

There is a story about a man who worked hard and saved every penny he earned. On his deathbed he asked his wife to promise to place all of his money in his casket. Even in death he did not want to be separated from his treasures. At his funeral a close family friend sat with the widow. Just as the service was ending, just before they closed the coffin, she got up and placed a box in the coffin. The friend was appalled. "You didn't put all his money in the coffin?" She looked at him and said, "I kept my promise. His wealth is with him. I wrote him a check for the full amount of his estate."

Our ancient cousins filled their tombs with what they deemed to be life essentials. You didn't want to discover you did not have enough gold to pay the fees to pass through the gates to eternal glory. Or you didn't want to discover you lacked enough food for the journey to the next world, or lacked the proper attire. Ancient tombs, such as the pyramids, are known for their buried treasures.

When I think of buried treasure I think pirates. What I have never been able to figure out was why one would bury treasure. To have so much but to feel the need to hide it away seems oxymoronic. If you can't enjoy it, why have it? And so many stories speak of the energy expended by opportunists in decoding maps that take you across rivers and mountains and deserts in the hope of finding an "X" marked on the exact spot on the ground where the treasure is buried.

Buried treasure is not just the stuff of fiction or something ancient peoples were concerned about. Today, if you are interested in finding buried treasure you can go on a hunt in the Rocky Mountains.<sup>1</sup> A former Vietnam fighter pilot turned art collector, by the name of Forrest Fenn, has stashed a chest supposedly filled with 40 pounds of jewels and gold. The chest has been hidden somewhere in the mountains between Santa Fe, New Mexico and the Canadian border. The only clues given are hidden in a poem Mr. Fenn wrote called the "Thrill of the Chase."

Why bury treasure for others to find? Mr. Fenn said he had two basic goals. The first was to instill hope in people because of the recession back in 2010. And two, to encourage people, especially families, to explore the Rocky Mountains and get out in the fresh air. Plus it's a puzzle. One needs to connect the lines of the poem with the accompanying map. As Mr. Fenn's instructions state: "Begin it where warm waters halt and take it in the canyon down. Not far, but too far to walk. Put in below the home of Brown." He told reporters that at least 350,000 people have gone looking for the treasure. For some finding this treasure has

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<sup>1</sup> [CNBC.com](http://CNBC.com), "Make It. : An 87 Year Old Millionaire Buried Treasure in the Rockies," Yoni Blumberg, 18 April 2018,

become an obsession. Some have lost their lives in pursuit of this treasure. For Mr. Fenn, it has been a far better adventure than he ever dreamed possible. As Fenn is the only one that knows where the treasure is hidden, unless someone stumbles upon it or is able to decode his map, his secret will go to his grave with him.

Buried treasure is not just the stuff of pirates or eccentric millionaires. We all, at some time or another, bury treasure. How many have stashed some money in a drawer, in a coffee can, or maybe even in the mattress? How many have taken something precious and put it in a sock that's placed in a box and hidden at the back of a closet? Maybe it is rainy day money or something set aside for something special. Maybe we hide things because we don't want them broken? I don't know about you but there have been times when I am pleasantly surprised to find a bit of hidden treasure in a forgotten box stashed in the back of a drawer. We may also hide or bury those talents we have within us, refusing to use them or share them with others. While relevant to the discussion of buried treasure, buried gifts is a topic for another day.

But there are times when our treasures are so great they can't be hidden. There are those who are hoarders, feeling the need to hang onto every item that comes their way. Some may hoard food or newspapers. Some may collect bank accounts or stocks. You might be a collector of art like Mr. Fenn, or a collector of books, or Hummel statues, or a collector of - I don't know - you name it? Even if we don't need all that we have, we are inclined to hold onto it all and add to it.

Such was the case of the farmer we read about in scripture this morning. He was blessed with a bumper crop from his labors. The great harvest caused a great dilemma for him. What to do with it all? Does he sell it? Does he hide it so others will not take it? Does he give it away? Does he watch over it and take pleasure in his good fortune? Scripture tells us that is exactly what he did. He built a bigger barn to hold it all and then planned to rest on his laurels. He decided his goal in life was to eat, drink, and be merry.

