

“Looking Out”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, Nov. 14, 2021

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

Scripture Text:

1 Timothy 6:17-19 [NLT]

OPENING

“Tell the folks who are rich at this time...

- To do good, [that is,] to be rich in the good things they do
- And to be generous, [that is,] to share with others....”

“This way, they can take hold of what is truly life.”

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to his young protégé, Timothy, concerning the counsel he should give to people of worldly wealth. And by most measures, that’s a lot of us taking part in worship today.

Now, in addition to Paul and Jesus, we talk a lot about John Wesley in the UMC. And there’s good reason for that: Wesley worked on the application of Christian truth to his life and the life of his communities with no less energy than the Apostle Paul.

And while Wesley ended up living into this admonition of Paul, he didn’t start out that way. But that wasn’t because he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth – far from it. Let me share part of an excellent article on this aspect of Wesley’s life by Charles Edward White, an asst. professor of Christian

thought and history at Spring Arbor College in Michigan. He writes: [Source:

<https://www.westohioumc.org/conference/news/what-did-wesley-practice-and-preach-about-money>]

“John Wesley knew grinding poverty as a child. His father, Samuel Wesley, was the Anglican priest in one of England's lowest-paying parishes. He had nine children to support and was rarely out of debt.

“Once, John saw his father being marched off to debtor's prison. So, when John followed his father into the ministry, he had no illusions about financial rewards.

“It probably came as a surprise to John Wesley that while God had called him to follow his father's vocation, he had not also called him to be poor like his father. Instead of becoming a parish priest, John felt God's direction to teach at Oxford University. There he was elected a fellow of Lincoln College, and his financial status changed dramatically. His position usually paid him at least thirty pounds a year, more than enough money for a single man to live on. John seems to have enjoyed his relative prosperity. He spent his money on playing cards, tobacco, and brandy(!).

“[But]...while at Oxford, an incident changed his perspective on money. He had just finished paying for some pictures for his...[office] when one of the chambermaids came to his door. It was a cold winter day, and he noticed that she had nothing to protect her except a thin linen gown. He reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy a coat but found he had too little left. Immediately the thought struck him that

the Lord was not pleased with the way he had spent his money. He asked himself, “Will thy Master say, ‘Well done, good and faithful steward’? Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold!” [And then he cried out,] “O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?”

SERMON THOUGHTS

Marcia McFee, the creator and developer of *Worship Design Studio* from where this series comes, writes, “This week’s theme, ‘looking out,’ can invite the use of the phrase ‘looking out for...’ whom? Who are we ultimately looking out for?” I ask, “Just ‘Number 1’?” [Source: Marcia McFee, in her reflections on the theme for this week]

“How do we balance our need to care for our own well-being” with what “liberation theology” names “God’s preferential option for the poor”? [Ibid.]

Wesley understood this and felt it deeply and personally. Professor White’s brief biographical sketch continues:

“Perhaps as a result of this incident [with the maid], [beginning] in 1731, Wesley began to limit his expenses so that he would have more money to give to the poor. He records that one year his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses 28 pounds, so he had 2 pounds to give away. The next year his income doubled, but he still managed to live on 28 pounds, so he had 32 pounds to give to the poor. In the third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds.

“Instead of letting his expenses rise with his income, he kept them to 28 pounds and gave away 62 pounds. In the fourth year, he received 120 pounds. As before, his expenses were 28 pounds, so his giving rose to 92 pounds.

“Wesley felt that the Christian should not merely tithe but give away all extra income once the family and creditors were taken care of. He believed that with increasing income, what should rise is not the Christian’s standard of living but the *standard of giving*.

“This practice, begun at Oxford, continued throughout his life. Even when his income rose into the thousands of pounds sterling, he lived simply, and he quickly gave away his surplus money.”

There is no question that one of John Wesley’s spiritual gifts was *exhortation*. And he most often put his exhortations in the form of “rules” for those in his “Methodist societies”.

WESLEY’S RULES FOR DEALING WITH MONEY

“His **first rule** about money was *Gain all you can*. [This is often worded, *Earn all you can*.] Despite its potential for misuse, money in itself is something good, [Wesley felt]. There is no end to the good it can do: ‘In the hands of (God’s) children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked. It gives to the traveler and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of a husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We may be a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the

sick, of ease to them that are in pain. It may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame: yea, a lifter up from the gates of death!’

This underscores one of the points in *A Wonder-Full Life*: There is a place in the church for people of means who have a role to play in the furthering of Christian mission.

“Wesley's **second rule** for the right use of money was *Save all you can*. He urged his hearers not to spend money merely to gratify the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, or the pride of life. He cried out against expensive food, fancy clothes, and elegant furniture: ‘Despise delicacy and variety and be content with what plain nature requires.’” This perspective leads to Wesley’s third rule.

“Wesley's **third rule** was *Give all you can*. One's giving should begin with the tithe. He told the one who does not tithe, “Thou dost undoubtedly set thy heart upon thy gold” and warned, “It will 'eat thy flesh as fire!’”

“But one's giving should not end at the tithe. All of the Christian's money belongs to God, not just the first tenth. [Wesley felt] believers must use 100 percent of their income as God directs.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

“And how has God directed faithful people to use their incomes? Wesley listed four scriptural principles:

- Provide things needful for yourself and your family (I Tim. 5:8). The believer should make sure the family has "a sufficiency of plain, wholesome food

to eat, and clean raiment to put on" as well as a place to live and enough to live on if something were to happen to the breadwinner.

- "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:8). "Whoever has sufficient food to eat, and raiment to put on, with a place to lay his head, and something over, is rich," he said.
- ..."Owe no...[one] anything" (Rom. 13:8). Wesley said the next claim on a Christian's money is the creditors. He adds that those who are in business for themselves need to have adequate tools, stock, or capital for the carrying on of that business.
- "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto...[everyone], especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). After the Christian has provided for the family, the creditors, and the business, the next obligation is to use any money that is left to meet the needs of others.

I would add a fifth Biblical principle, also from the Apostle Paul, that acts as an important balancer to all of this, especially in today’s world: *Anyone unwilling to work should not eat*. This is from 2 Thessalonians 3, a passage of Scripture that speaks to the expectation that the able-bodied earn their living through honest work.

CONTEXT for this quote from the movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*

“...Is it too much to have...[the common people of the community] work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? ...my father didn't think so. People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped,

frustrated old man, they're cattle. Well, in my book, he died a much richer man than you'll ever be."

This is from pre-welfare days, a time in our country when it would have been unthinkable for persons of sound mind and body to expect others to provide for their needs. Those would not be considered "poor"; they would be considered lazy...or worse.

George is extolling his father's memory because of his attitude toward people and his desire to help them improve their lives. He was not championing laziness and entitlement among people who should otherwise provide for themselves.

CONCLUSION

In 1744 Wesley wrote, "When I die, if I leave behind me ten pounds...all mankind can bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber."

When he died in 1791, the only money mentioned in his will was the miscellaneous coins to be found in his pockets and dresser drawers. Most of the 30,000 pounds he had earned in his lifetime he had given away. As Wesley said, "I cannot help leaving my books behind me whenever God calls me hence; but in every other respect, my own hands will be my executors."

9 AM: Prayer

11 AM: 🎵 "These Alone are Enough"