

Preparing For Our Spiritual Inheritance

Working Towards the Goal

Ryan McClure

Given 22-Nov-25; Sermon #1847s

From about 1996 to 2012, roughly 15 or 16 years, I worked for a multimedia manufacturing company who ended up branching into pharmaceutical packaging around 2004 and beyond. We managed many audio, video, CD manufacturing and packaging projects as well as packaging and distributing OTC and VMS products. On both the multimedia and pharmaceutical sides of the house, we completed several small and large packaging projects that required putting kits or products together by hand since there really was not a machine designed to put all the pieces together. On the bottling side of the house, while we did have some automation, certain specialty packaging was required or required things to be folded or built or finished by hand.

It was during these largely manual projects that me and my team had time to talk about a lot of different things. As you can imagine, spending at least eight hours a day with the same folks, often more than eight hours, and even on weekends, of course except Saturday, there was a lot of time to talk and get to know one another.

One topic that I remember bringing up every now and then when it hit the news headlines, was the Powerball total followed by what would you do if you won however many millions of dollars the sum total had actually risen to. Now all of us, including myself, were not making a great amount of money at the time. Most of us were getting by paycheck to paycheck. So talking about the lottery and even dreaming about what it might be, felt like our chance to think rich for a moment. So I would ask, what would you do if you won 10 or so millions of dollars?

Now it is very interesting to hear about how people would spend a lump sum of cash, such as those who win the lottery. We all have different priorities based on where we are in life, and so the responses vary for each. What would you do if you received a huge lump sum of money like that? The most recent Mega Millions was won by someone in Georgia, and that person

could take home a lump sum of \$452 million. Now, obviously, we do not participate in the lottery, as it is a game of chance, gambling, if you will. But just to take a minute to think about what would you do with \$452 million.

Regardless of what you would specifically do with the money, if done correctly, that would last someone several generations. One could live quite nicely. Let us say you spend \$10,000 a month or \$120,000 per year for the rest of your life. That \$452 million would last over 3,700 years. But we are rich now, right?

So let us spend \$83,000 a month or \$1 million a year, and of course, if I counted on my fingers and toes correctly, that would take us 452 years to spend it all. Now everyone is thinking, wow, not only would we live lavishly for the rest of our lives, but our kids and their kids, their generations would be set. Or would they?

In 2002, Michael Carroll won the UK lottery, which was about \$15 million in US dollars and he was dubbed the Lotto Lout because he was 19 at the time and blew everything on cars, drugs, and parties. He was known to give large amounts to friends and even strangers recklessly. Within 10 years, he had spent it all and returned to working at a factory.

Also in the UK, Laura and Roger Griffiths won about \$2.7 million, again in US dollars, in 2005. They purchased a dream home, a Porsche, and took luxury trips. Unfortunately, their house was underinsured and ended up burning down, which set them back quite a bit. Laura opened a salon that collapsed. Roger pursued a rock star dream that failed, and it said that their marriage ended in divorce, and they were left with less than \$10.

William Bud Post (Bud is his nickname), won \$16.2 million in the Pennsylvania lottery in 1988. Within one year, he was \$1 million in debt. His brother, who "loved" him so much, hired a hit man to try and kill him for inheritance reasons. He faced lawsuits, bad investments, and reckless spending, later stating, "I wish it never happened."

Jack Whittaker in 2002 won the \$314 million Powerball. At the time, it was the largest single ticket in US history. He was already so wealthy that Whittaker gave millions away, and his generosity was exploited. He was

robbed multiple times, once losing \$545,000 that he had left in his car, and he was sued repeatedly. Apparently at the end of his life, he admitted that the fortune that was now gone had in fact destroyed his life.

It is said that lottery windfalls can magnify both virtues and vices. For some, the money becomes a catalyst for reckless behavior and moral compromise. For others, it is an opportunity for security and philanthropy.

Now, because these rises and falls are not limited to the lottery, let us look at Terrence Watanabe, who inherited the Oriental Trading Company from his father in 1977. About 23 years later he sold his stake in it. Now, the sale gave him an estimated \$300 to \$350 million. Watanabe became a legendary high roller in Las Vegas gambling \$825 million in 2007 alone. They estimate he lost between \$204 and \$350 million in gambling. He also gave in to alcohol, opioids, and by 2010 had lost nearly everything and was living on Social Security.

