

Our World and Our Wealth

John D. Martin



This message (adapted from a spoken sermon) speaks about a topic close to all our hearts ... our material wealth.

Contrary to what it would seem to be, the more material goods a man has, the harder he grasps them. Funny, not? But it really isn't funny, it is sad. Especially if YOU were the one who needed breakfast and it was the other man who had a handful of cash and wouldn't spare a dollar to fill your aching belly.

In one sense, the following message isn't really necessary. Jesus' words are plain enough. But somehow we have not learned to simply let His words sink in.

Please read this message, then act. ~

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The story is told of a shipwrecked sailor who landed on a South Seas island and was seized by the natives. They hoisted him to their shoulders, set him on a wooden throne, and said that he was going to be king for one year. This man discovered that they did this every year.

But after the man had been king for a little while, he began to wonder what they had done with the previous kings because it appeared that no former kings were living on the island. He was told that after the one-year reign, the king was put on a desert island and left there to starve.

But this man was wise. He hired people to go out to the desert island and fertilize it, build irrigation systems, plant trees, and construct buildings. For the rest of the year, the king had men working to furnish the desert island with everything a man would need to live there.

Thus, at the end of his reign, the man was banished to an island of plenty, furnished for abundant living.

Now, we all are kings for a little while on this earth. It is our responsibility to decide what we are going to do with the things God has given us. We can keep them here and when we leave have nothing on the other side, or we can send them on ahead to enjoy them for all eternity. That is what the Scripture has clearly said to us. Jesus said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

Then he told us how to do it. He said, "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not." We live in a world that offers us tremendous opportunity to do this with extravagance because we live in a very, very needy world. There is no end to the needs to which we can give.

The reality

Seven billion people live in our world. Are you aware that one billion out of those seven billion live on less than one dollar a day? Another two billion of the seven billion live on less than two dollars a day. In other words, nearly half of the people in our world struggle to find enough food

and water just to survive another day. Almost half ... that is an incredible fact!

Here are some more facts. Every day, 29,000 children die of starvation and preventable disease, brought on by contaminated water, infections, malaria, and the like—29,000 children! To help you think a little bit about that reality, by the time this talk is finished, about 1,000 children in the world will have died from preventable causes. All they needed was food, clean water, or proper medical attention.

Teen Mania, a youth ministry, puts on a yearly event to challenge young people. One year they decided to do a demonstration that would make the realities of the world a little more real. To every session (held in various parts of the country), they brought a gold fish in a bowl. They took the gold fish out of the bowl and laid it on the podium, then stepped back to see what would happen. The audience was left to watch the gold fish flop around and die. In *every* case, someone in the audience could not stand to watch this and ran up to put the fish back in the bowl. The problem is that *you* are not there when those 29,000 children die in obscurity, often in places that the news media does not reach.

Someone once said, “A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.” My goal is that by the time you finish reading this article, each one of those 29,000 deaths will be a tragedy, not just a statistic.

The golden rule

Suppose *you* were starving and you knew that some rich teenager could have saved your life if she hadn't needed that sixth pair of shoes. What would you think if you heard that she was a Christian and you knew what Christianity taught? And you died, knowing that this person had the means to save your life but simply did not care ... what would you think?

Every night, 850,000 children go to bed hungry. How much money would it take to prevent this mind-boggling tragedy in our world? Actually, \$13 billion would provide the basic nutrition for every starving child in the world.

You may say, “That is a lot of money!” But are you aware that American Christians spend \$21 billion/year on soft drinks? If every Christian in the United States gave the money he or she spent on soft drinks, every starving child in the world would have a full stomach.

Do you want to know how much those same people spend on Christmas gifts? An unbelievable \$100 billion! That same money would feed and educate almost every needy child in our world. For \$3 billion a year, 500,000 people could be saved from blindness that occurs simply from the lack of vitamin A. American Christians spend \$5 billion on bottled water.

