



SESSION 3

TRANSFORMED IN MY POSSESSIONS

▶ **The Point**

Possessions don't last. Your relationship with God does.

▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 6:19-24

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

"You can't take it with you." But some people certainly have tried. Take Billy Standley. When he died at age 82, he was buried on his 1967 Harley Davidson Electra Glide cruiser. He worked for years fabricating a massive casket of cement, wood, and Plexiglas so everyone could witness his last ride. As the funeral proceeded to the cemetery, onlookers all saw Billy Standley on his bike, surrounded by his trophies. He was determined to try and take it all with him.¹

That may sound excessive, but we all can get carried away with our possessions. Perhaps you know someone who gets a little crazy about their car, couch, or carpet. Possessions aren't necessarily bad, but there's no doubt they can drive a wedge between us and God. If we aren't careful, we won't own our possessions—they will own us.

That helps explain why Jesus spoke more about money than just about any other topic. Let's look back at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and let Christ transform our view of our possessions.

▶ **The Setting**

As Jesus continued to instruct His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, He introduced them to a difficult challenge they would face: as they served Him, they would be tempted to give priority attention to their possessions. Overcoming such a powerful temptation would require them to be disciplined so they would not turn their possessions into idols. Instead, they would use their possessions so they could serve Jesus well as citizens of the kingdom of God.

What does the Bible say?

Treasures (v. 19)—The Greek word translated here literally means “a deposit”; in context, it refers to wealth considered so precious we want to store it up and keep it for ourselves.

Lamp of the body

(v. 22)—A portable lamp that gave enough light to help a person find his or her way in the darkness. Such lamps were common in the ancient world and could be attached to a person’s body in a variety of ways.

Matthew 6:19-24

19 “Don’t collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

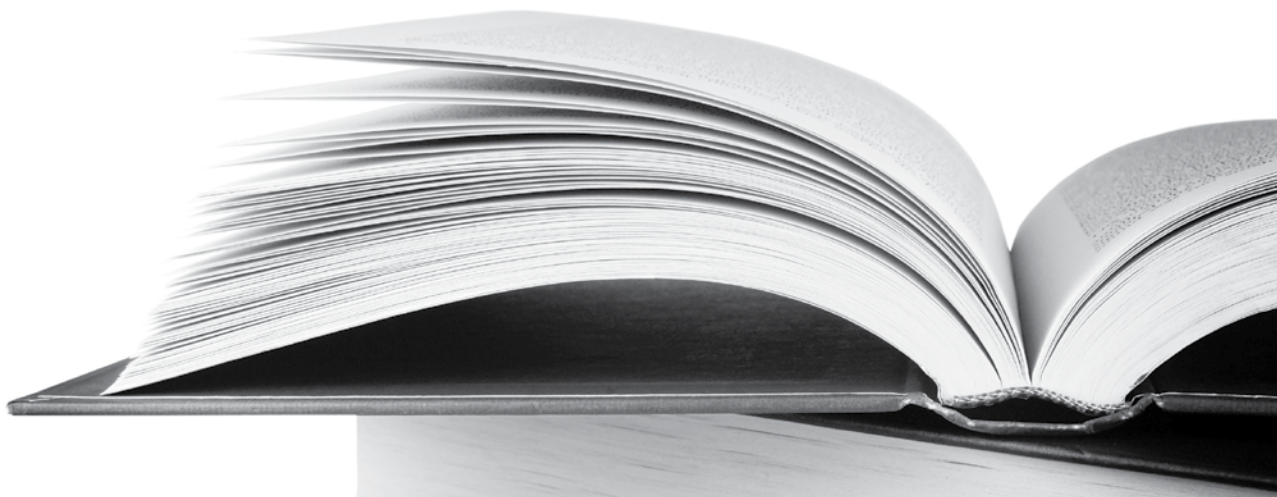
20 But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal.

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.

23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness—how deep is that darkness!

24 “No one can be a slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot be slaves of God and of money.



Matthew 6:19-21

[Verse 19] Jesus taught about the need to invest in heavenly treasure. He showed the monumental difference between treasures on earth and treasures in heaven, and He warned against collecting treasures on earth. In doing so, Jesus didn't imply we should not have any interest in resources. Serving Him requires resources. When resources become treasures, however, something harmful happens inside us. Instead of managing the resources He gives us so we can serve Him, we find ourselves hoarding them as treasures, which can eventually become idols.

Jesus emphasized that **treasures on earth** don't last very long. In His day, people treasured fine fabrics, precious metals, and food. Each of those treasures had an enemy. A tiny **moth** could destroy the most expensive piece of fine fabric. Similarly, **rust** could gradually gnaw away most precious metals. In the original language, the word for *rust* carried the idea of eating or consuming. Rust, vermin, or mildew could eat away at the precious items stored away as a treasure. Food didn't fare any better. Wherever food could be stored, **thieves** could be found.

[Verse 20] Instead, Jesus instructed kingdom citizens to collect heavenly treasure. When we do, we'll find we won't ever run the risk of having it disappear. **Treasures in heaven** are immune from the damage caused by moths, rust, thieves, or any other enemy. They will last a long time. In fact, they will last for eternity.

This brings up an important question: what kind of treasure belongs in heaven? Only people will go from earth to heaven. When we treasure our opportunities to grow toward maturity in Christ, we take to heaven a life of devotion to Him. His love in us that we treasure in our walk with Him will last through eternity, too. And we cannot forget the treasure of His love shared through us. People who receive the gift of eternal life because we have shared the treasure of the gospel will be in heaven as well.