Sounds like a good idea! Sounds like all of his hard work paid off. A party is warranted! But the reality is God has other ideas. Personally I don't think God is against a little party, a time of thanksgiving and celebrating. What I think God is having difficulty with is the farmer's long-term plans. Does he really need all of this grain? Is he thinking of retiring from farming? Is he going to be able to consume it all? Maybe! Of course that assumes the grain does not spoil over the years.

Having all of that grain in the barn is as good as having treasure buried in the back yard. While the grain will feed his stomach it is also feeding his ego and his greed. He has set his goals in life as self-gratification and self-reliance. The man's actions clearly state that he has no need for anyone else and does not care about anyone other than himself.

And so God calls the man a fool. Counter to what the rich farming fool is thinking his riches do not make him wise, they do not make him powerful or important, and they do not set him up for a long life. The man may be materially rich but he is spiritually bankrupt. He has ignored the riches that come from God and the richness of God's favor.

In his greed the rich foolish farmer forgot about the great commandment - to love God with his whole being and to love his neighbors – those whose names he knows and those whose names he has yet to learn, as much as he loves himself. In God's world it is not all about me or you or him. In God's world it is all about what we do for others.

So you might be asking, should the rich farmer have sold off everything and become poor? "Of course not!" However, the rich fool of a farmer should have been thinking about how best to use his gifts, those produced from the earth and his God given talents so as to further the kingdom of God. The farmer needed to be thinking about caring for others more than he was thinking about caring for himself.

So where is the balance between caring for ourselves and caring for others? John Wesley is very outspoken on this topic. In his sermon "The Use of Money," Wesley tells us to earn all we can, to save all we can, and to give all we can. In the sermon he stresses the importance of "thrift, honesty, sobriety, and generosity, all virtues that are part of holy living."<sup>2</sup>

Based on Wesley's sermon, I believe he would have praised the farmer for his efforts and the use of his talents that resulted in such abundance. Wesley did not find money to be evil, but only the improper use of money to be evil.<sup>3</sup> To earn all you can means we do not waste our God given abilities, we put them to work. We should use our abilities to prosper as long as we do not harm others or

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<sup>2</sup> John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology, "The Use of Money," Albert C. Oulter and Richard P. Heitzenrater, (Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1991), 341.

<sup>3</sup> John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology, 342.

harm ourselves, in body, mind or spirit. The rich farmer's determination to kick back and rest on his laurels for the rest of his life is a refusal to use his God given abilities. He would have been deemed to be slothful rather than thrifty.

Then we come to the building of the bigger barn. Again, like money the barn itself is not a problem, it is the man's intentions that cause that barn to be suspect. The rich farming fool is treating his harvest as if it were buried treasure. His intent to save all he can was good on the surface but he was being self-centered, gratifying his own flesh, to feed his pride, and to puff up his perceived importance to the community.

The rich fool forgot about caring for others, which falls into Wesley's maxim of giving all we can. From our earnings and savings Wesley tells us to "first provide things needful for yourself and family, such as food, clothing, or whatever is moderately required to preserve health and strength. With whatever is left we are to share with those who are without. Rendering to God the things that are God's."<sup>4</sup> Wesley actually ups the ante by telling us to give not just what we can but to give all we have for the benefit of others and to do so for the glory of God.

To help us determine what it means for each of us to give everything away, Wesley encourages us to pray for God's wisdom. He also suggests we ask ourselves versions of the following questions. Is what I am acquiring consistent with being a good steward of what God has given me? Is my spending helping me fulfill God's commandments, especially the Great Commandment? Can this action be offered up to God as a pleasing sacrifice one that does not negatively impacting myself, my family, the earth or others? Is this action, this expenditure, helping to build the kingdom of God in the here and now or helping to build my own kingdom?

Or as stated in the letter to the people of Colossae, we are to set our minds, our hearts, and our actions on Christ. We are not to set our minds, hearts and actions on the stuff of the earth.

For as God makes it clear, we can't take the stuff of this world with us when we die. But we can use all of our treasure to help build God's kingdom today. Amen

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<sup>4</sup> John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology, 355.