But the most heart-wrenching thing going on in our world is an injustice that happens to people who have no choice. In our world, 246 million children are in the bonds of child labor. Let me read you an actual account:

My sister is ten years old. Every morning at 7 o'clock she goes to the bonded-labor man. And every night at nine, [that is 14 hours later] she comes home. He treats her badly. He hits her if she is working slowly or if she is talking to the other children. He yells at her. He comes looking for her if she is sick and cannot go to work. This is a terrible thing for her. I don't care about school or playing. I don't care about any of that. All I want is to bring my sister home from the bonded-labor man. For 600 rupees I can bring her home. That is the only chance to bring her back, but we do not have the 600 rupees and we will never have 600 rupees.¹

Six hundred rupees is \$14.00.

All over the third-world countries, destitute people get into financial trouble, perhaps a funeral or an illness that they cannot afford to pay for. Not having the money to put food on the table, their children are sold to bonded-labor men. They may earn 10 cents/day, and the interest gets way ahead of the amount they owe. They will work for years to pay off \$10 or \$15 that was borrowed. To me, that is heart-wrenching. In fact, it is so heart-wrenching that I must do something about it ... so much so that I have been talking about it with my family. I can't handle the fact that 7-year-old children are forced to work like that. What were you doing when you were seven years old?

I want you to think about this. I want to lay a burden on your heart. We live in a country that is unrealistically the richest country that the world has ever seen. I see teenagers, in my own community buying designer clothes, buying \$160 sneakers, buying soft drinks, buying fancy cars, buying expensive cool clothes, buying 20 pairs of shoes. You know what goes on, even in our Plain communities.

What does God think about all of this?

God has repeatedly admonished and warned us about our responsibilities. Dozens of Scriptures speak about this. We are going to look at some of them. I hope to cure you forever of selfish materialism. My purpose is to show that your indulgence is someone else's suffering. Indulgence cannot be practiced with impunity. It costs someone else for you to be selfish with the resources you have.

¹ Quoted from *A Little More Would Change the World*, Bernard Borah, Good Measure Press, Charleston, IL, p. 21

Old Testament admonishments

Proverbs 24:11-12 reads this way, “If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death [and I have just given you some of those accounts] and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not.”

Now that may have been true years ago, without all the electronic media we have today. But basically nobody today in our society can say, “We don’t know that these injustices are happening.” It is on your cell phone and computer, even in the newspapers. It is just there, in front of you if you *want* to know it. And the Scripture says, “Don’t you say to the Lord, ‘We don’t know it.’”

The verse continues: “Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?” So, don’t say “I didn’t know it; they were statistics. I didn’t actually see it happening.” Don’t say that! Not a single person reading this can say, “I don’t know it; I am going to buy my 20th pair of shoes ...” Or purchase my dream car. Or build my dream house. Or continue in some other indulgence.

In Proverbs 28:27 we read, “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack.” That is a promise. God said that, not me! Continuing on, we read, “But he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.” I really don’t know what “have many a curse” means, but I don’t want to find it out!

Proverbs 21:13 tells us, “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.” Jeremiah 22:16–17 states: “He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD.” He is saying that to judge the cause of the poor and needy is to know God. Will God say you knew Him if you ignore the poor to have your luxuries? Continuing on, he writes, “But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.”

These are strong Scriptures, and reading them I was much convicted. My life needs some changes, and I intend to make them.

Now let’s look at Ezekiel 16:49: “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom ...” Now if you ask most people what the sin of Sodom was, they would answer, “homosexuality.” And that is true. However, God surprisingly says, “Pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.”

Apparently God puts ignoring the poor in the same category as He puts sexual immorality. God takes our attitude about the poor, as can be seen in the aforementioned Scriptures, very seriously. He has a special eye on

the poor; not only for *their* need, but for *your response* to their need. He is watching!

God could deal with all these inequities just like He could save the whole world without missionaries. He could do all of that, but He leaves these situations for His children so that they can accept their responsibilities and do what needs to be done. He is watching my attitude toward the poor just like He is watching my attitude toward the lost. He takes it very seriously!

