

# Let's Be Rich Toward God

by John Piper

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*Money is hazardous and helpful, and being rich toward God means using earthly riches to show how much you value God and moving your heart toward God as your treasure.*

**Duration:** 48:29

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:10, Luke 12:34, Romans 8:32, 2 Corinthians 8:7, 1 Timothy 6:18

**Topics:** "Stewardship", "Spiritual Wealth"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being rich toward God rather than treasuring possessions. It discusses the hazards and helpfulness of money, the significance of valuing God above all else, and the essential role of the local church in God's purposes. The message urges listeners to prioritize God's value, seek His guidance in managing finances, and use wealth to glorify Him and bless others.

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## Transcript

Let's pray together. I ask father that you would grant to me a fatherly affection for this flock and that you would give them toward me a readiness to hear and respond. I pray that Jesus' words would be understood and have the power that he meant them to have and that we would be moved to be rich toward you.

I pray that the way we handle our money would be so dramatically affected by the word of Christ that his value would shine more brightly in our lives. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen. Jesus and the apostles considered money to be hazardous and helpful, and they taught us how to minimize the hazard and how to maximize the helpfulness.

And that's what I want to do in this message. I would like to spare you the tragedies that threaten when money is much, and I would like to help you maximize the unadulterated joys of giving and the use of money in the wisest way possible to make Jesus look great and to make people go to heaven. Let me clarify something at the outset here about the nature of money.

Money in and of itself is little pieces of metal, we call them coins, and little pieces of paper, we call them bills. And the only reason we have any concern about these little pieces of paper and these pieces of metal at all is that in our culture we've established that they will function as currency. That is, they represent value, and you can therefore exchange them for things that you value.

That's why it's a concern to us. Money is significant simply because it shows what you value. So we value life and taste, and therefore we give our money away for food, and we value education, and so we give our money away for books and tuition, and we value probably more than we should entertainment, and so we give our money for Netflix and ballgames and concerts, and we value the spread of the gospel and the ministries of the church, and therefore we give our money to the church.

Jesus said this just a few verses after our text, Luke 12 34, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. So the movement of your money signifies the movement of your heart. Where your money goes, your heart is going.

You exchange money for what you value, what you treasure. So when I say that money is hazardous and helpful, I mean that these little pieces of metal in your pocket and these pieces of paper in your purses have the potential to show that you value things more than God, which is hazardous to your soul. And they have the potential of showing that you value God more than things, which would be very helpful to other people and to your own soul.

Now the conviction behind this message is threefold. It goes like this. A people, I'm thinking about Bethlehem now, on all of our campuses and all of our services, if a people understands that the movement of the heart of the money is the movement of the heart, if you get that, the movement of my money is the movement of my heart, where my money is going, my heart is going, get that.

And secondly, if a people treasures God above all that money can buy, and thirdly, if a people realizes that in God's economy the local church is indispensable to his purposes in the world, if a church gets those three things, that church will never be lacking. In its mission of mercy and evangelization, it's building up the body of Christ, and it's caring for every member so that none has any needs. Now my job therefore, if those three things are right, and I've known this a long time, my job week in and week out is to point you to the supreme value of God in Christ.

Every week, that's my job. Look, he's more valuable than anything. And secondly, my job is to reveal the inner workings of your heart so that you start to get how its movement goes with your money.

And third, my job is to help you understand the nature of the church, your role in it, its role in the world. Now the way I'm going to do it in this message is by taking you to Luke 12 and doing an exposition of verses 13 to 21, and then conclude with application, which I'm going to make a testimony of my own experience of the faithfulness of God as risky as it may be. As self-testimonies are, since Jesus said, don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing when you give.

So that's where we're going. Verse 13, someone approached Jesus and said, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. And now at this point, Jesus is confronted with an alternative.

Pastors are confronted with this kind of alternative regularly. I was, four weeks ago, on this very issue. I got that phone call, gotta be careful here, two people at odds over an inheritance.

Help us. Now how did Jesus respond to this? Verse 14, man who made me a judge and arbitrator over you. In other words, my calling, he's saying, is different than you're asking of me.

I do have something relevant to say, he says, but I'm not going to get, I'm not going down into those details. I'm not going to read the will. I'm not going to be your lawyer here.

I'm not going to get sucked into those things. Instead, I'm going to warn you about the hazard that you evidently are not perceiving. Verse 15, take care.

