

**“The Dynamics of Discipleship:  
Developing Spiritual Disciplines II”  
Luke 12:13-21**

**March 25, 2001**

**Dr. J. Howard Olds**

Once upon a time, a midwestern man fell in love with his gold Cadillac. He loved it so much he asked to be buried in it. Since money wasn't a problem, on the day of his burial, a huge crane was placed over a gigantic grave. And sure enough, they lowered this man into his grave sitting in the driver's seat of his gold Cadillac with white gloves grasped to the steering wheel. Observing the peculiar scene, one bystander said to another, "Man that's really living!"

Once upon another time, Jesus told a story about a man who was so successful in business that the stress of building bigger and better warehouses caused him to have a heart attack and die. Since he cared a lot about his body, but not much for his soul, Jesus called him a fool. In a world of bills and budgets, schedules and stress, I want to talk about the spiritual disciplines that could save our souls.

Last week, we talked about prayer and fasting, and study. Today, I want us to think about worship and service, and generosity. These spiritual habits of life will keep our hearts in tune. They are disciplines of the spiritual life. There are two things out of this parable of Jesus that stands out to me.

The first is this. Success is not a sin. Verse 16: The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. So

far as we know he did it honestly and justly and rightly. He earned what he had. My father was a farmer. For sixty-five years he dug out a living for himself and his family by the sweat of his brow and the labor of his hands. Even today, his big hands are rough and calloused from the years of his labor. My mother liked to entertain preachers on Sunday. On a particular Sunday, a pious preacher was taking a look at my dad's farm, looking at the green meadows and the cows grazing in the background. The preacher said, "Mr. Olds, God has sure given you a beautiful farm." My dad thought for a moment and then said, "Yeah, and you should have seen it when God had it all by Himself."

The vow of poverty is not a prerequisite for holiness. There have been times in my life when I didn't have two nickels to rub together and there have been other times, when I have lived rather comfortably. There is no holiness in the former and there is no eternity in the latter. Mr. Wesley said, "Earn all you can." In a world that has become lazy, more interested in rights than responsibility, we would do well to remember the value of work.

We live in a land of opportunity, unusual opportunity. Every day this fatherless boy gazed at the fence separating his family's ramshackled cabin from the plush country club. What chance did this poor Chicano with a seventh grade education have to be welcomed into that world, he wondered. But Lee Trevino was determined. So he took a job as a gardener. He became a caddie. He honed his putting skills by hitting balls with a stick and a soda bottle wrapped in adhesive tape at the bottom. And today, no fence is separating Lee Trevino from any country club in the world. It is not a sin to be successful.

The successful are not to be envied, or shunned, or taken advantage of. Jesus noticed the poor. But He also spent

a lot of time with the rich. He had lunch with Zaccheus. He dined with Simon. He hung out at the home of Mary and Martha. The Pharisees accused Him of being a wine bibber and a rabble-rouser. Nevertheless, He continued to go to parties.

Abraham, the father of all nations, went out not knowing where he was going, but he wound up a very rich man. David started out playing the harp, and wound up governing a nation. Solomon was always arrayed in splendor and glory. Lydia was a dealer of fine linens. God used them all for great and glorious purposes.

Christian sociologist, Tony Campolo may be Christianity's most vocal conscience, when it comes to Christian economics. But even Campolo who's known to ask compelling questions like, "Would Jesus drive a BMW?" acknowledges that some people have the gift of making money. Far too often Christianity is prejudiced against them. In his book entitled, *Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God*, he tells the story about an affluent friend who enrolls in the seminary to try to figure out God's will for his life. Early in his seminary course, the professor let loose on a tirade about the incongruity of being rich and being Christian. Tony's friend raised his hand and said, "I'm rich and I'm Christian, are you talking about me?" The professor immediately said, "No I don't mean you. I mean the really rich people. I mean the people who live in suburban mansions, and have two Jaguars in their garages." Tony's friend raised his hand again. He said, "You just described me exactly the way I am. I live in the suburbs in a rather expensive home, and I have two Jaguars in my garage. So are telling me that I can't be a Christian?"

The last time I checked, the Bible says, "Nothing is impossible for God." The rich man, the poor man, the

beggar, the thief, all get through the eye of the needle by the miracle of grace. Success is not a sin. But let me hasten to the second point.

Success is not an end. Verse 20: "But God said to him, you fool. Riches can be risky business. To whom much is given, much is expected." So where are the habits of life that will keep our hearts in tune, especially if we have done well in this game of life? Everybody ought to practice spiritual disciplines. But those of us who have sort of made it in the world, have an extra reason to practice spiritual disciplines. Yes, they are prayer and Bible study and fasting. Today I want to focus on worship and service and generosity.

Worship. I have a feeling this guy didn't have much time to go to worship. Read the story. It consists of a hundred words. Over twenty are personal pronouns, most of them in the first person singular. His speech gives him away. He thought to himself, "What shall **I** do? This is what **I** will do. **I** will tear down **my** barns and build bigger ones. **I** will store all of **my** grains and **my** goods and **I** will say to **myself**, 'You have plenty of good things.'" His speech reveals his love. One thing worship does for us, it pulls us out of ourselves. There is at least one time of the week we have to recognize we are not captains of our fate and masters of our own souls. Here we bow in love and adoration to another who is much greater than you and I. We need that in our lives. Worship helps to define who we are and why we are, and what God expects from us.