New Testament admonishments

Let's look at Matthew 25, the classic New Testament Scripture on the subject of caring for the poor. It really doesn't need any comments or explanation.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Most people read this and say, “Well, I thought the final judgment was going to be about whether a person surrendered in obedience unto Christ.” That is true. But the response of John the Baptist is interesting when the people came to him—after he had preached that scorching sermon calling them vipers—saying, “What shall we do?”

John responded, “If you have two coats, give one away. If you have more food than you need, give the extra away.” What strange advice! You would have expected him to say, “You need to turn from your sins!” Well, he *was* saying that in very practical terms. He was telling them what the fruit of repentance looked like in real life.

If you asked most people what the “fruit of repentance” is, you would get a different picture than what John shared. John told the people that “fruit of repentance” is distributing one’s extra material goods. If so, can most Christians say they actually have ever repented?

Zacchaeus came to Christ saying that he was going to give half of his goods to the poor and restore that which he had wrongfully taken. Do you remember what Jesus said to him? “Today is salvation come to this house!” If genuine repentance is giving away your extra stuff, and if salvation is proved by what you *do* with your extra stuff, I ask myself, “How much salvation are we really experiencing?”

In Matthew 25 Jesus makes it very clear what judgment is going to be based on. The evidence that you have surrendered your life in faith and obedience to Christ will manifest itself specifically in how you handle your material goods. According to John the Baptist, Zacchaeus, and what Jesus says in this chapter, there has not been genuine repentance, nor faith in Christ, nor a surrender to His lordship, nor obedience to His commands if we are not sharing with the poor. The thing that troubles me is that for years the church has failed to emphasize this fact of the gospel.

Blinded

There is a great blind spot in American Christianity. It is amazing what kind of blind spots Christians can have. Are you aware that in this country 150 years ago Christians defended slavery? We look back and say, “How in the world could they possibly have defended slavery?” But they did! And *you* can be that blind. I hope that we can rid ourselves of blindness about how God requires us to handle the possessions He lends to us.

The world has 143,000,000 orphans because of all the wars and other social catastrophes. There is an anti-Christian Website that plays the song “Jesus Loves Me” while showing pictures of the emaciated children. Then at the end they show a cross covered by a circle with a line through it that means “No.” Then the Website says the following: “He is your God; these

are His rules; and you all go to hell.” Now granted, that is a pretty awful message, and they don’t intend for it to do any good. But I am afraid they understand the gospel better sometimes than we do.

The widow gave all that she had. She gave her living, which literally means she had nothing left for the next day. And Jesus said that she had given more than all the rest put together. That is Jesus’ standard: not how much you give, but how much you have left.

I hear people say, “This man is really rich, but he really gives.” According to the parable, God does not measure how much you give; He measures *what it costs you* to give.

The requirement is that God expects us to know what is going on in our world and to respond to those needs to the extent of our ability. And He *will* hold us accountable.

The resources

The United States is the richest nation in the world. It has one half of the world’s wealth ... and 5% of the world’s population. Did you get that?

In the United State, 160 million adults claim to be Christians. Now think about it: if each professing Christian gave \$15 a month, it would literally wipe out starvation in the world. Now I understand that a lot of the starvation situations are political conditions that make it impossible to even get aid to the needy. We are talking only in hypothetical figures here. Not only would starvation be eradicated, it would supply safe drinking water for all children and educate every child not in school.

God has given us more than what we need for only one reason. Did you know that? 2 Corinthians 8:14-15 gives us that reason: “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality.”

If you have more than enough to meet your needs, there is only one reason: so you can help those who do not have enough. It is *not* yours to use as you wish. In fact, are you aware that the great practical theme of the Scriptures is equity?

The prophets warned Israel time after time concerning inequity, which means that you respond with your resources in a way that is not equitable, or equal. Instead of equality, you lavish your resources on yourself while there are other people in the world who are dying. And God hates it! So He has told us through Paul that the reason some people have more than enough is so that they can give to those who have less, and things can equal out.

