

PUT A BOW ON IT
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So, is Jesus right? If we don't listen to Moses and the prophets,
will we also refuse to be persuaded by one who rises from the dead?

Now, most of us wouldn't think of ourselves as being filthy rich
like the people described by either Amos or Jesus.

We probably don't identify with the rich guy..

Just so, few of us have been quite as destitute as Lazarus.

Most importantly, the rich man and Lazarus are dead,
and if you're sitting here this morning, I'm assuming you are not.

So this is a story for the living, like the rich man's brothers.

We are the brothers and sisters of the rich man. Abraham did not send Lazarus to us to warn us,
but God did send Jesus, and Luke is writing to us about him,
about following Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah of God.

Luke was willing to take a chance on us, that we would be persuaded.

Persuaded of what? That hell is hot and there's no water? Sort of like Florida this month?

Reinhold Niebuhr, a great American theologian of the mid-20th century
marveled at how people would leap over the point of Jesus' parables
to speculate about the "furniture of heaven and the temperature of hell."¹

The point of this parable is not that it's bad to be rich.

Abraham was one wealthy fellow, and so was King David.

Jesus is not condemning the ability to make money;
indeed, it is a spiritual gift to have the savvy to do that.

It's our attitude toward money, the place it has in our hearts,
the LOVE of money that is the sin because it is grounded in selfishness,
in getting what we want without any concern for others.

How do we begin to idolize money? I've given this some thought, and I might be wrong, of course.

But, my hunch is that turning to that idol begins with fear and anxiety.

Both rich people and those without any money at all
can become so afraid of not having enough that they become hoarders.

Hoarding money and things against the anxiety of not having what we need
turns us inward and focuses us on inanimate objects instead of people,
shiny, breakable toys instead of God.

Hoarding money and things builds a secure fortress made of dead stuff
that walls us off and keeps us from taking hold of what is truly life.

How can we be liberated from this fortress and take hold of what is truly life?

The letter to Timothy tells us: *do good, to be rich in the good things [we] do . . .
be generous, and . . . share with others.*

Maya Angelou summed it up well: GIVING liberates the soul of the giver.²

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Impassable Gulf," sermon preached Oct. 2, 1955, quoting Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 294. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/impassable-gulf-parable-dives-and-lazarus-sermon-dexter-avenue-baptist-church#fn4>

² Maya Angelou, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, Bantam, 1994. p. 15.

There's some real evidence that this is true.

I've come across many stories about really wealthy people who quite deliberately decided to stop hoarding their money:

they looked past their walls and saw the millions of Lazaruses at their gates and decided to do good, be generous, share with others, and be free.

Speaking of gates, Bill and Melinda Gates (of Microsoft) are working on giving away at least half of their billions to address illness and poverty, and this is part of how they practice their Roman Catholic faith.

That well-known liberal magazine, *Fortune*, called Bill Gates "the foremost itinerant advocate for the poor."³

Both Bill and Melinda travel the world in an effort to eradicate polio and provide economic opportunities, especially for desperately poor women.

J.K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* books and a good Anglican, dropped off the Forbes 500 list of the wealthiest people back in 2012.

The major reasons were high British taxes and her generosity to charities.

A former welfare mom, Rowling said she is privileged to have plenty and to be able to pay taxes that help those who are in the same situation she used to be in; she knows what it is to be

"two pence short of a tin of baked beans, and your child is hungry."⁴

But she doesn't rely on the British government for her care of those who suffer, and reportedly has already given away 16% of her fortune to charity.⁵

Just before the first *Harry Potter* book came out,

Rowling's mother died after suffering from multiple sclerosis for 10-years.

She has given over \$25 million towards research and treatment of that devastating disease.

Very recently, I became aware of a woman named Cami Walker

a young woman diagnosed with multiple sclerosis shortly after her wedding.

She had excellent medical care available in California, but Cami was miserable, angry, and very, very sick.

This was totally understandable: she's 35 and looking at a life of pain, infertility and not even being able to walk.

Then Cami received a very unusual diagnosis and prescription

from a South African medicine woman who was teaching American doctors the power of traditional African healing techniques,

which look not only at the physical aspects of disease, but also its spiritual side.

The medicine woman, Mbali, told Cami that all the time and energy she was spending focusing on herself, her pain, herself, was not only making her disease worse, it was sending her spirit into a black hole.

The prescription Mbali gave to Cami to heal,

was for Cami to stop thinking about herself and to give.

Specifically, to give away 29 gifts in 29 days.

Cami fussed and bothered and bothered and fussed about this prescription.

But, she was so spiritually and physically miserable, one day she decided to do it.

³ "The World's 50 Greatest Leaders: 01, Bill and Melinda Gates," *Fortune*, May 1, 2019, p. 45.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._K._Rowling

⁵ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/j-k-rowling-drops-off-forbes-billionaires-list/>

She did it for 29 straight days. Then she did it for another. And another.

A year later she was cured of MS.

No, that's NOT what happened. She still has the disease, and pain is a constant in her life.

However, she says, it doesn't control her any more. She's free.

She is truly alive, with relationships and many, many reasons to keep living.

Cami has written a book with the full prescription,⁶

I'm giving you what is basically a sample, like what we get at the doctor's office when they want to get you started.

