

Title

Message for Sunday, February 16, 2014
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Children's Message:

Hebrews 13:16, New International Version:
Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

This story is told by a woman named Eddie. It happened to her when she was 14 years old. The year was 1946.

I'll never forget Easter 1946. I was 14, my little sister Ocy 12, and my older sister Darlene 16. We lived at home with our mother, and the four of us knew what it was to do without many things.

My dad had died five years before, leaving Mom with seven school kids to raise and no money. By 1946 my older sisters were married, and my brothers had left home.

A month before Easter, the pastor of our church announced that a special Easter offering would be taken to help a poor family. He asked everyone to save and give sacrificially.

When we got home, we talked about what we could do. We decided to buy 50 pounds of potatoes and live on them for a month. This would allow us to save \$20 of our grocery money for the offering.

Then we thought that if we kept our electric lights turned out as much as possible and didn't listen to the radio, we'd save money on that month's electric bill. Darlene got as many house- and yard-cleaning jobs as possible, and both of us baby-sat for everyone we could. For 15 cents, we could buy enough cotton loops to make three pot holders to sell for \$1. We made \$20 on pot holders.

That month was one of the best of our lives. Every day we counted the money to see how much we had saved. At night we'd sit in the dark and talk about how the poor family was going to enjoy having the money the church would give them. We had about 80 people in church, so we figured that whatever amount of money we had to give, the offering would surely be 20 times that much. After all, every Sunday the pastor had reminded everyone to save for the sacrificial offering.

The day before Easter, Ocy and I walked to the grocery store and got the manager to give us three crisp \$20 bills and one \$10 bill for all our change. We ran all the way

home to show Mom and Darlene. We had never had so much money before.

That night we were so excited we could hardly sleep. We didn't care that we wouldn't have new clothes for Easter; we had \$70 for the sacrificial offering. We could hardly wait to get to church!

On Sunday morning, rain was pouring down. We didn't own an umbrella, and the church was over a mile from our home, but it didn't seem to matter how wet we got. Darlene had cardboard in her shoes to fill the holes. The cardboard came apart, and her feet got wet. But we sat in church proudly. I heard some teenagers talking about the Smith girls having on their old dresses. I looked at them in their new clothes, and I felt so rich.

When the sacrificial offering was taken, we were sitting in the second row from the front. Mom put in the \$10 bill, and each of us girls put in a \$20. As we walked home after church, we sang all the way. At lunch Mom had a surprise for us. She had bought a dozen eggs, and we had boiled Easter eggs with our fried potatoes!

Late that afternoon the minister drove up in his car. Mom went to the door, talked with him for a moment, and then came back with an envelope in her hand. We asked what it was, but she didn't say a word. She opened the envelope, and out fell a bunch of money. There were three crisp \$20 bills, one \$10, and seventeen \$1 bills.

Mom put the money back in the envelope. We didn't talk, we just sat and stared at the floor. We'd gone from feeling like millionaires to feeling like poor white trash.

We kids had had such a happy life that we felt sorry for anyone who didn't have parents like ours and a house full of brothers and sisters and other kids visiting constantly. We thought it was fun to share silverware and see whether we got the fork or the spoon that night. We had two knives, which we passed around to whoever needed them.

I knew we didn't have a lot of things that other people had, but I'd never thought we were poor. That Easter Day I found out we were. The minister had brought us the money for the poor family, so we must be poor.

I didn't like being poor. I looked at my dress and worn-out shoes and felt so ashamed that I didn't want to go back to church. Everyone there probably already knew we were poor! I thought about school. I was in the ninth grade and at the top of my class of over 100 students. I wondered if the kids at school knew we were poor. I decided I could quit school since I had finished

the eighth grade. That was all the law required at that time.

We sat in silence for a long time. Then it got dark, and we went to bed. All that week, we girls went to school and came home, and no one talked much. Finally on Saturday, Mom asked us what we wanted to do with the money. What did poor people do with money? We didn't know. We'd never known we were poor.

We didn't want to go to church on Sunday, but Mom said we had to. Although it was a sunny day, we didn't talk on the way. Mom started to sing, but no one joined in, and she only sang one verse.

