

INTRODUCTION

Well, Christmas is over, and we are getting ready for a new year. Each year, the #1 New Year's resolution is to lose weight. I came across a funny poem about how we all eat too much during the holidays. It was written by a woman but we can *all* relate to it!

'Twas the week after Christmas, and all through the house,
Nothing would fit me, not even a blouse.
The cookies I'd nibbled, the fudge I did taste,
All the holiday eating had gone to my waist.
When I got on the scales there arose such a number!
When I walked to the store (less a walk than a lumber),
I remembered the marvelous meals I'd prepared,
The gravies and sauces and beef lightly rared,
The pies and the cakes, the bread and the cheese,
And the way I'd forgotten to say, "No thank you please."
As I dressed myself up in my husband's old shirt,
And prepared once again to do battle with dirt,
I said to myself, as only I can,
"You can spend the winter disguised as a man!"
So away with the last of the sour cream dip,
Get rid of the fruitcake, every cracker and chip.
Every last bit of food that I like must be banished,
Till all the additional pounds, too, have vanished.
I won't have a cookie, not even a lick,
I'll want only to chew on a long celery stick.
I won't have hot biscuits, or corn bread, or pie,
I'll just munch on a carrot and quietly cry.
I'm hungry, I'm tired, and life is a bore—
But isn't that what January's for?
Unable to feast, life's no longer a riot,
Happy New Year to all, and to all a good diet!

The good news is that feeding on the Word of God is calorie free! The last time we were in Luke, we found Jesus warning His audience about important matters like hypocrisy and the power of God to throw sinners into Hell. In the middle of His message, He was interrupted by a couple of brothers who had a family controversy about how their inheritance was going to be divided. While Jesus was talking about powerful themes, all these two guys could think about was how much money each of them was going to get from their father's estate. Let's listen in on Jesus' reply in Luke 12:13: Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Jesus used this interruption to address a topic we all confront: greed. He was the Master teacher, and this is a good example of His teaching style. He would first state the principle, then illustrate it and then make a personal application. When I preach, I try to follow the same pattern. Here is His basic principle: Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his

possessions.” Next, He is going to tell a story to illustrate His premise: And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.’” But God said to him, ‘You fool! [Circle that word.] This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ Finally, Jesus makes the personal application for everyone listening to Him: “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

There is one word in Jesus’ story that rivets my attention: “Fool!” Jesus warned in Matthew 5:22, “Anyone who says, ‘you fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” But notice it is *God* who calls the farmer a fool. It doesn’t bother me too much if another person calls me a fool, because, like Paul, I don’t mind being known as a fool for Christ’s sake (I Corinthians 4:10). But I certainly don’t want to reach the end of my life and have *God* call me a fool—how about you? If you don’t want that to happen, we’d better pay close attention to the kind of person God calls a fool. Although the man appears successful, he is a total failure in life. This message is entitled “A Fool’s Formula for Failure.” Hopefully, we can learn from his mistakes and avoid them at all costs! **GOD SAYS A FOOL IS SOMEONE WHO:**

1. EQUATES MATERIAL ABUNDANCE WITH SUCCESS

In Jesus’ time, the economy was agriculture-based. This man was rich because he had a bumper crop with such a surplus he had to build bigger barns! If that guy was around today, he would be considered a brilliant entrepreneur and named Businessman of the Year by *Business World* magazine; but God named him something else—a fool.

In our culture, success is measured by how much money you make, how many toys you have, how much property, real estate, or business interest you possess. Each year, *Forbes Magazine* publishes its much-anticipated list of the ten richest people in the America. Last year, Bill Gates hung on to first place with assets of over \$60 billion. Investor Warren Buffet, and Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen round out the top three. Sam Walton’s four children, Jim, John, Rob and Alice are each in the top ten as well. Americans look at those people and use them as the template, the model, for true American success. Wouldn’t it be great if *Forbes* or some other magazine published a list of the ten best dads or the ten best moms or the ten most fulfilled or content people? How about the ten happiest married couples?

Like the foolish farmer, most Americans think true success has happened when you have accumulated so much stuff you can just sit back and say, “Take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”

My friend, Steve Farrar, has re-written a common prayer that captures our obsession with accumulating stuff:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray my Cuisinart to keep.