Getting ahead?

We have a brother in our community who farms organically. He feeds his cattle very little grain—he says it is too expensive—and has basically his whole farm in alfalfa and grazes his cows, without raising any corn. He makes a decent living. He says, “My cows don’t get sick. They have little mastitis and no twisted stomachs. My cows stay in the herd for many years, instead of 2 or 3 years like the cows on farms where they are pushed with energy.” He was thus telling me what a wonderful experience he has farming. He has healthy cows, and he makes a good living.

I was telling a friend of mine about that—a conservative Anabaptist man—and he said, “Yeah, you can make a living doing that, but you can’t get ahead.”

I said, “What do you mean by ‘getting ahead?’”

He replied, “You will never come up with enough money to buy the next farm.”

You see, that is our mentality ... “get ahead.” My question is, “Get ahead of whom? God?” God said that if you have extra money, it is not yours to do with as you please. It has been given to you because there are people here in the world who need it, and for some reason God has given it to American Christians, expecting it to flow from America to other parts of the world so that there can be at least some semblance of equality worldwide.

We have an unbelievable opportunity. Let’s consider the response by looking at 2 Corinthians 9:6 (I love this verse!): “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” This is in the context of giving. Next we read, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

Do you know what the Greek word for “cheerful” is? “Hilaros!” from which we get our English word “hilarious.” God loves a hilarious giver! I mean when he gives, he is in hilarity! It is the most uplifting thing he can think of to do!

God loves such a giver!

Continuing on to verse 8, we read (this verse is taken out of context many times. If you are not living as I was just describing, then this verse does not apply to you): “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” This is for the hilarious giver. I think we all want that kind of blessing. God has clearly told us how to have it.

In Philippians 4:19 we find another promise: “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Again this

is in the context of giving. Paul is commending the people in Philippi for sending an offering. Let's look at the verse 17: "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." Paul tells them that he is happy to receive the gift, not because it was sent to him but because he knew what the result would be a blessing on their account.

Looking again at verse 19, we see the words "according to his riches." Now if God gives us "according to his riches," that is a little bit different from Him giving "out of his riches." Let me explain ...

If I were a millionaire, and you had a \$50,000 hospital bill and I paid \$40,000 of it, you would say that was a pretty good gift. But the amount would give you no clue how wealthy I really am. However if I paid the whole \$50,000 bill and gave you \$20,000 on top of that, you would have some idea of how wealthy I am. To the hilarious giver, God gives according to His riches—commensurate with His wealth—not "out of his riches." This is a tremendous promise!

The gospel is full of teachings and warnings about materialism, yet everybody rings their hands in our Plain churches and says, "We are drowning in our materialism ..." while refusing to obey the Gospel's plain solution to the problem.

Look! We are in a war against the world, and the world is basically a materialistic world that values only the things you can see and feel and touch. The best way to win the war against materialism is by extravagant giving.

Matthew 6:1–4 shows us how our giving is to be done: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven."

To the Jewish mind, the word "alms" meant any righteous deed, but we think of it in terms of giving.

"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret ..." And here is the part that excites me! "... and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

In reaction to the Roman Catholics, with their "means of grace," we have gone to the other extreme and said there are no means of grace. But there *are* means of grace. One of them is given to us in these verses. When we give alms, God rewards us openly, although not necessarily with money, in return.

Openly rewarded

Let me give you an example of a man whom God rewarded openly in a tremendous way. And you probably did not know what was behind the scenes. I am referring to John Wesley.

John Wesley chose to live on what today would be a salary of about \$20,000/year here in the United States. He never changed that through his entire life. The hidden side of this is that John Wesley wrote many books and was involved in handling large sums of money, earning approximately \$160,000 a year in our economy. Yet he never took out for his own expenses more than the \$20,000 salary he paid himself.²

I visited the Wesley museum in London where he preached and stood there convicted. Here was a man who was famous and could have had basically anything he wanted in material goods. He had supporters who would have gladly given him any honor or position he wanted. But John Wesley was a man who cared about the poor in London.

