as disciples as we learn to be faithful stewards of God's gifts.

Remember that next week is Commitment Sunday. We'll have one combined worship service at 11:00. I hope you'll pray each day this week for God to guide you in the decision you'll make about financial stewardship. Then fill out a commitment card and bring it next Sunday.

Let's give John Wesley the last word today, from his sermon "The Use of Money":

Having gained all you can, by honest wisdom and unwearied diligence, the second rule of Christian prudence is, "Save all you can." Do not throw the precious talent into the sea.... Do not throw it away in idle expenses.... Expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life.

<http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-50-The-Use-of-Money>

Actually, let's give Jesus the last word:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

You can't take it with you, but you can invest in eternity as you seek God's wisdom to direct how you use what God gives.