

I liked Doctor Stewart the first time I met him. He was to be our pediatrician when Leigh was born. We went to this orientation class for first time parents. Dr Stewart came in wearing a bright colored shirt and told us that was how he would look when we brought our children to his office.

He said several things that made a lot of sense to me. "If you have something on the coffee table that is so valuable that you cannot bear to part with it, put it up on a high shelf for awhile. Don't go around slapping your child's hand all the time saying 'No! No! There is really no reason to hit your child. It just means you are frustrated and don't know what else to do. You are much bigger and you can get away with hitting, but that will not help. If your child is crawling around and into something you want them to leave alone, just pick up your child and take them to another room or put your child in the play pen with some toys to distract them. Little kids can be distracted and you don't have to make an issue of everything. That distraction idea will work – for awhile!!

Sarah is 90 something. She lives in East Avondale. I met her when our YouthServe work crew went to work on her yard and house as one of our community service projects at summer camp. It took awhile – most of a week – but the work crew reclaimed her back yard from the overgrown weeds and other assorted vegetation. We also got the vines off the fence to her yard and trimmed the bushes around her house. Some of us did some work inside. We even got some plywood and vinyl and covered a hole in her kitchen floor. I was afraid she would go in there and not see it and step in it and break her leg. The ceiling and walls were in bad shape. The roof didn't keep out much rain, so the water had ruined places in the ceiling and walls. We found a group that worked on affordable housing to fix the ceiling and walls, but they couldn't do that until we got the roof fixed. Some roofing person had taken 1500 dollars to fix her roof, but had done only the front half of it. 1500 dollars is a lot to a person living on social security.

Finally, we got the roof fixed and the ceilings and walls are patched up and we will paint them this summer. It was so hot in her house that a kind hearted church member gave money and we put in a window air conditioning unit. I thought it was great, but Sarah (while thrilled by it) was worried about it driving up the cost of her electricity. She still uses it sparingly. Sometimes I think the stove, water heater and air conditioner are distractions from her simple way of living. We live in a society that has to have the latest computer gadget, the fastest car, the latest fashion in clothes – stuff. Sarah doesn't really have that problem. Stuff. That is what Jesus is talking about in our text for today. Distractions that keep us from being focused on living in God's Kingdom. Much of what we are after are distractions.

Our text is part of a larger periscope that is concerned with wealth and possessions. Much of this larger passage seems to be aimed at people who have more wealth than they really need. The passage serves as a strong warning against storing up treasures on this earth that will not last. It really doesn't matter how many alarm systems, or dead bolts we have, treasures on this earth will not last. These earthly treasures become distractions when we set our heart on them instead of on the Kingdom of God.

Paul Tillich, and American theologian point out that if we define God as who/what we spend most of our time, money and energy serving – then God could be our hobby, our car, our job. If we define God as what we serve most, we soon realize that all this stuff that we have to have can be a great distraction to our serving God's Kingdom.

Much of Jesus' warnings about wealth seem to be aimed at those who have much and who want

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more. But our text today seems to shift to speaking of those who have little. Rich people don't have to worry about their next meal. They do not worry about having clothes to wear. Poor people do those things. Jesus says we should not expend our energy on chasing after what we do not have – chasing the latest trends in our society. He also says we should not worry. He points out that God will provide for us. The words are "Consider the lilies of the field." That Greek word usually translated "look!" or "Consider" is more emphatic. It can be translated "Look! NO, REALLY look!" Tom Long – preaching professor at Candler says "Whatever tomorrow brings, it brings God with it." If God takes care of the common birds and wildflowers, then God will take care of us who are made in God's image.

We know we can't worship God and money. That is a commandment. To worship money would be idolatry – putting something in God's place.

But our accumulation of stuff is more subtle than that. Our allegiance is transferred from God to all this stuff – stuff that we spend our time, energy and money to acquire. Our green paper money and coins say "In God We Trust." Do you think that is to remind us that our trust is not to be placed in the money we have? Jesus calls us to be focused on who we are. God's providence frees us to give more of ourselves working in this Kingdom of God that seeks to bless the poor, the meek, the grieving, the hungry and the peace makers. Much of the time, we devote far more of our time and energy seeking after the wealth that we think we need. I have never believed we can divide up our time – this for me, this for God. I don't think that system will work. But, 40 hours is a light work week, but one hour in worship seems to be a lot to ask.