Be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. So he sees a man losing his grip on some of what he thought was rightfully his in an inheritance. It's going through his fingers.

He's losing it. And he sees in him some evidence that the hazard, that this inheritance is for him. The hazard is not being perceived.

It is, in fact, deceiving him. That's what he's sensing in this fellow. And this is why Jesus elsewhere referred to the deceitfulness of riches.

They lie. Inheritances lie. Bonuses lie.

Money lies to us. So this inheritance is lying to this man. And that's why it's so hazardous.

It was saying, if you lose me, this is what the inheritance was saying, if you lose me, you lose a very great part of your life. If you lose me, you lose what life can be for you. Think of all the life you will lose if you don't get your share.

Don't you realize how big I am? Life will be real life. Life will be truly life if you have me. That's what the inheritance was saying.

Now, Paul knew that that's what inheritances say, and that's what riches say, which is why he said in 1 Timothy 6, 18 to the rich in the church, be rich in good deeds, be ready to share, take hold of that which is truly life. In other words, don't be deceived when money says I'm your life. Don't be deceived when an inheritance says you lose me, you lose life.

It's a lie. So, Jesus says in verse 15, second half of the verse, one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. It's a lie when they say they do.

Don't listen. Take care. Be on your guard.

This lie is going to awaken covetousness in you. Covetousness as idolatry, Colossians 3, 5, and idolatry will kill you. There's a hazard here, and here the hazard is not just that the inheritance is not your life, but it can take your life, which it did.

It did. Listen to what Paul said about the power of money to take your life away forever. First Timothy 6, 9, those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

So, beware, Jesus says. He's loving you, and I'm your dad tonight, loving you. I want my sons and my daughters not to perish.

Beware, be on your guard. This inheritance, man, is about to kill you. That's more or less what I said on the phone, by the way.

I said, look, I don't think I should get sucked into the details, but I can just smell you want this too much. Let it go. Try to seek justice, but don't don't make it ugly.

That's just tragic when that gets so ugly. Oh, how vulnerable the fallen human heart is. John Piper's heart.

Oh, how vulnerable is my heart to feeling that having lots of things means being really alive. How vulnerable I am to equate having and being, having and living. Just feel it.

You go to Best Buy and you feel it. If I had that, I'd be alive. Crazy.

Things, things are gonna give life. That's the lie. Life, what is life? Jesus.

This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Life is not having things. Life is knowing God.

So he tells a parable. He told the parable to them. So now I'm telling it to them.

These are the people that overheard the question, overheard the little interchange, and now he's looking around in the church and say, everybody, everybody hear this little story about the, about the inheritance? God, I got a word for all of you. So this is verse 16. He told them a parable.

So you listen. Jesus is talking to you. The land of a rich man produced plentifully.

And he thought to himself, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. Then he said, I'll do this. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones.

And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

But God said to him, fool, this night your soul will be required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. It is not a bad thing to be a productive farmer.

It's not a bad thing when your land produces plentifully. It's not a bad thing when your business prospers. It's not a bad thing when you get a promotion with a pay raise.

It's not a bad thing when your investments increase in value. That's not the evil in this parable. He's not called a fool because he was a productive farmer.

God knows this world needs productive farmers and profitable businesses. Why is he called a fool? That's the question of the parable. And he's not only a fool, he loses his soul.

Verse 20, God said to him, fool, this night your soul will be required of you. He's a damn fool. Here's the way I would put it.

By the way he used the increase of his riches, he gave no indication of being rich toward God. By the way he used his God-given riches, he gave no indication of being rich toward God. He kept building bigger barns and that might be okay.

If you're going to store up grain to use for something that makes God look like your treasure, bigger barns aren't here or there. It's what he said. It's what he said.

Verse 19, I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for you for many years. What are you going to do now? And he blew it. Relax, eat, drink, fun.

The use he plans to make of his wealth says one thing, my treasure is relaxing, eating, drinking, and partying. That's my treasure. Those are my riches.

That's my life. And the riches in my barns, they make it possible. They're not good, bad, they're just there making possible that I can get what I will really, really value.

Relaxation, food, fun, partying with other retirees. Is that cool? What's wrong with that? Nothing if there's no God and no resurrection. That's what Paul said, right? If the dead are not raised, let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we'd die.

It just makes total sense. Maximize present pleasure if there's no God and no resurrection. No infinitely valuable God to enjoy forever.