At church we had a missionary speaker. He talked about how churches in Africa made buildings out of sun-dried bricks, but they needed money to buy roofs. He said \$100 would put a roof on a church. The minister said, "Can't we all sacrifice to help these poor people?"

We looked at each other and smiled for the first time in a week. Mom reached into her purse and pulled out the envelope. She passed it to Darlene, Darlene gave it to me, and I handed it to Ocy, Ocy put it in the offering.

When the offering was counted, the minister announced that it was a little over \$100. The missionary was excited. He hadn't expected such a large offering from our small church. He said, "You must have some rich people in this church."

Suddenly it struck us! We had given \$87 of that "little over \$100." We were the rich family in the church! Hadn't the missionary said so?

EDDIE OGAN lives in Washington with her husband, Phil. They have one son by birth and 11 children by adoption. This article was taken from a letter she wrote to encourage some missionaries.

Message: "Giving to God's work is investing in eternity"

1) Stop money fights before they start: have a will

Jesus talked a great deal about money and possessions. He knew this was a matter of sensitivity and temptation for us. In Luke's gospel we find someone coming to Jesus with a money problem.

Luke 12:13, New Living Translation:
Someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me."

We can see right away that this isn't really a money problem at all. It's a relationship problem. Maybe money started it — the two brothers fighting over who would get what, or maybe money is just a symptom of the tension in this family. We don't know from this brief passage.

But we certainly know from experience that money and bad relationships don't mix. What I mean is, if two or more people don't like each other, giving them a pile of money to divide among themselves is not going to help their relationship! As a pastor, I am involved with families when loved ones die. And I've been involved with them after the funeral, when the time comes to divide up the property.

Some years ago, we lived in Newfoundland and Labrador. In the old days, the pastor and the teacher were the only ones who could read and write, and so the pastor was often named as the executor of the will, and even helped to draft the will, which would then be left in the pastor's desk. Even though that is no longer the case, that tradition has carried on with many families. I remember one in particular.

They argued and fought over what would happen in the funeral service. We had a family meeting where we got everything settled; then when I got home the phone would start ringing, as one or the other wanted me to change something to what they wanted. The day after the funeral, we gathered back at the family home. I had made photocopies of the will and gave a copy to each one. Then I passed around my copy and said, "If you are in agreement with what is in the will, then I want you to sign this paper saying that you agree with it. If you don't, then find yourselves another executor. I've had enough of this fighting nonsense from you." They all signed. Can you imagine the nightmare if there had been no will, no guidance at all? I've been there, too. It's not pretty.

Friends, I'll just say this: please, make sure you have a will. You will save your family so much pain and hurt if you take just that one step. This is true not just for families that fight; it's a blessing also for families which get along. It helps them so much.

2) The wise put God first; fools put money first

Back to the Bible story. We have these two brothers fighting over their father's property. Instead of solving their dispute, Jesus went to the heart of the matter: lust for money.

Luke 12:14-21, New Living Translation:

Jesus replied, “Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?” Then he said, “Beware! Don’t be greedy for what you don’t have. Real life is not measured by how much we own.”

And he gave an illustration: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. So he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store everything. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?’

“Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”

Jesus tells a parable, a story with a point. In this story there is a rich farmer—that may strike you as kind of a contradiction, but we’ll let it go. The point here is, this man is rich. He has everything he needs. His barns are full and overflowing. Now he has a problem: it’s been a good year, and he has even more grain to store, but there is nowhere to put it. So he decides to build new barns, bigger and better than the old ones. He will have plenty of room for everything.

Before this harvest, he was already rich. But it’s not enough. Even though he already has more than he needs, he wants still more. He wants to keep it all for himself. Did it ever occur to him to give some of it away? No. There wasn’t even a flicker of that thought.

He enjoys thinking about the life he’s going to enjoy: “Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!” But God says to him, “You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?”

Jesus sums it up this way: “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”

This is the sad story of someone who loved his money and his possessions more than he loved God. He was keeping it all for himself, even though he didn’t need half of it. Jesus talks about how foolish it is to store up wealth here on earth, but have little connection with God. The person who lives like this, Jesus calls that person a fool.