Anyone still want to try to take a huge lump of sum of money?

Now, last but not least, we have the family stories of the Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers. These two families remain relatively famous parts of American history, with most knowing of the Biltmore Estate there in Asheville, and even Anderson Cooper of CNN, who was from the Vanderbilt family, and you can barely think of New York without thinking of things like Rockefeller Plaza and others. These families represent one of the largest use cases that financial advisors and trusts leverage to teach people how to pass on generational wealth.

Cornelius Vanderbilt started amassing his fortune in the late 1800s from railroads and shipping businesses. He became the wealthiest person in America in the 1860s, and by the time he passed down the family business, his wealth was estimated over \$300 million. John D. Rockefeller was also starting to make his mark in the business world, and in the 1860s, he and his brother started an oil refining business. In 1870, Rockefeller founded the Standard Oil Company, which would end up controlling 90% of US refineries and pipelines. Rockefeller would go on to become the richest man in the world and one of the first billionaires. At its height, the family fortune was valued at over \$600 billion in today's dollars.

Both men were extremely hardworking and probably a bit cunning in business deals as they amassed their respective empires over the years. One of the biggest differences between these families becomes apparent in how the family and the family's wealth was, or is, managed.

Now there were some core challenges for the Vanderbilts, and these will sound pretty familiar. They encouraged or they did not encourage it, but several of them had lavish spending. Later heirs indulged in opulent mansions, gambling, alcoholism, affairs, suicide, extravagant parties, and social status pursuits rather than reinvestment. There was a lack of governance. No cohesive estate plan or trust structures were implemented early on, leaving wealth vulnerable to mismanagement and fragmentation among the family. There was also a cultural shift. By the mid-20th century, the fortune had largely evaporated, and at the 1973 family reunion, none of the 120 attendees were even millionaires.

The Vanderbilt story became a cautionary tale of shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations. This is a quote from William K. Vanderbilt. He is the grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt. He says, "Inherited wealth is a real handicap to happiness. It is as certain a death to ambition as cocaine is to morality."

Now here is some of the core strategies that the Rockefellers developed, kind of the compare and the contrast. So they came up with trust structures. The family pioneered dynasty trusts and irrevocable trusts to protect assets, minimize taxes, and control distributions to the family. They also employed professional management. They appointed institutions like Chase Bank as trustees, ensuring expert oversight and continuity. And finally, I should have put this one first because it is almost the most important one, they established family governance. So they established councils, family retreats, and even a family constitution to instill shared values and financial literacy.

Today, the Rockefeller family's wealth remains robust, estimated between \$8 and \$10 billion spread across 70 heirs while maintaining influence and legacy. David Rockefeller, Jr. is quoted as saying, "If the values weren't lived, the words wouldn't have had an impact. I think the family has tried its best to live those values. To whom much is given, much is expected."

There are clear investing and other money decisions that helped the Rockefellers even to this day, continue their family success. And what I think is most fascinating out of all of the things that they did was their family constitution. As revealed in the quote by David Rockefeller, Jr., a constitution served as a moral code that guided their values and practices as a family. In contrast, we see the Vanderbilts lacked some of the virtues and this moral compass similar to what we saw with Terrence Watanabe and our lottery winners. It appears that money augmented their vices and not their virtues.

Just for the record, I am neither bashing the Vanderbilt family or lifting up the Rockefeller family on some sort of pedestal. I am just pointing out that we can draw from the survey that money can either magnify virtues or vices.

Let us head over to Luke 15 for our first scripture. Now some of you may know the parable that we are going to based on this topic. We have read it many times, and apparently it is part of this week's *CGG Weekly*. Thank you, John, I did not plan that.

Luke 15 and we will start in verse 11 and read through 16. This is Jesus speaking.

Luke 15:11-16 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal [and this is also translated as as wasteful] living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in the land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods the swine ate, and no one gave him anything."

From this parable we can see a similar pattern to those who had sudden windfalls of wealth. It appears that his father is somewhat successful, with hired servants and plenty of animals. Clearly he had enough wealth to go

ahead and divide it right then and there and give it to his son. Jesus does not say how virtuous this particular son was, but we can see that he was at least wasteful, burning through all that his father had given him. I also think the fact that he went to a far country shows a desire to get away from mom and dad, and perhaps indicate some type of rebellion. Finally, in verse 30, we see his older brother state that this other son "devoured your livelihood with harlots." So I think that we can glean that he was not prioritizing the right virtues.