And then he gives this key, Jesus gives this key concluding verse, makes the point most clear, verse 21. So is the one, he's going to draw the lesson out now, generalize it for all of us, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. What does that strange phrase mean? Rich toward God.

Only place in the Bible it occurs. It's an odd phrase, rich toward God. That's a good literal translation.

What does it mean? I think the meaning is pretty plain from the contrast in the verse. It's opposite, it's the opposite of laying up earthly treasures for yourself. So being rich towards God is the opposite of treating yourself as though it were made for things and not for God.

Being rich towards God is the opposite of acting as if life consists in the abundance of your possessions. It doesn't. It consists in knowing God.

Life is. So being rich toward God is the heart moving toward God as riches. That's simple.

Being rich toward God is the heart moving toward God as your riches. Being rich towards God is moving toward God as your treasure. Being rich towards God is counting God greater riches than anything on the earth.

Being rich towards God means using earthly riches to show how much you value God. This is what the prosperous farmer failed to do. It's a big farmer fail written over this right here.

And the result was that he was a fool and he lost his soul. And we will too if we are not rich toward God. So that's what I meant when I said money is hazardous.

It lures you out of love for God. It lures you away from treasuring God. Now again, clarify, the issue here is not that the man's field prospered.

The issue is that God ceased to be his treasure. If God has been his treasure, what would he have done differently? If God had been his treasure and not eating and drinking and relaxing and partying. If God had been his treasure, what would he have done differently? Instead of saying, soul you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, be merry. I think instead he would have said something like this. God, this is all yours.

You made my fields prosper and you made me. Show me how I can express with my riches that you are my treasure. How can I make that plain in the world? God, I'm a rich man.

My fields just, they blew me away. And there it is, available at my disposal. And you pray, oh God, I don't need a bigger and bigger safety net.

I don't need a bigger pad. I don't need a bigger and better anything. I don't need better food.

I don't need better drink. I don't need better parties. I do want to make merry, because you said it is more blessed to give than to receive.

So I want to maximize that. So would you just help me know how to invest and how to give this prosperity so that I can make merry in how much good it does others in pointing them to you? Help me discern that. Something like that he would have said.

That's the end of my exposition. Now here's some application. And I'm going to take that risk, just because Paul does a whole bunch of times in his letters.

He takes the risk of using himself as an example, especially in the use of money. He made the Macedonians an example in 2nd Corinthians 8 to inspire the church to give like they did, and he made himself an example in 1st Corinthians 9 when he didn't take any salary, even though he had a right to. And he was using himself as an example all the time, even though Jesus said, when you give alms, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.

There are moments in lives of churches where leaders should risk whatever is at stake there. Pride's the main thing at stake, if you're doing something right. And legalism is another thing at stake, lest you give the impression everybody should do it your way, and so on.

You feel the dangers. Another danger is, I thought of, is that my ways of avoiding the hazard and maximizing the helpfulness are all growing out of me and my particular situation. It won't be like yours.

So put everything through those sieves, okay, and make sure that you apply what's applicable to you in ways that are spiritual. Don't look for ways to criticize me, please. Look for ways to be helped.

If you don't get it, just say, I like the first half, second half was not helpful. Maybe. I have five things that I have done and do, do against the hazard of money and for the helpfulness of money, and I hope they inspire you to find your way of doing it.

And let me, one other word here. Paul's so interesting in the way he deals with the people he loves and trying to get them to do what he wants them to do. And remember when he wrote to Philemon, he said, I could command you, but I don't for love's sake.

We know that you can command somebody you love. God does it all the time. But there's something about a command that's a little harder to perceive as love, whereas entreating and example-giving.

So that's what I'm after. I'm talking as a father to his family here. I feel old enough to talk like that, even though one or two of you are older than me, but most of you.

Okay, number one. First three, everybody can copy. Second two are a little bit different.

I study to see and savor the supreme value of Jesus every day. And by study, I don't mean formal study. I just mean I make an effort.

Study war no more, in that sense of study. I make an effort by reading my Bible every day on a quest for a vision of God that will reassert his supremacy in my heart. I want to see him and his son and his work in this book every day in such a way that it makes money lose its effect.

That's my goal. Or anything else that's clamoring for my soul. Notoriety or pick your idol.

