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### *Three Promises*

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Do you have trouble with your stuff? I do. If studies are correct, so do most people.

Our stuff is everything it takes to live a full life. Martin Luther includes, *'body and soul with all their powers. ... food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day'* in his definition of stuff. You get the idea.

Jesus' said, "Where your treasure is your heart will be also. (Matt.6:21)" I think *'stuff'* would be a good substitute for *'treasure.'* Jesus might well have said, *'Your stuff is going to draw your heart's most diligent attention.'*

I heard that there is enough square footage in rental storage buildings so that every man, woman and child in the United States could stand shoulder to shoulder in that square footage space.

God's not against *'stuff'*, after all God created the raw materials out of which all our stuff is made. But my stuff is a problem because my *'stuff'* threatens to blind me to God's role in my life.

Author Dan Hotchkiss, when writing about stuff as money, says, "Strong feelings about money threaten to preoccupy us: shame at lacking it, pride in having it, fear of losing it, compulsive eagerness to spend it, gluttonous delight in hoarding it. Each of these feelings has a moral and spiritual dimension: At worst, shame can render us unconscious of our kinship with God's family; pride can make us feel like gods ourselves. Fear can take away the courage requisite for moral action. Compulsive spending, like compulsive hoarding, turns our attention toward ourselves and away from the well-being of others."

Even with my best efforts to keep things in balance I find myself with a foot in two worlds. The one world is the world of *'stuff.'* In this world my stuff threatens to take me along a path that goes from *'worry to fear to hoarding.'*

On the other hand, I hear God's invitation, through the life of faith, to see in my stuff a reason to *'trust, grow in gratitude and to share.'* The two tracks in life might look something like this:

ANXIETY - FEAR (worry) - HOARDING

Versus

TRUST - GRATITUDE - SHARING

The struggle between anxiety and trust in my life will always end up at the same place – my hoarding – if it were not for God's goodness that calls me to a different reality. God's promises start me on the journey toward trust and keep me on that path.

**P**romise One: "Your father in heaven is pleased to provide you with all these things (Matt: 6:32b)."

At its best, our stuff can draw us closer to God with gratitude and provide an avenue in which to enjoy God's goodness as well as serve others. "Money can be a spiritual plus. Money earned for useful work is an encouraging symbol of our worthiness and value. The thoughtful use of money – spending, saving, investing, giving – is an effective way to care for others and realize our visions of a better world." – Hotchkiss

Stewards view their possessions as gifts of God and are thankful for them. Any deep reading of these verses from Matthew is rooted in the understanding that God's economy places us in possession of all that is needed for life and often more.

**P**romise Two: “Where your treasure is your heart will be also.”

This could be bad news and in one way it is. Simply put, our possessions are the occasion for worry, anxiety and greed as noted earlier. We are conflicted in our relationship to stuff.

Jesus recognized this truth about the human condition and said bluntly, “You can’t serve God and money (Matt. 6:24).”

However, our struggle with possessions also holds another possibility. Our money can draw us closer to God. Mark Allan Powell writes, “If you desire a spiritual life that draws closer to God, if you want your heart to be right with God, put your treasure there.”

Jesus talked a lot about money and possessions because they occupy center stage in human culture. What we do with our stuff affects who we are as people and shapes the communities in which we live. You will remember what Jesus said to the rich young man (Mk 10:17), or the rich fool who built bigger barns (Lk 12:16). Even the widow with her ‘mite’ (Mk 2:41) was, for Jesus, a sign of the effect of money on a life.

As stewards each of us is uniquely positioned to discern God’s intentions for what God has provided to each of us. What God entrusts to each of us in capacity, skill, inheritance, culture and energy are uniquely our own to steward. No one can live your life for you! We cannot escape our particular responsibility to steward our stuff.

This is vital work. Naive platitudes will not do in a work like this. Simply leaving it all up to God is not a substitute for reasonable care in preparing, planning, authoring and publishing our lives.

The real irony is that given our world where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break in and steal, it is the height of foolishness to invest in realities that waste away our good efforts. Our best efforts are worthy of a place where they will not fade or waste away.

That is why on a simple and practical level Jesus’ admonition that ‘where your treasure is your heart will be also’ is actually the great promise that invites us to live life fully in service to a greater good: God’s greater good. If you want a life that is more satisfying and content in a spiritual way then put your money on God: invest in kingdom work.

Imagine investing in a life where moth and rust cannot destroy or where the ‘Enrons’ do not break in and steal!

I think that God intends that the ‘stuff’ we receive as we are blessed in life is to help us enjoy God’s goodness and more: to remember God’s goodness and share so that others may experience God’s goodness also.

**P**romise Three: “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6:33).” People of faith share because we need to share. We share because giving is an act that shows our love of God. People of faith give because it is an intention (discipline) that draws us closer to the grace that is at the heart of God’s cross given love.

Mark Allan Powell writes “I find that this is true: on a simple, practical level, I find that it is easier to sing hymns and not really mean them than it is to part with my money and not really mean it... We are invited to put money in the offering plate on Sunday morning not because the church needs our money (although there are commitments we have made to others about our intention to support them) but because ‘we want and need to give it.’ ”

“Believing in God as sustainer means believing that we are sustained – we can trust this God to take good care of us. We are free to use our resources (time, talent, treasure) in ways that are pleasing to God without worrying about our own needs. We offer to God what God has first given us and we know that God will continue to provide for us and to teach us the secret of being content.”



#### **YOUR STEWARDSHIP TEAM**

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