

# Profit, Property, and Possessiveness

by Jack Hayford

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*The Bible teaches that abundance is not a hindrance to a God-intended order of life, but rather that abundance with possessiveness can hinder spiritual growth.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:14

**Topics:** "Stewardship", "Wealth Management"

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## Description

Jack Hayford delves into the topic of personal wealth and abundance in the life of a Christian, emphasizing the need for responsible handling of God-given resources and the dangers of possessiveness and ingratitude. He explores the problems associated with personal wealth, including lack of security, loss of perspective, and forgetfulness of the source of blessings. Through the teachings of Jesus in Luke 12, Hayford highlights the importance of being rich toward God, living with a plan for abundance, and applying lifetime values in managing resources.

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## Transcript

"Then one from the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' But He said to him, 'Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?' And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.' Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" 'So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.' Then He said to His disciples, 'Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on..'"

Luke 12:13-22

One of the major objectives of the Word of God is to lead us into fulfillment; indeed, even profit. Acts 20:20 says, "...I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly..." And Isaiah 48:17, "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go." These and many other Bible references indicate that it is God's will for His people to prosper in every way, including financially. However, Church history seems to clash with contemporary affluence.

How do we reconcile this seeming conflict? Does the fact that Jesus directed limitation of possessions for the sake of mobility in evangelism argue against "having?" (Matthew 10:9, 10). Does the traditional practice of clergy taking an oath of poverty make a valid statement essential to "truest holiness"? Is it proper for a sincere Christian to have savings accounts, insurance policies, and retirement plans and not be a victim of the covetousness this text decries? If our "practical reasoning" conflicts with the Word of God, one is wrong: or could it be that the Word of God is "impractical?" Let's see if we can come to terms with some of the issues around this sensitive and often controversial subject.

## THE PROBLEM WITH PERSONAL WEALTH

There are at least three major problems regarding wealth, abundance, and affluence in the life of today's Christian. First of all, they are seldom recognized as such. A fundamental thanklessness surrounds much of our society. And as thanklessness perverts the creature when the Creator is not praised, so ingratitude perverts our possessions and monies when God-given abundance is not recognized and responsibly handled (Romans 1:21-32).

Secondly, personal wealth will never afford complete security. When we consider our personal resources to be our primary hedge against the uncertainties of tomorrow, we will never be satisfied that they are totally adequate (Matthew 25:14-30). The very real problem of "preparing for later years" is introduced in this text, but some of the more complex ramifications we face today are not addressed. The subject for Christians in today's society is complicated and compounded by additional aspects including the need for reassessing family relationships and caring for the aged.

Personal wealth also tends to lead to a loss of perspective. It is easy for someone who has been successful to slip into the self-congratulatory mode of thinking which says, "I have been very diligent and have amassed this fortune out of my own wisdom, determination, and energy." In Mark 4:18, 19, Jesus shows how the entry of Kingdom truth has little chance of durable penetration ("becomes unfruitful") where "the cares of this world, (and) the deceitfulness of riches" preoccupy the mind. If my over-riding concern is how I'm going to protect my investments or my cash liquidity, I'm not likely to spend my energy on a maturing relationship with Jesus. He once said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

## THE MESSAGE OF JESUS ABOUT CONCERN OVER POSSESSIONS

The occasion of this teaching in Luke 12, verses 13-15 is where Jesus refuses to become an executor of an estate; He uses the squabble of brothers over inheritance rights to teach on the problems of "covetousness," i.e. possessiveness. From this and the surrounding text, we can gain some insights into different problem areas regarding personal wealth;

1. There is a very human tendency for all of us to forget the source of our blessings (vs. 16). Jesus introduces the "fool" who illustrates His point. He fails to remember that everything with which he is dealing came from "the ground." The Creator birthed his abundance; he is but a steward or caretaker of what God has granted him.

2. There is an inclination toward preoccupation with self (v. 17). The man's entire system is closed inwardly--"within himself." Six "I's," five "my's," and two "himself's" constitute the thrust of his total consideration. In his system of things, possessions are for possessing. There is no thankfulness in his

heart, nor is there any talk of sharing from his bounty.

3. We see the absence of a plan for abundance (v. 18). The waste and the shortsightedness of this mentality is apparent. The man plans to tear down barns to build bigger ones; and it never seems to occur to him that this is not necessarily the last crop he will ever harvest.

4. There is a failure to apply lifetime values (v. 19, 20). The contrast between the words "many years" and "this night" is startling. We must live in the light of James 4:13-15, "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

5. A neglect of long-range plans is apparent (v. 20, 21). This seems to be a case of a man who not only forgot his ultimate accountability to God concerning everything he has as well as for who he is; but he even seems to have neglected to provide for his loved ones with a will.

#### The Guidelines We Observe From This Study

The Bible does not teach that abundance of resource is a hindrance to a God-intended order of life. (Note: "and is not rich toward God." The problem is in the absence of balance, not in the absence of self-inflicted poverty.) BUT, the Bible does teach that abundance with possessiveness does become a source of hindrance to some, stopping spiritual growth: Luke 18:18-27; James 5:1-5; Joshua 6:17-7:26.

The Bible does not teach against provision for family and future. (contrast v. 21 with Proverbs 13:22). BUT, the Bible does teach against the unwise accumulation of resources subjecting them to loss and/or worthlessness (Luke 12:22-32).

The Bible does not teach that wealth is undesirable or unspiritual (Proverbs 10:22; III John 2). BUT the Bible does teach that our resources are to be managed under God's headship and in His name and behalf. We are stewards of HIS bounty, not ours; charged to distribute and/or multiply unto larger purposes that with which He has entrusted us (Ephesians 4:22 and text).

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