The goal in reading the Bible is to see God so supremely valuable that other things assume their way lower place, and your idolatries fall away, and your obedience becomes driven by what is beautiful than by this lash on your back. It's just a glorious thing if God would open our eyes, which leads to number two. I pray that he would help me see what I'm after.

I don't assume I can get it. It's a spiritual thing. It's not an intellectual thing merely.

You can stare at the Bible all day long and see nothing wonderful and nothing glorious and be moved in your heart not the least to be free from best buy. But if you pray the way the psalmist prayed, incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Satisfy me in the morning with your steadfast love that I may rejoice and be glad in you all my days.

That's a good prayer to pray every day. Satisfy me in the morning with your steadfast love. Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of your word.

Cry to God that He would reveal His supreme value to your soul so you feel it. You walk into the day and He is so precious and so valuable and communing with Him is so satisfying. Pornography loses its power and covetousness loses its power.

That's the way I fight every day and it's a fight to the finish. I have no illusions that between now and when I die I can coast. I could make shipwreck of my life.

I taste it. It is war till you're dead and the war is to see. It's to see.

Number three, so first study to see His value in the word every day and two, cry out to Him and pray that He would let you and help you and make you see and number three, I daily put my trust in His promises that the needs of this church and the needs of my family will be met. My God will supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Not all the things you think you need but all that you really need to give Him glory.

They're going to be there even if you starve to death. Is that okay? I get that from Romans 8. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword. No! In all these things we are more than conquerors.

I'll always have enough to glorify my King which is all life is about. Life is not about food and clothing. It's about the kingdom.

Seek first the kingdom. All these things will be added. How much? Just enough to seek the kingdom.

It'll always be there. God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times you may abound in every good work. Is that amazing? There's not a single good work God has ever or ever will call you to do for which there will not be sufficient resources to do it.

You can never say God wants me to do X but I don't have the resources ever. That's awesome. If He wants you to do it, He provides the doing.

Number four, I set aside electronically on the Bethlehem website a gift to the church out of every paycheck automatically and I spontaneously give gifts in worship services. Now we didn't used to have this whole electronic stuff and I had questions about it as it came. I still do but it seems to me that in the New Testament there are two streams.

One is the stream of be disciplined and regular and sacrificial in your giving. The other is to be spontaneous and free and uncoerced in your giving. The way I've worked it out, work it out however you work it out, that it is good for me and Noelle.

And I should say that when I say I on all these, I do, I do, I do, what's mine is Noelle's. That's what I think one flesh means. All my money belongs to her.

She didn't have to, her name is on the bank account. In, out, it's just ours. What we do is say that the disciplined part to make sure we do what we've covenanted to do is to go on there and tell them that I have an account of Wells Fargo and to take out every two weeks this amount.

Now I don't ever deal with it except come around January I go in there and I'll tell you a minute later what I do with that. I don't think that's the only way you should give to Jesus. Out of sight, out of mind it becomes a pretty sterile thing.

I think giving is an act of worship. That's what Romans 12 1 and 2 I think says. Therefore historically we've always built our services with a piece of worship called offering and the whole point of that is just to say with that moment letting our goods go shows how much we value you.

That's just part of worship right here. We're doing that right here now. We're saying I love you.

I don't need this. I'm letting it go. Those little 30 seconds whether it's a dollar, a thousand dollars, or 50 cents in some token way and I know a lot of you don't think that way and I'll just commend it to you that these two aspects of giving the discipline aspect and the free worshipful aspect can be symbolized by the electronic thing and the the in-service participatory thing.

Just think that through whether or not that commends itself to you which means by the way for me I'm just thinking here's my wallet tonight. I'm giving everything I need to give that I think I need to give electronically. This thing right here what I'm going to do tonight is whatever.

Tonight it happened to be a envelope thing because I got what did I what did I get? Where did that money come from? Some some honorarium show. Oh yeah yeah yeah I know what I did. I did Carl's funeral on when did that do Carl's funeral? Monday and and bless their hearts they sent me a check.

That's coming in just a minute honorariums. Children. The reason we give allowances to our children as soon as they can count is to teach them to give a portion of it to the church.

That's the main main not only main reason for giving allowances to two-year-olds or three-year-olds. As soon as they can say one two three give them a dime every week or 50 cents or a dollar or something and say now we'll have an envelope here for Jesus or the church and then let them drop it in the basket and so immediately now I know that this is one of the reasons I'm preaching this sermon that hundreds of you

grew up in homes where you had no model and no teaching on giving to the church at all. Don't want to be a father here.