Let us drop down to verse 25. This is right after the son returns home and his father is setting up a big celebration for his return. Verse 25.

Luke 15:25-32 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called to one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"

We often center our studies of this passage around the prodigal son, his departure, return, and subsequent reinstatement, but we rarely discuss the older son. And this is fitting because the passage shows us a lot about God's love for us and His desire for us to repent and return to Him when we sin. In fact, chapter 15 can probably be summed up in Jesus' statement there in verse 7 where He says, "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." He is focusing on repenting and coming back to God.

Now let us look at the older son for the purposes of this message. Notably, in verse 25, the older son was in the field, similar to the Parable of the Hundred Sheep where the 99 stayed back, or stayed in the field, he stayed where he needed to be, and we also see that he was working.

The story does not open with the older son was watching TV. The older son was playing video games. No, the older son was in the field, which signals that he was being productive, that he was working. This is a major point of this message. He was working and properly aligned with his father's will and the family.

Now, further down we read a statement that most likely none of us can actually repeat if we are being honest, but I will just read it again.

Luke 15:29 Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time [and we have all definitely sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Let us keep going. He says]; and yet you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends."

I thought this was interesting because we may feel like this at times, even though we know that we sin, probably more than we like to admit, and we are facing all of these trials and tribulations and life just seems to be crashing down all around us, we feel like we are still in the race, we are going to church, we are praying, we are studying, repenting, and we are just looking for some blessing from God that tells us, "I see you. I see that you're trying. Here's a little blessing here or over there."

Now we may miss these blessings if we are not carefully looking for God's hand in every situation. We were recently reminded of Jesus' admonishment in Luke 12:22, I think, where He tells the disciples not to worry about what they will eat or drink or wear because our value to God is much higher than the birds of the air, and in fact, the rest of creation for which He provides everything. God does care about us, and He will bless us with the things we need to walk towards His Kingdom.

In verse 31, the Father reassures him, saying, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours." The blessing for the son who stayed with him is a huge inheritance. In fact, it has most likely grown since the time the younger son left. And additionally, because he stayed and worked, he was better equipped with what he needed to be successful to manage the inheritance that was yet to come. In most cases, as we have seen, money can either magnify either virtues or vices. It all depends on your moral guidance.

Similar but far greater than the Rockefeller family constitution, we have a Bible that gives us the direction that we need to live successful lives. The instruction guides our lives away from vices and sin towards virtue, morality, right living, and a good life with purpose. Finally, when we have worked hard, stayed the course, lived a good life according to God's design through His love and grace and certainly not by our might, there is an eternal inheritance that awaits all of us through Christ.

Life is difficult. Sometimes it feels like we do more crying than laughing, we face more bad times than good, and we have more problems than solutions, and we might think that money is the solution to all of life's problems. But as we have seen, depending on how we have chosen to live our life and what guides our moral principles, whether we are laying up our treasure in heaven or here on earth, well, money might actually be our downfall. It is temporary. It is not the temporary inheritance that we should be seeking. Our responsibility is to work.

We see this in John 5:17, where Jesus says,

John 5:17 "My Father has been working till now, and I have been working."

Of course, no amount of works can get us into the Kingdom of God. That is not what I am saying. We must continue to live our lives with purpose using God's Word as our guide, our compass, as a tool to live a good life. We must get rid of the things that easily weigh us down.

We will close in I Peter 1. I do not have time to read it but in verses 13 through 21, Peter tells us the kind of life that we need to live, and it is best

summed up as, "Be holy, for I am holy." I think that encapsulates it. Let us read I Peter 1, verses 3 through 5.

I Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Now God has called us into the richest, most wealthiest Family in the entire universe. It does not get any bigger. He has established His covenant with us and given us His Word to serve as a guide on how we are to live our lives. He has told us what to get rid of in this life and what to hold on to and given us a glimpse into the heavenly inheritance that He has for us that is incorruptible, undefiled, and will not fade away.

Let us use the time that God has given us to prepare wisely so that we through His grace are prepared to be godly stewards of the heavenly inheritance that He wants to give us.