

“Imagine the Possibilities: Our Relationships”

Mary Kay Collins | November 5, 2006 | 1 Timothy 6:9-19

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But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

How many of you have ever played the lottery? My husband Rob buys a ticket maybe once a year, when the lotto jackpot gets to be some crazy amount like 100 million dollars. Because you know, for less than 10 million, it’s not even worth the effort, right? Who needs 3 million?

There’s obviously something powerful about buying a ticket for one dollar that has the chance, however astronomically remote, to be worth millions of dollars. You hold that ticket in your hand and just before you hear or read the winning numbers, there’s this sense of anticipation—six little numbers could change my life forever!

In our Scripture reading this morning, the Apostle Paul tells us that we all have won the lottery in a sense, and what we have won is far more powerful and meaningful than if we had won a 50 million dollar jackpot. We have won the lottery in “the life that *really is* life.”

Paul says more specifically that we can “*take hold* of the life that really is life.” Earlier in the passage Paul urges Timothy, a young associate, to “take hold of *eternal* life.” I would suggest that this is the same thing; the life that really is life *is* eternal life, and we can “take hold” of it now.

We sometimes get the idea that “eternal life” is only something we will experience after we die. John 3:16 famously says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Of

course, our assurance that there is indeed a Resurrection life after our earthly deaths is one of the most precious things we have.

And yet eternal life is more than that. Eternity is not *lots* of time—eternity is *outside of* time, and we can take hold of it, of this life that really is life, right now. Listen to Luke 17:20-21:

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”

The Kingdom of God is another way of talking about eternal life, or the life that really is life. Jesus says it is among us. It is the winning lottery ticket that really counts.

I am throwing some pretty heavy spiritual stuff at you for this reason. Throughout the Bible, this concept of eternal life, the life that really is life, the Kingdom of God, is woven together with two very tangible things: our human relationships, and the way we approach money.

We were created to be in relationship with one another and everything that exists belongs to God, including our relationships, so how do we take care of these gifts? Do we keep them in line with what we are called to do as Christians? Jesus taught us how to relate with one another through stories and parables, for instance the prodigal son—do we forgive and offer generosity to someone who has gone astray like the prodigal son? Or the good Samaritan—Jesus teaches us here to take care of one another. We aren’t to walk by someone who is hurting—we are to stop, take care of them, and make sure that they are provided for. How successful are we at that? When I consider these stories, the way Jesus taught us to relate, to love one another, I realize I fall short, way short! And yet this is what the Kingdom of God is about—loving one another just as God loves us. We have quite a bit of work still to do, but each time we extend a hand, reach out to someone in need, offer love the way God loves us, we are partnering in ushering in God’s Kingdom.

Similarly with money, as I said before, everything belongs to God, including money. We learn in the Bible that we are to give generously and to take care of the poor. The Bible doesn’t tell us to make sure that all of our wants and desires are taken care of first and then if there is something left over give this to God. And yet this is what I know we so often do. And we know better—I am guilty of this and I know that when I give sacrificially, that God always see me through, takes care of me and blesses me. Every time we sacrifice or give of the financial gifts that we have, we are partnering in ushering in the Kingdom of God. That is why you have been invited on this spiritual journey to be a partner with God, ushering in His kingdom.

Let me try to reiterate these points with a story, the story of a woman named Kelly. Kelly is an attractive 40-year-old but looks ten years younger thanks to working out two hours a day plus a little plastic surgery. Kelly is rich. She married well, made a point of meeting a man in college who already had money and was going to make a lot more. The garage of

their 5 million dollar home contains a Hummer, a Porsche, and a Mercedes. She wears a diamond ring worth \$30,000, Louis Vuitton shoes that cost \$1,000, and carries an \$800 Gucci purse. Her 10-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter go to the best private school and have been raised by the best nannies. She is the envy of everyone she meets.

Unfortunately, Kelly is miserable for the most part. She becomes temporarily happy when buying a new outfit or when enjoying a day at the spa, but it quickly wears off. Her marriage is in shambles, due in part to the affairs both she and her husband have engaged in. She feels estranged from her children, who for the most part are spoiled brats. Her friendships with the women from the country club are superficial.

Kelly has what would seem to many to be the dream life. And yet it is a life that isn't really life at all. This is an extreme example of what life can be when lived for money: empty... shallow... destructive. We all know this to some degree, especially when you think about someone like Kelly, who "has it all" but really has nothing.

But, it becomes trickier when you think about people like you and me—people who maybe are not ostentatious or extreme in our wealth, but are wealthy nonetheless. Even if you and I aren't as rich as Kelly, we're still very well off—if you have a house, a car, and enough money to go on vacation once in a while, you are richer than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people living in the world today.

Let me stress again though, it is not money or wealth that is evil; it is the way that we let money or wealth become first in our lives. Paul in our Scripture reading this morning doesn't condemn wealth in itself. Listen again to the 10th verse: "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." Have you heard that before? Or have you heard "money is the root of all evil"? I most often hear this, that "*money* is the root of all evil," and people assume that this is Biblical. But this is an example of someone taking a text and rearranging it for their purposes. In this passage we are not told that money is evil; what we are told is that the *love* of money is "a root of all kinds of evil."

And the greatest of these evils is the loss of real relationships, relationships with each other and with God. That is the life that really is life, those relationships. And in both cases, money can hurt or help those relationships.

It can be a delicate balancing act. We need to be able and willing to provide for our families. That takes work. But if we work so much that we miss out on developing relationships with our friends, spouses, and family, what's the point? That may be an existence, but it's not life that really is life.

The song by Harry Chapin "The Cat's in the Cradle" defines this as well as anything that I know. I hope you know it—if not, listen to it this week. There are copies of the words available on the front office counter. This song is about a father and child's relationship where the father is so busy seeking to be successful in his business, to make money that he has no time to spend with his child, and this continues into the next generation. How very sad, and yet how very true. If we do not consider every day how we will spend our

time and our money, we can get lost, and in the process of trying to make the money we lose the relationships—not what God desires for our lives!

The same goes for our relationship with God. Remember, Scripture doesn't say that money or belongings are evil things. Many of us might have second thoughts about being Christians if we had to take a vow of poverty. And we don't have to take a vow of poverty. I for one plan to continue getting my nails done, going out to a nice dinner when we can arrange babysitters, and taking nice vacations every now and then. I even hope to one day have a bigger house, one with four bedrooms so that each of our kids can have their own room. I say that with full knowledge of the fact that the house we currently have is plenty big, and gives us more living space than most of the world's families have.

Now, I realize that we could drive ourselves crazy scrutinizing every dollar we spend, and I am not asking for that. This "Imagine the Possibilities" campaign is not about making you feel guilty. If you drive a Rolls Royce when a Cadillac might get you around just as well, that's between you and God.

What I am asking is that you prayerfully consider how you honor and worship God with the resources you have been given. Next week we will be talking more about how supporting the church is a special and profound way of expressing our love and trust in God. For now, just ask God to help you with this delicate balance. Try to realize that you have won the huge lottery jackpot—and act accordingly.

In closing, as I did last week, I want to read some of this Scripture again, this time from Eugene Peterson's contemporary translation in *The Message*. So listen now to the Apostle Paul's words to Timothy, and to us:

Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life.

Let us pray.