I pray my stocks are on the rise,
And that my analyst is wise.
That all the wine I sip is white,
And that my hot tub’s watertight.
That racquetball won’t get too tough,
That all my sushi’s fresh enough.
I pray my cellular phone still works,
That my career won’t lose its perks.
My microwave won’t radiate
And my condo won’t depreciate.
I pray my health club doesn’t close
And that my money market grows.
If I go broke before I wake,
I pray my Lexus they won’t take!
(Steve Farrar, *Survival in the American Jungle*)

We’ve all heard the expression, “money can’t buy happiness.” Someone said, “Money can’t buy happiness, but at least it lets you choose your misery.” That’s cute, but it’s not true. I’ve known wealthy people who were pretty miserable—and I’ve known poor folks who were miserable, too. Misery is no respecter of persons or net worth. The t-shirt message summarizing our culture is: “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” However, someone much wiser revised that message to say, “The one who dies with the most toys—still dies!”

But real success is *not* attained when you have a fat bank account or a house full of gadgets. Success in God’s eyes is found when you have a good relationship with Him, which produces a good relationship with other people. Listen to the way God describes success in Jeremiah 9:23: The Lord says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.”

Jesus has a different definition for success than our materialistic culture has. He said true success is to be enjoyed when you have “life.” And He clearly states a person’s life is not determined by the abundance of his possessions. When Jesus spoke of life, He didn’t use the word *bios*, which means physical existence; we get our word biology from that. He used the word *zoa*, which means a quality of living. True success is knowing God and loving God.

2. A FOOL DEMONSTRATES A SELF-CENTERED ATTITUDE

I have read that before September 11, Americans were the “Me generation” but since that terrible day we have become the “Us generation.” I hope that’s true, but I haven’t seen much evidence of it. Actually, instead of being the Me generation, I think we are the “Gimme’ generation.”

The main problem with the foolish farmer was he was so self-centered he could only think about himself. Beginning in verse 17, notice how many times he used a form of the first personal pronoun: “What shall I do? I have no place to store MY crops.” “This is what I’LL do. I will tear

down MY barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all MY grain and MY goods. And I’LL say to MYSELF ... ” In a space of speaking a total of 43 words, he used “I,” “me” or “my” 11 times! Every fourth word was about *himself*. This farmer was all wrapped up in himself and when a person is all wrapped up in themselves they make a pretty small package! The essence of *all* sin is self-centeredness. Adam and Eve didn’t eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden because they hated God, they did it because it was the selfish thing to do—there was a taste and a knowledge they had not yet experienced, so to satisfy this self-craving they munched away—until they ate themselves out of house and home!

The Bible confirms you are a fool if you are living a self-centered life. Proverbs 28:26 says, “He who trusts in himself is a fool.”

The best way to guarantee you’ll live a miserable life is to only focus on pleasing yourself. The best way to guarantee you’ll have a miserable marriage is to only focus on yourself and your own needs rather than focusing on the needs and desires of your mate.

Last June, the entire nation paused as Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City Bomber, was executed by lethal injection. His last statement was an excerpt from a poem by William Earnest Henley. These words describe perfectly the attitude of every life that has shut God and others out from their self-centered existence:

I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeoning of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.
(From “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley, 1849-1903)

Sadly, the phrase, “my head is unbowed” is a perfect description of the foolish farmer as well as the attitude of many Americans who truly believe they *are* masters of their fate. They are living their lives with self at the center of their own little universe. Neither Timothy McVeigh nor the rich farmer were prepared to meet God. A millisecond after Timothy McVeigh died, he discovered he was *neither* the master of his fate *nor* the captain of his soul.

Compare the final words of McVeigh to the last words of a great missionary, William Carey. Carey has been called the father of modern missions because he was one of the first Baptists to take the gospel to a foreign land. For over 60 years he preached and taught in the continent of India. He lived a totally unselfish life, a God-centered life. Before he died, he asked that his last words be engraved on the tombstone he would share with his wife who had died earlier:

A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,

On thy kind arms I fall;
Be Thou my strength and righteousness.
My Jesus and my all.

In the competitive atmosphere of the American business world, a statement like that might prevent you from being hired in a Fortune 500 company—you'd be considered a wimp. Our American rat race seems to prefer the kind of hard-charging, go-getter who says, "I am the master of my fate."