Exhibit after exhibit in that museum show the lengths to which he would go just to help one prisoner or poor person who was in trouble. John Wesley was an extravagant giver. In fact, at one point in his life tea became expensive, and he quit drinking tea so that he would have that much more to give to the poor. He was involved in prison ministry, poor houses, the cause of freeing slaves in England ... basically anybody in need captured John Wesley's heart. Here is an actual account:

Wesley had just finished buying some pictures for his room when one of the chambermaids came to his door. It was a winter day and he noticed that she had only a thin linen gown to wear for protection against the cold. He reached into his pocket to give her some money for a coat, and found he had little left.

It struck him that the Lord was not pleased with how he had spent his money. He asked himself, "Will thy Master say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful steward'? Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money that might have screened this poor creature from the cold'!

O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?³

2 Editorial note: Money values are hard to calculate across centuries due to the difference in purchasing power. The salary figure given here may actually be high, as another calculation of the value is closer to \$14,000/year. The point is that John Wesley lived on what was basically a "minimum wage" salary and gave away the rest. In one particularly prosperous year it is said that he gave away 98% of his income.

3 Quoted from *Radical*, David Platt, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO, p. 126

There is a reason that at his death someone made the following comment about Wesley. “When Wesley departed from this world, he left a battered hat, a worn coat, a tattered Bible, and the Methodist Church.”

And that was not just a happenstance. His extravagant, self-sacrificing giving explains why God blessed his ministry extravagantly.

Let’s turn now to some very often misunderstood verses in Luke 16:

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

He was still giving away, unjustly, his lord’s money!

Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

He had no authorization to do this! But he was getting prepared for getting fired.

And the lord [whom he had just ripped off!] commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

This man knew that it was to his advantage to make friends with his lord’s money. But we don’t understand that. Our Lord says, “Do it!” But we don’t do it.

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Now I don’t understand what all that means, but it is clear that we are to do with our money what the unjust steward did with his money. The next part is what I really want to look at.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

Jesus then explains what He is referring to ...

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

What true riches? The kind that John Wesley experienced. God says, “Money is a test. Money is the least on my scale of importance, and I am going to watch you and see what you do with it. And then when I see what you have done with your money, I will decide whether to give you the true riches, the kind the John Wesley enjoyed in his ministry.”

Does that explain why there is so little power, so little gifting, so little effect of our witness and testimony? It may just be that the Lord is looking at the materialism—that we all know exists among us—and the waste of our resources on extravagances, luxuries, and frivolous things, and that He is telling Himself, “If that is what they do with what I consider as the least important thing, I will never give them the things that are really important.”

Let’s turn now to Isaiah 58:10-11 and consider some tremendous promises, given in the context of fasting. “And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity.” John Wesley didn’t live in obscurity. Everybody knew who he was. I am not saying we should seek for fame, but that is what the Bible says.

“And thy darkness be as the noonday. And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” This is a promise given to those who reach out their hand to the poor.

Christians do practice this principle to a degree, and what they do proves that these promises are true. After Hurricane Katrina, Christians sacrificed to give the city food, water, and shoulders to cry on. It was obvious to the people of New Orleans that the Christians were doing the lion’s share of the restoration work. A Jewish doctor looking on made this comment after it was over: “There are no longer any agnostics in New Orleans.”

Taking Jesus at His word

Eric Camille is a dear brother from Tallahassee, Florida. We were one of his first contacts with Anabaptists. He looked up Anabaptists, and Shippensburg Christian Fellowship came to his attention, so he traveled the whole way from Tallahassee with his dear wife to visit our congregation. He told me: “Anabaptism is beautiful! Absolutely beautiful! I did not

know that there were people like this. But the thing that surprises me is that you people keep it within the four walls of your church buildings. You folks should be down on the streets of the cities helping the poor and lifting the fallen.”