Friends, don’t be a fool. Put God first in every part of your life, including your money and possessions.

3) What is the money for? (Hint: it’s not about you)

So on the one hand, we saw the last time I was here that it is good and responsible to save for the future. But now we see that there needs to be some wisdom in that saving.

First, we need to know how much is enough. Resist the temptation to be a fool and keep it all for yourself. Learn the joy of being a generous giver.

4) Giving to God: priority and proportional

I mentioned this is above and beyond our regular offering to God’s work. The Bible is quite clear on taking the first part of our income and dedicating it for God’s work.

Proverbs 3:9, New International Version:

Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.

We set aside the money for our offering to God *first*, before we take money out for all the other things. God’s portion comes first, not from the leftovers.

The Scriptures also teach *proportional* giving.

1 Corinthians 16:2, New Century Version:

On the first day of every week, each one of you should put aside money as you have been blessed.

Those who earn plenty, give plenty. Those who receive a smaller amount, give a smaller amount. Some people use the “tithe” — meaning one-tenth of their income — as the guideline for giving. Jane and I do that, and have done so ever since we married. We’ve never been short, God has always provided for our needs.

Peter Marshall was the pastor of a church in New York. One of the men in the congregation years earlier had made a commitment to tithe, but was now looking for a way out. He said to Peter: “I have a problem. I have been tithing for some years. It wasn’t too bad when I was making \$20,000 a year. I could afford to give the \$2,000. But you see, now I am making \$500,000, and there is just no way I can give away \$50,000 a year.”

Peter reflected on this wealthy man’s dilemma but gave no advice. He simply said: “Yes, sir. I see that you do have a problem. I think we ought to pray about it. Is that alright?”

The man agreed, so Peter bowed his head and prayed: “Dear Lord, this man has a problem, and I pray that you will help him. Lord, reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe.”

Let us give back to God our offerings for the mission of God's church.

5) Giving to others: gladly and generously

The other type of giving we need to be doing is giving to help others. Caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the oppressed — this is one of the most dominant themes in the entire Bible. Here is a commandment from the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 15:7, 10, The Message:

When you happen on someone who's in trouble or needs help among your people with whom you live in this land that God, your God, is giving you, don't look the other way pretending you don't see him. Don't keep a tight grip on your purse...

Give freely and spontaneously. Don't have a stingy heart. The way you handle matters like this triggers God, your God's, blessing in everything you do, all your work and ventures.

When Mother Teresa visited Australia in the 1980s, a Franciscan monk was assigned to be her guide and look after whatever she needed. He was thrilled and excited at the prospect of being so close to this great woman. He dreamed of how much he would learn from her and what they would talk about.

During her visit, though, he became frustrated. Although he was constantly near Mother Teresa, he never had the opportunity to say one word to her. There were always other people for her to meet.

Finally, her tour ended, and she was due to fly north to New Guinea. In desperation, the monk spoke to Mother Teresa: "If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so I can talk to you and learn from you?"

Mother Teresa looked at him. "You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?" she asked. "Yes," he replied eagerly.

"Then give that money to the poor," she said. "You'll learn more from that than anything I can tell you."

Here are a few more verses on this subject of giving to people in need.

Romans 12:13, New International Version:

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Hebrews 13:16, New International Version:

Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

The principle here is that the money we have belongs to God. It's not really mine or yours at all. We are just managing it, looking after it for God. Since it's not ours, we have no right to be stingy with it. When you know of a person or a group which has a need, give joyfully and generously.

Next Steps:

- Make a will, if you haven't already
- Love God or love money: choose only one
- Put God first in every part of your life, including money
- Be generous in giving to others

Theme for today: MONEY...

It can buy you a House, but not a Home.

It can buy you a Bed, but not Sleep.

It can buy you a Clock, but not Time.

It can buy you a Book, but not Knowledge.

It can buy you a Position, but not Respect.

It can buy you Sex, but not Love.

It can buy you Medicine, but not Health.

It can buy you Blood, but not Life.