



September 16, 2024

Laying Down in Order to Lay Up

I have been pondering two phrases about treasure ever since the Finance Ministry Team settled on its campaign theme of stewardship's "T's" of time, talent, treasure and testimony. The first phrase involves ***laying up*** treasure in heaven in contrast to Christ's warning about an unhealthy focus on securing earthly things. How in the world do we lay up treasure in heaven?

The second is the inverse- a ***laying down*** of that which burdens the soul. I call it "overcare," an excessive and habitual worry rooted in the pride of self-sufficiency. When we care way too much about this world and our own comfort, we cement deep inside ourselves a disposition fraught with fussing, fear, and pessimism. Where is God's grace in that? Caring too much about the wrong things starves our ability to care for others; I cannot freely and willingly give to you my time, talents, or money when I insist on stockpiling them to "secure" my perceived needs.

Why sit like Gollum maniacally polishing what is vilely, wrongfully precious? If I am to *want to* lay down overcare and let Christ take care of my present and future needs, I must understand that my eternal future is already secure. Yes, I *want to* care less about earthly things. But it's countercultural and hard to do. Oh, so hard. Lord, make me *careless* in this regard.

Happily, Scripture and catechism call us to enjoy God forever. It reminds me of a choir anthem I've sung often- *And the Father Will Dance* (by Mark Hayes based on Zephaniah 3:17). It's about God rejoicing over his beloved. God delights in our delight in him! This is the real treasure we lay up: to know God deeply, to surrender our future to Christ's perfectly capable hands, to hear God joy over us with singing, and to breathe in the tantalizing aroma of Christ through prayer, song, Scripture, worship and the Sacraments. These are all real, tangible, and lasting treasures that we *can* lay up and carefully steward. Oh Lord, make me care more about you and your kingdom.

How can a person steward a spiritual treasure? Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8 to think on, to dwell on, to pray over, and marinate in those things that are honorable, just, pure, commendable, lovely and true. *Anything worthy of the praise of God is the treasure we lay up and steward.*

It's a full circle really, this intentional laying down of what hinders; we lay down our sin, our self-absorption, even our lives, freeing us to lay up in heaven a whole different kind of treasure that gives God joy. So, we lavish on others rather than squirrel. We praise instead of grumbling. Listen instead of arguing. We laser-focus on the needs of others and willfully repress our self-interest. It means we pray when we've promised to pray. And, as we will see next week, we give testimony to what Christ has done and is doing rather than just superficially blather on about the weather.

So, lay down to lay up. Delight in God! And his peace, which far outstrips our ability to understand will stand guard over (steward) our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). This is the kind of steward I *want* to be. Oh Lord, make it so.

~Written by Julie Walton

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