Today, there are three universities named after William Carey. How many schools will be named after McVeigh? And when God gets ready to pass out his rewards in heaven, his list won't be same as *Forbes* or *People Magazine*. He will honor those who lived an unselfish life in which they gave themselves away, people like William Carey and thousands of others we don't even know because they lived their lives flying beneath the radar of worldly success.

3. A FOOL ESTIMATES THAT MORE WEALTH WILL REDUCE STRESS

This poor, rich farmer believed, like many Americans, that, if he only had a little more money, life would automatically be better. Listen to his words again in verse 19, "you have plenty of good things *take it easy!* Eat, drink, and be merry!" He was a fool for thinking life would be easier just because he had more money.

The Romans had a proverb: "Money is like seawater; the more you drink the thirstier you become." Howard Hughes made more than a billion dollars in his lifetime. And that was back when a billion dollars was really a billion dollars! He lived such a self-centered life he believed every relationship was disposable. He spent the last, lonely years of his life hiding in the Xanadu Hotel in Freeport, Grand Bahamas Island. He was so sick and miserable he couldn't even enjoy a good meal. At one time in his life he probably thought, "if I could just make a little more money, I could spend the rest of my life taking it easy: Eat, drink, and be merry!" He was mistaken.

Everybody wants to live on Easy Street. When I first moved to Tyler, I was amused to learn there really is a street named "Easy" a few blocks south of our building. That's the *only* way to live on Easy Street—and those folks don't have it easy. They even have a hard time pulling out onto Paluxy Road!

I've known a few wealthy people, and their lives are not free of stress. In fact, if you were to ask rich people if having a lot of money reduces stress, you'd be surprised to learn wealth produces its own kind of stress and pressure. Great wealth is often more of a burden than a blessing.

The richest man in Bible was Solomon. In today's dollars, he would have been wealthier than Bill Gates. He had unlimited free slave labor to build his palaces and stables. But as Solomon approached old age he wrote in Ecclesiastes 2:10-11: "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired ... my heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." Do you hear the stress and regret?

My friend, you can chase the wind, but you’ll never grab it. You can seek for happiness and purpose in accumulating wealth and possessions, but you won’t find it. The truth is, life will *never* be trouble-free. The only stress-free people are in the cemetery! Job said, “Man is born for trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7) Finally, God says a fool is someone who:

4. MISCALCULATES THE LENGTH AND MEANING OF LIFE

Our farmer could understand the agriculture futures market, planting, harvesting, the weather, labor, and construction but he made one terrible miscalculation: he didn’t figure on dying so soon. In verse 19 he said: “I have plenty of good things laid up for *many* years.” He was half-right which made him all wrong. He *did* have plenty of good things, but he didn’t have many years. God appeared and said, “Fool! This very night, your life is required of you.” Some people’s motto is, “Live as if there’s no tomorrow.” When what they really mean is: “Live as if there is no eternity.” Compared to eternity, this life is very brief. James 4:14 says: “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” When I walked outside this morning to get the newspaper, I could see a little cloud form whenever I breathed—but it disappeared in less than a second. That’s how long your life is from heaven’s perspective! There is another thing besides happiness money can’t buy—and it’s time.

Jim Croce was a talented singer and songwriter. He wrote and recorded a beautiful love song entitled, “Time in a Bottle” about his desire to save time in a bottle in order to spend it later with someone he loved. The eerie thing about that song is by the time it was released Jim Croce was dead.

What is the *meaning* of life? Do we exist just to work 60 hours a week so we can make a bunch of money so we can retire and relax? When you understand there really is a God who can demand your life at any time, it will change your entire outlook. Suddenly making million bucks before you turn forty doesn’t seem as important.

The personal application of this parable is found in verse 21. If we spend our lives stockpiling good things for ourselves, Jesus says we are fools, too. But He indicates there is another kind of wealth—being rich toward God. Being rich toward God has nothing to do with your financial net worth. You can be dirt poor and still not be rich toward God or you may be a millionaire and you may be rich toward God. It all depends on the *location* of your treasure.

