**Pleonexia**

**FBC Albemarle**

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Once upon a time, there once lived an important man in Silicon Valley. He routinely worked 12-14 hour days at his job and he rarely took time off. He earned a Masters in Business Administration and he was placed on boards of important organizations. He constantly read how-to books to increase his leadership skills and listened to podcasts get ahead even more. He found the forty-hour work week such a good idea he would often do it twice a week.

His wife tried to slow him down, reminding him that he had a family. He knew he wasn’t spending enough time with his wife and kids but he kept telling them that when they had accumulated enough, they would spend time together on expensive vacations. He kept telling himself that he was doing it all for them to begin with.

He also knew that he wasn’t taking care of his body. His doctor told him that he had some serious warning signs – elevated blood pressure, high cholesterol. He didn’t have time to exercise regularly so he did what he knew to do. He just stopped going to the doctor. He kept telling himself there will be plenty of time for that when thing settle down.

One day, his Chief Financial Officer came to him and said that there was great news! There was an opportunity to expand the business globally. If the company can take advantage of this opportunity, they would be set for life! So now he was available for his business partners 24/7…leaving behind the people whom he needed most – his wife, his children, his friends, himself and God.

One night, as he was working late at home to cover all of the details for an upcoming meeting on his laptop, there was a microscopic detail he failed to pay attention to. The blood cells were barely squeezing through his main artery until it finally couldn’t. His wife asked him to come to bed but he told her that he would come up after he sent one more email.

His wife rolled over in bed around 3am and realized that her husband wasn’t in bed. Angry that he had probably fallen asleep at his desk once again, she went down to wake him up and get him to bed. “This is ridiculous!” she thought to herself.

So she went over and shook him but he didn’t respond. His skin was shockingly cold. As she picked up the phone to call 911, she felt sick to her stomach. When the paramedics got there, they told her that he had suffered a massive heart attack. He had been dead for hours.

People came to his funeral and paid their respects. People talked about how successful he was. How hard he worked and how smart he was. He was called a visionary, an innovator, a leader, and an entrepreneur. On his tombstone, one word was placed at the top: SUCCESS.

That night, the angel of the Lord was sent to rewrite the description on the tombstone. The angel wiped away the word SUCCESS and simply etched four letters: FOOL.

God said, “You fool. This very night your soul will be required of you. And the things you have stored up – whose will they be?”

 In verse 15, Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” The Greek word for ***greed*** used in the verse is ***pleonexia***. It is defined as extreme greed for wealth or material possessions. So, when Jesus told the parable about a rich man building bigger barns to store all of his grain and goods, he was warning them about pleonexia and not being a fool.

 The rich man was only concerned about himself. The personal pronouns "I" or "my" are used eleven times in just three verses (17-19). The only conversation he has in the parable is with himself, and it's all about what he's going to do with his wealth. His goal is the achievement of hedonistic pleasure -- to "relax, eat, drink and be merry" (v. 19). But notice that his attainment of this goal is all in the future: "I *will* do this ... I *will* pull down my barns and build larger ones ... And I *will* say to my soul ...." For now, he is going to devote all his energy toward the achievement of the goal -- and do it his way.

 Greed narrows our focus inward. Instead of thinking, "I have a lot of extra, I wonder who I could help?" the man is only concerned about his own leisure, pleasure and security. Greed trumps generosity. The greatest good the rich fool can imagine is a life of maximizing his own pleasure: to eat, drink and be merry.

 In *The Good and Beautiful Life*, James Bryan Smith suggests that we make certain purchases because of the image it gives to others. *“We purchase things not merely for their functionality but for what they say about us and what we think they will do for us.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* We buy name brands because we believe it says something about us. The Polo shirt, Lilly dress, Coach handbag or the Michael Kors watch all represent some sense of status. Driving a Porsche or a Hummer also shows off what we can afford. Most of us don’t buy things for sheer survival but because of the promise they bring to us. We believe that nearly everything we buy will make us happy and successful.