[Verse 21] Jesus hinted at the next question as we take inventory of our treasures: how can we know what we sincerely treasure? Answering that question can be difficult. Jesus made our dilemma somewhat easier by reminding us that what we genuinely treasure will be seen in our hearts.

In the Bible, the **heart** is considered the center of the personality. Emotions, motivations, and affections emanate from the heart. Thus, looking into our hearts can give us the right starting place for determining our treasures. What brings out our passions, makes us take the paths we choose, and causes us to love with all our hearts? We can see what our hearts are set on and determine whether we're eagerly collecting heavenly treasure or earthly treasure.

Matthew 6:22-23

[Verse 22] Moving forward, Jesus turned His attention from the heart to **the eye**. However, His shift in imagery didn't change the point of His instruction—the need for His disciples to make Him and His kingdom their main priority.

The picture of the eye as a **lamp** depicts Jesus' desire for His disciples to concentrate on what matters most—a close relationship with Him. In this illustration, the eye is a lamp (or a lens) that allows light inside the body. By the same token, our spiritual eye allows in spiritual light from Christ and His directions. The brighter the lamp, the better our perception of the world around us.

That's why Jesus taught that a disciple's eye needed to be **good**. In other words, it needed to be single-focused. The light would be able to make its way into their lives only through an eye focused exclusively on God. This dovetails with the ancient Jewish belief that a "good" eye represented a generous attitude, while a "bad" eye was a signal of stinginess and greed.

[Verse 23] Jesus addressed this concept of a bad eye in verse 23. A person whose **eye is bad** has not allowed the lamp of His presence to shine into their lives, which means God's spiritual light will not penetrate into his or her heart. Instead of being enlightened, such a person will be engulfed by spiritual darkness.

By bringing up a bad eye and the blindness that results from darkness, Jesus called attention to what happens when we take our eyes away from Him and focus on self-serving priorities. In doing so, we run the risk of making our priorities into idols, which can lead us to make poor choices.

While the tendency to take our eyes off Jesus can have a disastrous effect on our choices, Jesus pointed to another, more devastating outcome—deceiving ourselves into believing we are walking in the brightest light possible. Such self-deception results in the worst version of spiritual **darkness**. That happens when we try to keep one eye on Jesus and the other eye on our possessions.

When such devastating spiritual darkness engulfs us, we make foolish decisions about kingdom priorities. We choose not to make sacrificial commitments to support global mission causes because we consider them a waste of our money. Or, we refuse to share with people in need because we've determined they should suffer the consequences for poor choices they have made.

Matthew 6:24

[Verse 24] With this verse, we come face to face with a foundational decision every growing follower of Christ has to make: whom or what will control our lives. That's what Jesus wanted understood when He used the imagery of **slave** and **master**. Slavery requires complete submission to one master. It's an all-encompassing lifestyle that consumes one completely. A slave lives and breathes in order to please a master who exercises complete, exclusive power over absolutely everything he or she does.

Jesus didn't want His hearers deceiving themselves into thinking they could maintain a divided loyalty. A slave who tries to live with competing loyalties will eventually cave in to the tension and surrender to one master and rebel against the other. In the same way, all people will eventually make a choice regarding whom or what they will serve. Divided loyalty is nothing more than a myth. A Christian who thinks and behaves otherwise will have a rude awakening about absolute devotion.

In the instruction about possessions so far, Jesus had spoken about two kinds of treasure and two kinds of eyes. So we're not surprised that Jesus went on to speak of two kinds of slavery. Either a person will be a slave to **God** or a slave to **money**. We can't serve both at the same time.

We become slaves to God when we give our lives to Him as new believers. He intends for us to devote ourselves to Him, following Him without reservation. As we grow as disciples, we learn how to use the resources He gives us so we can carry out His plan for us. We use our possessions as we obey Him. The more we know Him, the more we love Him and want to obey Him without question.

But if we determine to be a slave to money, we can rest assured it will become the sole reason for our existence. As we serve money, we'll grow to understand how to collect more of it, store it up for ourselves, and keep away its enemies. In the process, we'll use everything, even God, in our effort to live out our obedience to money. We'll make decisions that ignore God in favor of our possessions. Eventually, we'll find ourselves having a bad attitude toward God as our love for money becomes more obsessive and more powerful. We will be slaves of money and nothing else.

For more information, read the article "Storing Up Wealth, Banking in the First Century" in the Summer 2016 issue of Biblical Illustrator. Previous Biblical Illustrator articles "Thieves and Robbers" (Winter 2012-2013), "Lamps in Ancient Israel" (Winter 1996), and "Mammon" (Winter 1996) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

Dotted lines for notes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for making their relationship with God higher priority than their possessions:



- ▶ **Memorize.** Commit Psalm 37:25 to memory. Let this verse strengthen your faith and drive out your fear, especially as it relates to your finances.
- ▶ **Review.** Take a look at your bank statement or purchase history for the past month. Use this information to make a list of your priorities and major concerns.
- ▶ **Invest.** One way to invest in God’s kingdom is through giving to your church. If you haven’t been giving, start this week. If you are giving, take the next step and begin giving one percent more of your income to God’s kingdom.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 36 of the PSG:

You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead by investing your earthly resources in heavenly treasures. Remember that truth, because your possessions will last for the blink of an eye. Your investment in God’s kingdom will last for eternity.

PRAY: Conclude by praising God for the many blessings in your lives. Ask that God would continually remind you that everything you have comes from Him—and that everything you have can be, and should be, used for His kingdom.

1. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/ohio-man-buried-riding-harley-davidson-motorcycle-article-1.1598403>.