



Sermon, November 13, 2016  
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

## Thanks Living: "Gain All You Can"

### Scripture: Luke 16:1-12

1 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

3 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg-- I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

5 "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

6 " 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

7 "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

The lives of John and Charles Wesley spanned nearly the whole of the 18th century. That was the century in which England rose to prominence as one of the centers of the Industrial Revolution. Just a few decades earlier, in 1687, Isaac Newton had published his *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, which laid the foundation for classical mechanics. Adam Smith, the author of *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* and his more well-known *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, was a contemporary of the Wesley's. England in the 18th century experienced incredible economic growth and social change and disruption as a result of the Industrial Revolution. It also experienced the revolt of its colonies in North America. One revolution that it didn't experience was a revolution of its lower classes in the way that France

did. Many historians have credited the work of John Wesley and his teaching about money and wealth as being one of the key factors in preventing England from having a French-styled bloody revolution. These historians point to the spread of Methodism as coinciding with the rise of a vital middle class, inspired to a great deal by Wesley's preaching.

So just what did Wesley preach? His main thoughts are found in his sermon entitled "The Use of Money." In that sermon Wesley outlines what he discerns from the Scriptures as being what he calls "the right use of money."

The first thing Wesley makes clear is that money is not the problem. Money is neutral. It is a tool. It can be used for good or ill. It can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, support the fatherless, be a defense for the oppressed and provide health to the sick, if employed properly by those with a consciousness and moral sensitivity informed by the Scriptures and formed by the Spirit of God.

In Wesley's words, "It is therefore of the highest concern that all who fear God know how to employ this valuable talent; that they be instructed how it may answer these glorious ends, and in the highest degree. And, perhaps, all the instructions which are necessary for this may be reduced to three plain rules, by the exact observance whereof we may approve ourselves faithful stewards of 'the mammon of unrighteousness.'"

(All quotations are from John Wesley, "The Use of Money," found online at <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/50/>)

There are three plain rules, and these are:

1. Gain all you can
2. Save all you can
3. Give all you can

We are going to look at these rules closely over the next three weeks, so today, the first rule: "Gain all you can."

Let's begin by looking at the phrase, "All You can."

## Thanks Living: "Gain All You Can"

Christian stewardship begins with a gifting God who owns everything and who is present in the world as grace. We are endowed as creatures of our Creator with a value and a purpose in life. We are all created with various abilities, talents, and potentials. Who we are and what we have is God's gift to us. What we do with ourselves and with all that we have is our gift to God.

*(Turn to 2 or 3 other people and share: "What is one special talent or ability you have been able to share with the world, either through work or outside of work?")*

We ourselves are gifts from God, given to bless the world. What we do with our lives, abilities, time and thoughts *matters* to the world.

Stewardship is our deeply spiritual response of gratitude to God. Wesley urges his hearers to apply themselves as diligently as possible to their work in the world. This is what he means by saying, "Gain all you can." But he fences this urging in with the caveat that a follower of Jesus Christ is bound by certain moral restrictions on their employment. Namely:

1. Money should not be gained at the expense of anyone's life
2. Nor at the expense of our own health
3. Nor by means of anything that deprives us of sleep or proper nourishment.
4. We should not be employed at anything that might hurt our mind or soul. That is, nothing that is immoral, sinful or unlawful according to the laws of one's community or country.
5. Money should not be gained by doing anything that is hurtful to our neighbor. That is, we cannot gain money by charging high interest, by writing contracts such that we profit from another's misfortunes (including foreclosures), by underselling and driving our competitors out of business, or by hiring away workers from our competitor.
6. We may not sell anything that impairs health.

The guiding principle in all of this is: gain all you can through honest industry in ways that do no harm to others. Doing no harm to others is a constant refrain in Wesley's writing. It is based in Jesus' commandments to "Love your neighbor as yourself" and "to do unto others as you would

have them do unto you." Stewardship to Wesley is a profound spiritual practice and a sublime moral and ethical guide for living and working in the world.

Rebecca Parker, the former president of Starr King School for the Ministry, wrote a poem several years ago that addresses this:

Your gifts

whatever you discover them to be  
can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power,

The strength of the hands,

The reaches of the heart,

the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting

The mind's power,

The strength of the hands,

The reaches of the heart,

the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting

Any of these can draw down the prison door

hoard bread,

abandon the poor,

obscure what is holy,

comply with injustice

or withhold love.

You must answer this question:

What will you do with your gifts?

Choose to bless the world.