James Moore tells the story about a university professor who loved to take his granddaughter on campus with him. She walked around with him, and he introduced her to all of his friends. You know how granddaddies are. One day a friend of his saw him coming up with his granddaughter on his shoulders. He was carrying her around. When the

two met, the friend said to the little girl, "My goodness, look at you, look how much you've grown since I met you last week. I now have to look up to you, you've gotten so tall."

The little girl in a moment of honesty replied, "Not all of this is me!"

Had this man realized the fertility of the soil, the power of the sunshine, the gentleness of the rain, he would have said as well, "Not all of this is me." That is what worship does for us. It reminds us that God is God and we are called to bow in adoration to the One in whom we live and move and have our very being. When I come into a moment of worship, I recognize there is somebody bigger than you and I, and we need to be reminded of that in life.

It is a spiritual discipline that will keep our hearts in tune.

From our worship we are called to service. Success leaves us satiated. When we have consumed too much, we get drowsy and forget there is another world that exists. Success lures us into the sin of isolation. Before long, we begin to think that others are just like us, or they could be if they would just try. These are foolish thoughts.

John Grisham has written ten novels and sold more than a hundred million books. One day, somebody asked him, "How do you cope with success?" To which the great writer said, "We go on church mission trips to keep us aware of how the rest of the world really lives."

Brennan Manning is an evangelical Catholic priest. As he tells the story: "I was in the Atlanta airport and wanted to get my shoes shined. I went to the shoeshine stand and asked the man to shine my shoes. As I sat in the chair, I heard a distinct call from God. God said, 'Pay the man and tip him well and then shine his shoes for him.' So when he had finished, I paid him and tipped him well and then I said, 'Now sir I would like to shine your shoes.' The man said, 'You want to what?' "I want to shine your

shoes,” said Brennan. “How would you like them done? Come up here in the chair, let me start.” The man began to cry. He looked me in the eye and said; “No white man has ever said that to me in all of my life.” With tears running down his cheeks, and tears running down mine, we embraced one another in the Atlanta airport as the hurt and pain of all the years began to dwindle away in a moment of reconciliation.” You shined anybody’s shoes lately?

I know, the needs are great and tremendous and they’re too much they are overwhelming when you think about four hundred people staving to death every hour around the world. It is too much to grasp much less relieve. Never let your limitations inhibit your efforts to heal the hurts of the world.

One of my favorite stories is about a man who walked the beach at dawn, picking up starfish that had washed ashore the night before, and throwing them back into the ocean. A cynical man observed the man throwing starfish back and asked, “Sir, what are you doing?” “Saving starfish,” said the man. “But there are thousands of starfish here in the sand, and the beach goes on for miles and miles and miles. What difference does it make?” That is when the man picked up another starfish and tossed it back into the ocean and said, “It makes a difference to this one!” “What I do makes a difference to this one. “

Habits of life that keep our hearts in tune. Worship and service, and one more...generosity. It’s not what you make; it’s what you do with what you make that makes all the difference. Magazine editor, Lewis Lapham tells about running into a college classmate thirty years after they graduated together. “How are you doing?” asked Lewis. “Terrible,” says his classmate. “I earn \$250,000 a year and I am nearly bankrupt. With a Park Avenue apartment,

and private school, and taxes and salaries for maids and butlers, my expenses are over \$300,000. I am nothing. I'm nobody, I can't make ends meet."

Andrew Carnegie was once asked, "How much is enough?" Mr. Carnegie said, "Just a little bit more than I have." And the game goes on. There is no limit to human wanting. Marketing has a way of moving things from "*That's extravagant*" to "*That would be really nice to have*" to "*I really need that*" to "*I just can't live without that, and I have got to have it right now.*" I say as your pastor and friend today, don't play that game, just don't play it. Avoid the disease of 'affluenza.' Learn the spiritual discipline of generosity. Embrace a lifestyle of simplicity. Let people be more important than your possessions. Tithe your assets and regain perspective. Be generous with others as God has been generous to you.

Hear what I am saying today, I'm not raising any church budgets, I'm not asking for a special offering, I'm not after anything, except your life. God wants your life. God wants all of you. He wants you to partner with Him in healing the hurts of the world. It is a spiritual discipline that will keep our hearts in tune with God.

David Robinson and Dennis Rodman are both professional basketball players. David Robinson uses his wealth to feed the homeless through *Feed My Sheep* program. He buys diapers and baby food for the needy, through his *Ruth Project*. David Robinson said, "These are not sacrifices to me. If I am clutching my money too tightly, I don't have any hands free to hug my wife and kids." Dennis Rodman, on the other hand, spends his money on wine and women and song, not to mention the tattoos and the body piercings of his life. So I ask you today, would you rather your kids grow up to be David Robinson or Dennis Rodman? Do I have to ask? Of

course you have a preference in life.

I ask you today, will you take a vow with me?

*I will do the best I can with what I have, where I am, for  
Jesus' sake today. Amen.*