He and his wife take what resources they have—and he is not a wealthy man—and go down to the slums of the city on a regular basis with food and prepare it on the sidewalk to feed the hungry. He said, “I don’t understand you people, why you are not taking this to the streets.” And he hasn’t joined any of our churches as a result because he sees this lack as our tremendous blind spot.

Joyful obedience

John 15 tells us that if we obey the Lord, our joy will be full. Let me give you an account:

Sunday in our church we were studying the story of the rich young man in Mark 10. Later, I received the following e-mail from one of our members:

My wife and I went home, emptied all our clothes onto the bed, got several bags of canned goods and, all the baby clothes our son has grown out of in addition to the toys he does not play with anymore. I took several hundred dollars cash that I was saving to upgrade the front lawn.

By the way, how much do you put into your front lawn? I cannot imagine the amount of money people put into their lawns.

We drove over to the projects downtown and prayed. I prayed for the people I didn’t know who were about to receive what I had too much of.

In the first house was a man about 30 who had a baby and needed some clothes. Perfect! I had my clothes to give him and the baby toys and clothes. He needed money for groceries, so I gave him \$100. . . .

The next house had a couple who needed some clothing for the wife and money for a car payment. So I gave her my wife’s clothes and \$100.

We prayed with each family and told them we came with God.

I got such a rush out of this that we got home and got more things together to give away. My wife and I are now consistently serving at the homeless center downtown. I am going to start teaching art and graphics at the homeless learning center.⁴

This man got a charge out doing this! I ask you, what gives you your “kicks”? What do you get a rush out of doing? Is it that new gadget? Is it that extravagant automobile that you really don’t need? Isn’t it far more than mere transportation? Why not admit that it also was bought to make an expensive statement?

Why don’t you do what this man did? You will be surprised at what it will do for *you*!

Sacrificial love testifieth loudly

Tertullian identified the outpouring of sacrificial love as the key factor to explain the multitudes that came to Christ in those first centuries.

Albert Einstein said, “The world is a dangerous place. Not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.” We are to overcome evil with good.

Ghandi was once asked by E. Stanley Jones—who had desperately tried to get Ghandi to make a commitment to Christ—what hindered him from committing his life to Jesus. Ghandi replied, “The Christians.”

Suppose we Anabaptists repented of our materialism and became known for our sacrificial and extravagant generosity in obedience to Christ? Yes, some of this does happen, but the people around us also know that we have piles of money left. We are known for our wealth and being people who have money. Suppose we were known as people who have depleted our resources for the sake of God’s Kingdom and are the most generous people on the face of the earth.

You can help change this! Coupled with nonresistance, obeying Christ in hilarious giving would be the most powerful testimony in the world. Will we be remembered as the generation that rose up for the cause of world poverty the best we could with our small numbers? Or will our history show that we were the most selfish generation in history who loved its soft drinks, fancy cars, cosmetics, extravagant clothes, expensive electronic gadgets, oversized houses, and costly vacations?

Reaping lavishly

This is serious! God is not mocked! He said whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap. Galatians 6:7–10 has a “negative” side, but it also has a

⁴ Quoted from *Radical*, David Platt, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO, pp. 131–132

“positive” side. In fact, the emphasis is on the positive. I want to inspire, not scold. “Be not deceived . . . “he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

You have Christian brothers and sisters around the world who are starving. You have the opportunity to sow much for a bountiful harvest of blessing.

Saving time?

It is not the high cost of living, but the cost of high living that is hurting us. I am amazed at what has happened in my generation. Let me give you an example from my own home. I grew up on a farm and we took a bath once a week in a tin tub. That wasn't unusual; that is the way everybody did: bathe once a week and change your clothes. Mom washed on Monday morning, all the clothes for a family of 13, and she was done with the wash for the week.