I'm giving out a slip of paper that has the basics of the prescription, and a small bow, because, you know: gift.

Giving liberates the soul of the giver.

~ Maya Angelou

A Month of Giving Challenge:

For 29 days straight, give something away. Try to make it something meaningful to the recipient. It can be simple and needn't always be a "thing".

Examples:

- ✦ A tissue to someone who's crying
- ✦ An ear to someone who's lonely
- ✦ A flower to a widow
- ✦ An extra-large tip to a restaurant server
- ✦ A home to a rescue animal
- ✦ Food to a hungry person
- ✦ An hour or two of respite to a caregiver
- ✦ Let in someone trying get onto the road
- ✦ Pick up trash in a public area
- ✦ Help someone who seems lost
- ✦ Something you love to someone who needs it more than you do.

(Thanks to Cami Walker 29gifts.org)

More Than Crumbs:

In honor of the Gospel lesson about Lazarus longing for the crumbs under the rich man's table, **at least one of the gifts should be a "stretch" gift** (financial or in-kind) to a person who needs food, or to an organization that helps the hungry.



⁶ Cami Walker, *29 Gifts: How a Month of Giving Can Change Your Life*. Da Capo Press, 2009.

For your trial prescription, I'm inviting you to take this slip and bow and give it a shot for 29 days.

Take the bow off the paper and put it somewhere you'll see it:
on your coffee pot, your review mirror, your purse, your desk.

Every day, be *intentional* about giving a gift.

Don't be like me when I put things I've already done on my To Do List
just for the satisfaction of crossing them off.

Look for ways to give your gifts. Remember, your gift doesn't need to be fancy.

It does need to be meaningful. It doesn't even need to be a thing.

Some examples are on the paper.

The last one, about giving away something special to you that someone else needs:

A woman had her mother's teapot on a shelf.

She thought lovingly about her mum whenever she saw it.

Some years later, a woman from England became a neighbor;
she arrived with only suitcases and no household goods.

Knowing a Brit without a teapot is a tragic thing, the woman gave her mum's teapot to her.

Yes, she misses seeing it, but it gave her great joy to welcome her neighbor with it

Giving liberates the giver.

One gift that is a "thing" is really important, and that's the one on the bottom:

Some time in the next 29 days give a "stretch" gift in honor of Lazarus
by making a financial or in-kind gift to feed the hungry.

It can be someone you know or someone you meet.

It can be on Bagzilla Sunday here, or to some other charity.

By a "stretch" gift, I mean something that is just beyond easy for you.

Only you know what that is. No one here can or will decide or judge that for you.

The point is to get beyond the anxiety of the fear of scarcity,
to be persuaded by the One who has risen from the dead

who is telling us, his brothers and sisters, the way of life, true life:

to help us find liberation from fear and death by giving as freely as you can.

That's what Jesus did: he gave everything away for us.

God gives all of Creation to humanity so abundantly: What a gift!

Consider: nothing is really ours forever, we can't take it with us.

God gives it to us so that we can give it away, so that we can share God's gifts with each other.

You know what to do with a gift! So, let's put a bow on it.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

O God, rich in mercy, you look with compassion on this troubled world. Feed us with your grace, and grant us the treasure that comes only from you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

AMOS 6:1A, 4-7

Doom to those resting comfortably in Zion and those trusting in Mount Samaria, who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on their couches, eat lambs from the flock, and bull calves from the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and, like David, compose tunes on musical instruments; who drink bowls of wine, put the best of oils on themselves, but who aren't grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore, they will now be the first to be taken away, and the feast of those who lounged at the table will pass away.

PSALM 146

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, for there is no help in them.

When they breathe their last, they return to earth, and in that day their thoughts perish.

Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! whose hope is in the LORD their God;
 Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; who keeps his promise for ever;
Who gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger.

The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind;
 the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

The LORD loves the righteous; the LORD cares for the stranger;
he sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.

The LORD shall reign for ever, your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Hallelujah!

1 TIMOTHY 6:6–10, 17–19

Actually, godliness is a great source of profit when it is combined with being happy with what you already have. We didn't bring anything into the world and so we can't take anything out of it: we'll be happy with food and clothing. But people who are trying to get rich fall into temptation. They are trapped by many stupid and harmful passions that plunge people into ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some have wandered away from the faith and have impaled themselves with a lot of pain because they made money their goal.

Tell people who are rich at this time not to become egotistical and not to place their hope on their finances, which are uncertain. Instead, they need to hope in God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.

LUKE 16:19–31

[Jesus said,] "There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted luxuriously every day. At his gate lay a certain poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Instead, dogs would come and lick his sores."

The poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. While being tormented in the place of the dead, he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance with Lazarus at his side. He shouted, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I'm suffering in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted and you are in great pain. Moreover, a great crevasse has been fixed between us and you. Those who wish to cross over from here to you cannot. Neither can anyone cross from there to us.'

The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father's house. I have five brothers. He needs to warn them so that they don't come to this place of agony.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.' The rich man said, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will change their hearts and lives.' Abraham said, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"

SERMON HYMN: *Son of God, Eternal Savior*

BLESSING: Beloved, life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us, so be quick to love and make haste to be kind. As you leave this place, the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you, now and forever. Amen.