

Day 10: Read Matthew 6:19-34

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust 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 English Standard Version).

I’m a technophile. I am always looking for the newest gadget. The other day at lunch I drooled (figuratively speaking) over a fellow patron showing off a gadget that turned his phone into a projector. He caught me staring, but I didn’t care. It was cool!

With Christmas season gearing up (no pun intended), we are flooded with advertisements of the newest gadgets and toys that no one can live without.

And I am tempted. I don’t need any of it, but I excel at convincing myself otherwise. The purchase might satisfy me for a while, but then what? If I die, all those gadgets will end up at a second-hand store, given away or tossed in the trash.

We like to think we’ve evolved, but we’re no wiser than those who came before. We simply have better tools (and toys). Like those Jesus preached to in Matthew, I’m so busy collecting worldly treasures, I’m not collecting heavenly ones.

What do heavenly treasures look like, anyway?

It could be giving money we would otherwise spend on toys to more useful causes or using our talents to glorify God more -- to name a few. It boils down to what we choose to focus on: the shiny stuff of this world, or God and his will.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33 ESV).

Andra Marquardt



2018 Advent Devotional - Week Two

Day 6: Read Luke 12: 13-21

“...a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15b New International Version).

I had true-life encounter with an “abundance of possessions” when inheriting the task of cleaning out my parent’s home before selling it. After almost 60 years of marriage and a lot of storage space, it was easy for them to save and not downsize. On the other side of the spectrum, on our mission trip to Houston last winter, we met families who had lost everything. They told us they felt blessed because they had their families and everything else was just stuff. Their courage and faith were truly heartwarming.

During this Advent season as I consider the challenge of spending less, I look at the things I have that are my cherished possessions: a collection of letters or cards from loved ones, a few heirlooms, pictures, and the memories of experiences shared with loved ones and friends.

I heard a speaker recently that said, “fostering relationships is budget neutral.” With this in mind, there are unlimited ways to foster relationships every day that are far more valuable than anything we could purchase. This Advent season, consider writing a heartfelt letter to someone, sending a text or email to brighten someone’s day, or carve out time to create an experience for someone that is different from the day to day things we do. How would Christmas look differently if we spent more time instead of more money?

Lori Campbell

Day 7: Read Philippians 4:10-19

Maybe this isn't true for you, but for me it has always been very easy to help others using my finances. I enjoy being able to help someone by giving them money, whether it's a group or an individual. Most times that's a good thing, but sometimes it is not. When my wife and I were first married and took a trip to a big city, she had to have a little talk with me after I kept giving money to all the homeless people that approached me. She reminded me that we may need some of that money to be able to get home. I don't mean to say that I will give my money away to anyone, so don't get any ideas the next time you see me. I just enjoy the feeling I get when I'm able to offer support.

You would think that having a giving heart would make it easier for someone to be content with what they have. It probably does help, but I'll tell you I am not always good about being content. I'm always looking for what is better, whether it's finding a better approach to things I do every day to what products would make my life better. I typically explain this away by saying I'm a planner and want to make sure I'm making the best choices for my family for the future. I'll say I'm happy in our current house, but you can catch me looking through all the listings out there some days. I'll say I don't need that new iPhone, but when I see someone else with it I try to justify why I should get it.

While I constantly have these thoughts about not being content, I have been blessed to have an accountability partner in my wife who helps me to not follow through with my urges to spend our money on things we don't need. In today's verses, Paul tells us that he "learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." He showed us that you don't have to be married or have some person nearby to be your accountability partner. You can follow Paul's example and "do all this through Him who gives me strength."

Jeremy Skoglund

Day 8: Read Isaiah 55:1-9 and 6:3

Most parents have seen a child obsess about a potential gift. Justin was a 7th grader when he decided he couldn't live without a pocket watch. Justin was my saver; his brother Greg was not. Nevertheless, Greg took his meager savings and bought a very nice pocket watch for his brother.

Once Justin got the watch, he realized he had very few opportunities to wear it. Greg observed that Justin only wore it a handful of times to adulthood. I later asked Justin why he had wanted the watch so badly and then rarely wore it. He confided that he realized he didn't really

NEED the watch, he just wanted it, and once he had it, it just wasn't that important anymore.

How many unimportant things do we all want, that we really don't need? How much is accumulated with the belief, "once I get this _____ (job, house, spouse, car, etc.), I'll be truly happy and won't need anything else." How often are we disappointed when those things don't satisfy us?

The only thing that truly satisfies is the Lord. It doesn't cost anything to spend time with Him and live in His presence. When your wants encroach on what you really need, your daily walk with Him will truly meet all our needs. That walk brings abundance, peace, joy, and the realization of how God's glory surrounds you.

Patty VerDouw

Day 9: Read Luke 1:57-80

Advent is the time of preparation for the coming of Jesus. In today's scripture reading, we are introduced to John the Baptist, whose name means "the Lord is gracious." John was born to prepare for the coming of Jesus as explained:

"And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77 New Living Translation).

As we prepare for the coming of Jesus this Christmas, we have been challenged to spend less by the Half-A-Christmas challenge. If you elect to accept this challenge, it may give you the opportunity to explain to your family why there will be fewer gifts under the tree this Christmas.

Just like John the Baptist, the Half-A-Christmas challenge may be a way to "prepare the way for the Lord." It may provide a training opportunity for your family to focus less on gifts and focus more on the birth of our Savior. Having Jesus in our hearts and our lives rather than more gifts in our hands is what Christmas is all about.

This Christmas, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, / Look full in His wonderful face, / And the things of Earth will grow strangely dim, / In the light of His glory and grace." (Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus, Helen Howarth Lemmel, 1922). Let us reflect the Light of the World to the world.

"Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace" (Luke 1:78-79).