Listen to your dad. Consider whether you've never given like this to the church as to whether it might be a possible or right and good and helpful and joyful and whether the children should be drawn in alongside. I made a covenant 32 years ago 31 and a half Tom and I joined the church about the same time.

I made a covenant along with 3,151 although nine we just did so 3,160 of you have made this promise to contribute cheerfully regularly to support the ministry and the expenses of the church and I would commend to you those ways possibly of doing it. Lastly number five I put protections in place against bigger barns and I turn the prosperity of my fields into blessings for others. This is one that may be least like your situation but let me let me say the the three ways we do this Noel and I and and then you can apply it if it applies to you which in principle it does even if you are on a fixed income.

Three ways I do this number one I surrender all the copyrights and all the royalties to my books and have from the beginning. I surrender them to the Desiring God Foundation knowing I'd be a millionaire if I didn't. I am scared out of my wits at being a millionaire that's a weakness some people can handle it I don't have that gift I don't think like I chew a whole pack of gum immediately why wouldn't you just don't have so those are gone and the Desiring God Foundation has a board you can ask me who the board members are if you want and it keeps a ten thousand dollars in the bank and has one meeting a year and we give everything away and we love it and all of it goes to Desiring God in Bethlehem except little teeny exceptions for other things in the church.

So that's one way I'm just watch out keep up your guard.

Number two I surrender all my honorariums didn't used to do this back in the early days somebody give me a hundred dollars for doing a wedding or a funeral cool take Noel out to dinner look this church pays me enough to take Noel out to dinner every day so one of the ways I protect myself is it all whether it's thousands of dollars because of some big speaking engagement or a hundred dollars because of a wedding or a funeral or something like that I'm just writing it off to the church to save tax money I asked the people out there in the ministries don't write the check to me I can save the church a lot of money that way like 15 or 20 or 30 percent so just write it to them that's that's a second limitation on my bigger barn temptation and here's the third Noel and I regularly just did it

recently go into that electronic account look at that figure and adjust it up both in terms of amount and in terms of percentage year in and year out we haven't always done that but regularly we've done it maybe I should say a word about how much I left it out when it came to the children I was going to say it there if you were to ask me how much do you teach your children to give to the church I would say start with the Old Testament standard of the tithe and build on that frankly now this this could offend and just deal with it I find it hard to comprehend that a child of the living God after the glories of the cross would regularly give to the church less than the standard of the Old Testament find it incomprehensible but of course you grew up in homes where nobody ever told you such a

thing you never formed that habit I did this is no big deal to me and so what happens if you're competent in your work and most of you are is that if you stay at a job long enough you tend to get raises and you get promotions and things like that happen of course catastrophes happen too and you lose everything but while you're going what are you going to do about that well we have said if we don't increase our amount and our percentage we're going to get richer and richer because the church keeps giving raises and when

you get richer and richer you and by that I mean keeping for yourself again it's let's say see unless I forget to say it I haven't said a word against making a lot of money tonight anybody hear me say that I have not said a word about prospering fields and profitable

businesses and investments that go up and salary increases amen bring it on the issue is like we sang not what you make but what you keep that's the issue man glorious possibilities if you are given much and what will happen if you don't build in some artificial governors like a graduated tithe is that more and more wants start to become needs I need a new suit new suit you don't need a new suit this suit is fine I could tell you stories it would make you laugh all over the place but I won't one last caution and I'm done businessman if you turn a two hundred thousand dollar business into a two hundred million dollar business not by glittering your lifestyle but by plowing profits back into create jobs and expand worthy goods and services you have done a good thing this is not an issue of

the man's fields prospering this is an issue of what he did with it so God may you grant us all the joy all the unadulterated joy of finding our life in you not in possessions and fulfilling our covenant commitments and showing the world what it means to be rich toward God so that's my longing for myself and for these folks Lord that wherever they are on the scale of riches whether they're just barely making it whether they don't even have a job right now and this sermon sounds so unreal to them they'd love to be having the struggles that I have or whether they are making lots and lots and lots of money meet us where we are and make yourself our treasure that's the point rich toward God a heart going out towards you as our riches so come and through Jesus Christ and through the

blood-bought mercies of his promises grant us to be rich toward you I pray this in Jesus name amen

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