 In some sense, making certain purchases do make us happy. When I first purchased my car 8 years ago, it made me happy when I got in it to drive. The new car smell is intoxicating. I enjoyed driving it, even in traffic. When I get a new suit, it makes me happy to wear new clothes. Anytime I buy something new for myself, it feels really good…for a while. Now, the new car is older, and the new car smell is long gone. I now just hope it gets me from place to place. I also don’t have the same feelings about putting on that suit that I loved so much. I just pray that it still fits me every time I wear it. I have to overlook the fraying edges and the stain I put on it last time I wore it. The happiness material things bring us is fleeting.

 Pleonexia is insatiable. It is an addiction. The story is told of John D. Rockefeller, the richest man in the world at that time, told a reporter that he was not really happy or satisfied. The reporter asked how much money it would take to make him happy, and he famously replied, “Just a little bit more.” Pleonexia is a disease and it is highly addictive.

So, the question is “How do we cure pleonexia?” **First, we have to trust in kingdom economics.** In God’s kingdom, it is never about storing up for the future so that we can “take life easy.” (v. 19) It is about seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness and everything else will take care of itself. We trust that God is out for our good and has endless resources. Therefore, we will never lack for anything we need.

How does God provide for our needs? It doesn’t drop from the sky or it doesn’t magically appear in our checking accounts. Here is a truth you should always remember: *God moves money and resources through people!* Could God do it other ways? Sure. However, God desires for us to participate in building of his kingdom and using the money and resources given for God’s glory allows us to be a part of what God is doing in the world.

Here is a corollary to the first truth of Kingdom economics: *When God uses money through people, he also gives it back to them.* We have to be careful how we interpret this. It is not a quid pro quo system. It is not an investment scheme where if you give $1,000, then you will be given back $5,000. When we spend our money and our resources for his kingdom while expecting nothing in return, God sees our hearts and I believe God makes sure that we never miss that money.

I share this story not to get a pat on the back but to illustrate God’s kingdom economics. When Amy and I got married, we had just graduated college and we both had teaching jobs lined up. In addition, I was working as a part-time youth minister at Knightdale Baptist Church for $700/month. I don’t remember the exact amount but we didn’t have much in the checking account when we got married. I do remember that we received some money as gifts at our wedding and with my $700/month at the church, we were going to be able to scrape by until our first paycheck at the end of August. During that time, it was tempting to not tithe our income to the church. Honestly, the small amount wouldn’t have made a whole lot of difference to the church’s budget. However, Amy and I wanted to be faithful in our walk with Jesus so we gave out of obedience. Amy and I were both math majors in college. The numbers did not add up. Yet, somehow, we didn’t miss that money.

That is kingdom economics. When we invest in what God is doing, we accrue eternal interest. We advance the kingdom by what we give, and our faith grows larger when we see that God’s giving far exceeds our giving.

**The second way to cure pleonexia is being rich toward God.** Don’t spend your life just accumulating as much as you can and building bigger barns. Being rich toward God takes us out of the first-person and into the second-person, inviting us to look at the needs of others rather than pursuing things only for ourselves. Your life – with God’s help – can make God smile.

The way we go about being rich toward God is to choose simplicity in life. Simplicity is an inner attitude that affects what we choose to purchase. Richard Foster, the author of *Celebration of Discipline*, says simplicity is “an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.” This requires having the proper perspective on material things and wealth. There is nothing wrong with wealth as long as we recognize it as a gift from God and something to be used for God’s kingdom.

I am not interested in making anyone feel guilty. Putting our faith and trust in kingdom economics requires maturity of faith and it is something I struggle with on a daily basis. What I am interested in is helping people, under the leading of the Holy Spirit and in light of the kingdom, to make informed decisions about their resources. My job is to speak the truth and allow the Holy Spirit to take care of the rest.

Pleonexia or greed isn’t something that we decide against once and become free from its grip. It is a decision we make on a daily basis. Somedays I fully trust in God’s economics and I feel contentment and joy. Other days, I let my flesh win over my spirit and I live in disobedience. In those moments, I ask God for forgiveness and seek to live in obedience once again. How are you doing? Are you living in the grips of pleonexia or are you living in simplicity? Trust in kingdom economics and be rich toward God!

1. James Bryan Smith, *Good and beautiful life* (InterVarsity Press, 2011), 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)