In Matthew 6:19 Jesus said, “Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth, rust, and burglars. The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.” (*The Message* paraphrase)

Most real estate experts will tell you the three most important factors in real estate are: location, location, location. The same is true with your riches: location, location, location. If you are hoarding and storing your resources in some bank vault or securities portfolio, your heart will be there—and you can’t take them with you when you die. You’ve all heard the expression: “A fool and his money are soon parted.” I heard someone revise it to say, “A fool and his money are

some party.” But Jesus said it best. He was teaching that “a fool and his money *are* parted, sooner or later—and permanently.” You can’t take it with you, but Jesus was teaching you can send it on ahead. Through the years, I’ve known some people who have been blessed with a lot of money and the happiest ones are those who have learned to give most of it away. What you give to God and His work is like making a deposit in heaven. I know for many of you, your most valuable assets are in heaven right now. Some of you have placed much of your wealth there already. Others of you have invested years of your labor there. Others of you love Jesus so dearly you are always looking in that direction for your hope and help: He is your treasure. Knowing Jesus is the “pearl of great price” for which you have liquidated everything else in your life. Your treasure is in heaven.

George Washington Truett was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas for 47 years (1897-1944). He once visited a wealthy West Texas rancher and had dinner in his palatial ranch home. After dinner, the rancher took Dr. Truett up to a veranda on top of his house, and lit up a big cigar. The sun was setting, and if you’ve been to West Texas, you know you can see a long way out there. The man pointed to the South toward some oil rigs and said, “I own everything in that direction as far as you can see.” He pointed east toward some cotton fields and said, “And I own everything in that direction, too.” He pointed North toward a huge herd of cattle and bragged, “And, preacher, I own everything as far as you can see in that direction.” He turned to the West, and said, “And I own everything you can see in that direction, except the sun, of course.” Dr. Truett, turned to the man and pointed straight up the sky and said, “And how much do you own in that direction, my friend?” I could ask you the same thing today.

CONCLUSION

Let’s visit our foolish farmer one final time. Can you picture him? He’s a good, hardworking man. He didn’t cheat, steal, or lie to earn his riches. He earned it by the sweat of his brow. His diligence finally pays off and he finally “hits it big” with a massive crop production. He’s thrilled, so he stays up late one night drawing plans for his bigger barns. There’s a knock at the door and he says, “Who is it?”

The answer comes, “I am Death. I’ve come for you. Ten, nine, eight ...”

“Go away, I’m not ready for you! Nobody warned me you were coming!”

Suddenly Death is in the room and says, “Oh yes, I warned you. Do you remember your brother who died of cancer? What about the teenager who drowned in the lake? I was warning you.

Seven, six, five ...”

The farmer says, “Wait, I’ll give you half of my money—just go away!”

“Four, three, two ...”

“Okay, I’ll give you ALL my money!”

“One, zero.”

God says, “This very night your life is demanded from you.”

The next morning, his wife discovers him slumped across his expansion blueprints. At his funeral, his friends and neighbors eulogize him as a wonderful man, a community leader and a fine, successful businessman. They bury him in an expensive casket with his name engraved on a

polished tombstone. But God sends an angel into the cemetery that night who writes four letters on the tombstone: FOOL.

He was a fool and he didn’t know it. Others didn’t know it, but God did. Are you a fool, and don’t know it? Are you rich toward God? Do you have a personal relationship with Him? When you die, you’ll lose all your material possessions, but your relationship with God is for eternity. Sometimes people look at Christians and call us fools. The real fool is someone who hangs onto those things that won’t matter a thousand or a million years from now. Before he was killed by the Auca Indians in Ecuador, missionary Jim Elliot had written in his journal: “He is no fool to give up that which he cannot keep in order to gain that which he can never lose!”

If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you are rich toward God and that is something you can *never* lose!

OUTLINE

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1. EQUATES MATERIAL ABUNDANCE WITH SUCCESS

This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight." *Jeremiah 9:23-24*

2. DEMONSTRATES A SELF-CENTERED ATTITUDE

"He who trusts in himself is a fool." *Proverbs 28:26*

3. ESTIMATES THAT MORE WEALTH WILL RELIEVE STRESS

"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired ... my heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." *Ecclesiastes 2:10-11*

4. MISCALCULATES THE LENGTH AND MEANING OF LIFE

"What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." *James 4:14*

Jesus said, "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth, rust, and burglars. The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being." *Matthew 6:19-21, The Message paraphrase*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes