

If you are joining us today for the first time in this series on what we at Linglestown Life believe it means to be a disciple of Jesus; or if you just need a refresher on where we have been over the last several weeks let's review.

We started off by saying that disciples of Jesus are daily making choices that are enabling them to live in such a way as to be centering their lives around loving God and loving others. And we used the word centering to indicate that this is a life-long process.

One of the essential choices that a disciple of Jesus is endeavoring to make each day is to spend time in the God's Word. The story which the Bible tells is meant to inspire us to see our story intersecting with the story of God. So the better we understand God's story and all the stories of people like us in the Bible; the better we will understand how God wants to influence our story.

Then we moved on to the topic of prayer. What we learned from Lou's example is what is also true for each of us: prayer is a constant conversation with a God who loves us and just as with any relationship our conversation goes through highs and lows, changes and evolutions as we grow in that relationship.

Another powerful choice that we discussed is the importance of fellowship for disciples of Jesus. Disciples need one another. Through our fellowship we find opportunities to encourage other disciples and to be encouraged by other disciples.

Then last week we learned about the importance of worship in our life- both corporately and individually. We need times of corporate worship to come together and be renewed in our faith journey; but we also need to see all that we do daily as worship. As the Apostle Paul said to the disciples of Jesus in Rome; Take your everyday, ordinary life- your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life- and place it before God as your spiritual act of worship.

Now while all that is essential for disciples of Jesus as they make daily choices for centering their lives around loving God and loving others; Jesus spent far more time on today's topic than on anything else. And I think that the reason for Jesus spending so much time on this topic is because he knew that our choices in this area of our life would be some of the hardest we need to make.

So what is it that Jesus spent more time talking about instead of prayer, heaven or any other topic? Money. I know that word makes some of you wish you hadn't come today and others think here we go again; but let's be honest, if Jesus spent more time talking about money then maybe there is something we need to learn.

And maybe the reason we wiggle so much in our seats when the pastor starts talking about money is because Jesus was right. We wrestle because we know that our relationship to money is a choice that we battle in our lives daily. And that's nothing new!

That was the case for one man who came to Jesus. In Luke 18 we find this encounter. The man approaches Jesus asking how he could have eternal life. Jesus gives him a list from the Ten Commandments, which the man says he has kept. So Jesus tells him you only need to

make one choice, sell everything, give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. This man of great wealth walked away because it was a choice he couldn't make. In his eyes, Jesus was asking him to make a choice that he was not prepared to make.

I'm not going to tell you to sell everything this morning; but I am going to ask you to think about choices relative to your finances. While some of you would prefer not to consider making any changes to how you approach money; the truth is that as a result of centering our lives around loving God and loving others we will need to make some difficult choices. I guess that is why Jesus spent more time on the topic than anything else.

Our choices about money are no different today than they were in Jesus day. So it will not surprise you that in the passage we are going to look at this morning, Jesus is confronted by a man obsessed with his inheritance.

Luke 12:13

Now it wasn't unusual for someone to bring an inheritance question to a rabbi, because rabbis often made the decision on who got what; but I wonder if this man had any idea what he was about to hear. So Jesus told this parable.

Luke 12:15-21

Jesus went right to the heart of the matter when he said, 'Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'

Listen, Jesus isn't against wealth, Jesus isn't even against possessing money; but what Jesus wants us to have is a right relationship with money. And the reason Jesus wants us to have a right relationship with money is because it is an indicator of where, or in whom or in what, we place our hope and trust.

In the parable, the Rich Fool makes choices which demonstrate that he places all his hope and trust in the abundance of his possessions. Notice the preponderance of the first person pronouns. To the Rich Fool, it's all about him and his possessions. His choice, to build bigger barns, revealed something about his heart and his relationship to the things that he possessed.

That stands in sharp contrast to our biblical understanding of stewardship. Stewardship is one of those words we don't use a lot; but it is a word that reminds us that nothing in this life belongs to us; everything in life- your life, health, relationships, home, finances, etc. has been entrusted to you for a period of time. And the choices you make daily relative to all that has been entrusted to you reveal something about your understanding of stewardship.

For a disciple of Jesus; when we talk about stewardship it begins with a presumption that everything that exists belongs to the One who created it. So if God created everything in this world; and as Psalm 24:1 says, The earth is the Lord's and everything in it...then we understand that we are stewards of God's gifts given to us for a season.

Stewardship is a concept that is hard for us to understand in today's world because we think that what we have is a result of our hard work and diligence. This is my money, this is my house, this is my life....

Because we are so industrious we like to think that what we have is all a result of our own hard work. That's nothing new by the way. Moses confronted that when he spoke to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. He was speaking to a generation that was about to inherit the riches of a land that they had not worked for. They were stewards and Moses didn't want them to forget that all they had was a gift from God.

Listen to what he said as a warning about this land of plenty they were inheriting:

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, Deuteronomy 8:17-18

Stewardship is a biblical concept that every disciple of Jesus needs to understand because it will have an impact on how we are centering our life around loving God and loving others. Our daily choices; everything from what we put into our body, to the use of our skills, to what we do with the money we have in our pocket- is an indicator of what we believe about our role as stewards of what God has given to us.

I find it interesting that every generation- whether we see it in the days of Moses, we see it in Jesus' time or we see it today- every generation struggles with our relationship to the resources (finances) that belong to us.

In the late 1700's when our Methodist forbearers were gaining more and more wealth because of the rise of the Industrial Revolution, John Wesley took to speaking often on the topic of a disciples' relationship to money.

Listen to this quote from Wesley to his followers: It is true, riches, and the increase of them, are the gift of God. Yet great care is to be taken, that what is intended for a blessing, does not turn into a curse.

John Wesley then went on to lay out three stewardship principles that are just as important today for disciples of Jesus.

The first was **Gain all you can.** (Sounds promising!)

Use all possible diligence in your calling. Lose no time...Never leave anything till tomorrow, which you can do today. And do it as well as possible...Put your whole strength to the work...Let nothing be done by halves, or in a slight and careless manner... Do everything you have to do better today than you did yesterday...Make the best of all that is in your hands.

When John Wesley called the early Methodists to gain all they could he wasn't just interested in adding to their wealth; he was calling them to a higher standard of stewardship of their time and talents. Wesley taught that type of industrious, hardworking attitude because it reflected the God that we serve as stewards.

However, he also added some words to those who might be inclined to become workaholics:

...without hurting your health

...without hurting your mind

...without hurting your neighbor

So the first point was to Gain all you can; and I think you'll like the sound of the second one as well: **Save all you can.**

Actually, Wesley wasn't calling the Methodists to open savings accounts; he was describing a lifestyle that we would call frugal. Wesley understood that being a wise steward was answering the call to a simple lifestyle.

In a world where we talk about 'disposable' income; we would all do well to think about Wesley's challenge- dare I say, Jesus' challenge for disciples to live simply so that others may simply live.

So Wesley says: Gain all you can, Save all you can, then he goes to the last phrase, **Give all you can.**

Wesley's rules on the use of money are progressive. Gaining all we can and saving all we can are steps in the direction of a generous life in which we give all we can. Wesley wasn't against providing for yourself and your needs; but what he challenged his listeners to undertake was a lifestyle of stewardship so that from the abundance that God provided they could in turn provide for the needs of others and the ministries of the church.

What Wesley, what Moses and what Jesus understood was that you and I will make choices as stewards; and every choice has a consequence.

For the Rich Fool, his choice to build bigger barns revealed where he placed his trust. It wasn't that building a bigger barn was the problem; it was the failure on his part to see that what he possessed had actually come to possess him. He was no longer living as a steward; he thought that it was all his.

We don't have time to continue reading Jesus' words here in Luke 12; but I want to point something out. In the next several verses Jesus mentions worrying about things- what we will eat or wear. Those are worries that consume the heart and soul of people who place their trust in their possessions instead of trusting in God.

Listen to what Jesus says:

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

May I challenge you today to answer these questions: Where is your heart? Where are you storing up your treasures? Who/What are you trusting in?

The heart of a disciple should be trusting in God who richly provides us all things. And the choices that we make as stewards should be helping us to store our treasures in heaven because we are using all that we have to demonstrate our love for God and our love for one another.