

MATTHEW 6.19-34

THE UN-AMERICAN DREAM

LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN



The American Dream is a national ethos of the United States, the set of ideals (democracy, rights, liberty, opportunity and equality) in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success, as well as an upward social mobility for the family and children, achieved through hard work in a society with few barriers. In the definition of the American Dream by James Truslow Adams in 1931, “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.



A key element of the American Dream is promoting opportunity for one's children, Johnson interviewing parents says, "This was one of the most salient features of the interview data: parents—regardless of background—relied heavily on the American Dream to understand the possibilities for children, especially their own children".¹ "The hopes and optimism that Americans possess pertain not only to their own lives, but to their children's lives as well. A fundamental aspect of the American Dream has always been the expectation that the next generation should do better than the previous generation."²

¹ Heather Beth Johnson, *American Dream: Power and Wealth*, p. 43

² Mark Rank, *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes*, p. 61



Research published in 2013 shows that the US provides, alongside the United Kingdom and Spain, the least economic mobility of any of 13 rich, democratic countries in the OECD, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.¹

¹ Inequality from Generation to Generation: The United States in Comparison, *The Economics of Inequality, Poverty, and Discrimination in the 21st Century*, p. 111



Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Christopher Hedges, wrote, following the November 2020 election: “There is no check left on corporate power. The inevitable social unrest will see the state, no matter who is in the White House, use its three principle instruments of social control — wholesale surveillance, the prisons and militarized police — buttressed by a legal system that routinely revokes *habeas corpus* and due process, to ruthlessly crush dissent.” He quoted novelist J. G. Ballard who wrote, “The American Dream has run out of gas. The car has stopped. It no longer supplies the world with its images, its dreams, its fantasies. No more. It’s over. It supplies the world with its nightmares now.” ¹

¹ Christopher Hedges, “American Requiem”, *Scheerpost.com*

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD . . .

- ▶ First and foremost, Jesus wants us (and we need!) to understand this priceless truth: our Father is deeply concerned about the everyday issues that affect His children, and His awareness of us extends to the smallest details of our individual lives.
- ▶ “Do I have enough this week?” “Will I have enough when I retire?” These are questions that we continually ask as we look at our needs and then at our resources. Most often, our sense of “enough” requires “more”—whether driven by insecurity, uncertainty, a desire for better, or by discontentment and greed.

- ▶ Our Father knows that we have both a sense of inadequacy and a self-driven desire for more. So Jesus teaches us to pray in this manner:
"Give us this day our daily bread."
- ▶ This petition is based on Israel's need to depend on God's daily provision of food while they were in the Desert of Sinai. God wanted them to trust His ability to take care of their *every* need. That daily trust would be necessary for building their faith for other challenges.
- ▶ Abundance (or the desire for enough) produces a sense of self-sufficiency and independence. I strive for control of my life and I, not God, determine the provision and adequacy. In a society of easily accessible abundance, dependence must be intentionally cultivated if we are to live as children who really trust our Father in heaven.

THE “LIFE” TEACHING OF JESUS

- ▶ The shape of your personal relationship with the Father (6.1-18) determines the “shape” of your life: investments and outcome (6.19-34).
- ▶ Jesus’ life-teaching is defined by two warnings and two directives:
 - ▶ **Do not—**
 - ▶ Invest heavily in earth assets
 - ▶ Worry about your life or needs
 - ▶ **Do—**
 - ▶ Store up treasures in heaven
 - ▶ Seek first His kingdom and righteousness

- ▶ These directives are further defined by “values” statements—
 - ▶ Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (21).
 - ▶ The eye is the lamp of the body (22-23).
 - ▶ You cannot serve two masters (24).
 - ▶ The sum of life is more than comfort and sufficient assets (25).
 - ▶ Who by worrying can add a single hour to his life (27).
 - ▶ What we pursue defines us as pagans or true children of the heavenly Father (32-33).



Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. . . . But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

LUKE 12.15-16, 20-21

YOUR BIGGEST FINANCIAL MISTAKE

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . . You cannot serve both God and money.”

MATTHEW 6.19-21, 24

- What are your treasures? It includes tangible assets like possessions and wealth but also much more: the resources of time, opportunities, and ultimately, your life. Jesus tells us that our biggest mistake is to extensively invest in this life instead of eternity.

DEFINING OUR TREASURES

The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. . . . They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. . . . a great reward for those who obey them.

PSALM 19.8-11

- ▶ What are your priorities?
- ▶ What do you invest your time and self into?
- ▶ What do you feel you must have for the future?
- ▶ What do you fear to lose?



If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. . . . In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”

LUKE 14.26, 33



Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

LUKE 12.32-34

YOUR MOST CRITICAL INVESTMENT

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries.”

MATTHEW 6.33-34 NLT

- ▶ Jesus commands us to take our eyes off of ourselves, our lives, our plans, our anxieties, the good that we want for ourselves, and pursue the esteem of our heavenly Father, pouring ourselves into His kingdom initiatives. The by-product will be His provision for those things for which we are anxious; the ultimate gain will be a life of worth by eternal standards.



Jesus directs us to make it our ambition to be a success before the Father—to impress Him, to accumulate the rewards and treasures of His notice and esteem. Every person has a ruling ambition, treasure, or investment somewhere. That fact is not disputed or even combated by Jesus. What is decisive in Jesus’ teaching is the *where* or *what* of the ambition or investment, or perhaps, more pointedly, the *whom*—whom are we really trying to impress?”

F. B. BRUNER, *The Christbook*

PHILIPPIANS 3—

I too once thought that all the credentials that people pour themselves into were worth attaining, but I've torn up and thrown all those things in the trash. Why? So that it is Christ alone in my life. Yes, everything else really is worthless compared to knowing Christ—my nationality and culture, the tribe I belonged to, my education, my career—when comparing it to Christ, it's all dung! Garbage, trash, poop! I don't want my life to amount to nothing more than the clown that follows the elephant in the circus scooping up poop with a shovel. And I don't want to end life dressed in the clown clothes of human effort and success, holding a shovel full of the poop of chasing things that everyone says is important. NO! I can see now see that all of those things are utterly inferior to knowing Christ—and thank God that I realized this before I wasted my life! So I have one ambition: to know everything there is to know about Christ and to become just like Him in every way; whatever it takes—surrender, suffering, dying—it doesn't matter. I keep this one goal in sight: Christ, only Christ. When I get to the end of life, I want the priceless prize of His approval—not clown clothes and a shovel full of poop!



We want treasures—career, money possessions—because they give us security. But Jesus knows that the fickleness, uncertainty, and inevitable decay of human treasures lead us to security’s opposite: anxiety. Doing well financially, professionally, socially, personally—doesn’t last. And Jesus does not want to see his disciples anxious, disappointed, or—most importantly—their lives wasted.”

—compiled from F. B. BRUNER, *The Christbook*, p. 259-260