When my twin brothers were born, the last in the family, my father thought my mother needed some help so he bought her an automatic washer and dryer. Coupled with the bathroom built a few years previously, this enabled all 13 of us to take a bath and change into clean clothes every day . . . and my mother washed every day with her automatic washer. She then had *less* time than she had before!

Yes, our “labor-saving” devices have robbed us. When I was a boy, we visited all over the community throughout the whole week. Today, we visit maybe on Sunday, but we never visit someone on a Tuesday evening, especially unannounced.

When I was a boy, we never called anyone before paying a visit. We just said, “Let's go visit someone,” and got in the car. We children would say to our parents, “If we get all the work done early tonight, may we go visiting?” And they would agree because we all loved to go visiting. We would go to the first place, unannounced, and if they were not home we went to the next, until we found someone home.

My father and mother together had 19 brothers and sisters, and we visited all of them once or twice a year, plus many friends. Nobody today that I know visits like that. Why? Because we have our automatic washers and other “time-saving” devices.

As another example, our great-grandmothers had a carpet in the parlor, the only carpet in the house. The only maintenance that carpet got was to have the lint picked off it occasionally and to get hung over the clothesline

each spring for the dust to be beaten out of it. So the children said, “Let’s help grandma out. Let’s buy her a vacuum cleaner.” Now she doesn’t have to take the carpet out and hang it over the clothesline.

The rest of the story is that we now put carpet in every room of the house and sweep it every other day.

That is what I mean when I say our problem is “not the high cost of living, but the cost of high living.” We have put ourselves in bondage with our luxuries and our high expectations of what life should be. In the meantime, we have less money and time for the desperate people in our world who will die physically and spiritually without our help. The key to freedom from this deadly snare is to be extravagant with our compassion and try to bring some sense of equity between us and the needs of our world.

Battleship, or luxury liner?

We are in a battle. I will finish with a story:

In the 1940s the US government commissioned William Francis Gibbs to work with the United States Lines to build a troop carrier for the navy, the likes of which had never been built before, at a cost of \$80 million. It was to be equipped to carry 15,000 troops. In 1952, the SS United States was completed. It could travel at 51 mph, faster than any other ship. It could cover 10,000 miles without stopping for food or supplies. It could travel anywhere in the world in less than 10 days. It was the fastest and most reliable troop carrier in the world.⁵

The problem is that it never carried any troops! Somebody convinced the United States Lines to turn the ship into a luxury liner for heads of state and celebrities. By the time they finished refurbishing it, the ship carried only 2000 passengers instead of 15,000. It had 695 staterooms, four dining salons, three bars, two theaters, five acres of open deck, a heated swimming pool, and was fully air-conditioned.

It was no longer a vessel for battle, but a means of indulgence so that wealthy people could comfortably ride across the Atlantic Ocean.

Did you know that the church was designed for battle? We are in a war! Christ wants to mobilize every one of you to wage a great offensive for the Kingdom of God right where you are.

Have we turned the church into a luxury liner? A song we sometimes sing says, “In your costly temples praying, let thy kingdom come we pray, are but idle words of meaning, if from these [the needy] we turn away.”

⁵ Paraphrased from *Radical*, David Platt, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO, p. 169

Are we willing to turn the church into a troop carrier for battle? Are we willing to obey the clear orders of Jesus concerning the tragic needs of our world? Are we willing to forsake our costly comforts to meet the great needs in the inner cities, the hostile regions of the Middle East, and the disease-ridden parts of “third-world” countries? Are we willing to make the richest country in the world a means for exalting Christ through the investment of our resources?

Just passing through ...

Pilgrims have lots of resources to invest because they travel light. An American tourist once paid a visit to the renowned Polish rabbi Hofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi had a simple room, with a few books, plus a table and a cot. The puzzled American asked, “My! Where is your furniture?”

Hofetz replied, “Where is yours?”

“Huh,” was the reply, “I am just a tourist. I am just here passing through.”

The rabbi replied, “So am I.”