

"How 'bout some quarters?"

By [Larry Patten](#)

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The rich man was a good man.

From not stealing to honoring his parents to loving God (and more), he hadn't merely memorized the essential commandments of his faith. They were the benchmarks of his daily life.

But could he achieve eternal life? He approached Jesus.

Tell me, [Good Teacher, what else should I do?](#) (Clearly he was a Type A, can-do, overachieving kind of guy.)

*Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him.*

I wonder how the rich man pictured the goal of his request?

Is eternal life a heaven of still waters and green pastures that we long for in today's landscape of a dry earth and drier souls? Is it the better place where the swing low, sweet chariot transports us from dreary to dreamy? In my reading of scripture, I don't doubt that Jesus spoke of eternal life in the same breaths he took to elsewhere promise the heavenly mansions prepared by God. So why not picture a fine divine future—a "better place"—when wondering about eternal life?

And yet Jesus, so often the contrarian, described eternal life to the rich man in earthly terms. Give your wealth to the poor. Follow me.

No! Why make "eternal life" so easy? Why make it so difficult?

Years ago, one of my first visits as a hospice chaplain took me to a home where a family lived. The family hadn't always been under the same roof, but when the grandmother was diagnosed with cancer, she'd moved into the unfixed fixer-upper house with its unkempt front and back yards. Who has time to mow a lawn when working multiple jobs to keep food on the table for multiple generations?

The grandmother, using a standard health-care phrase, was “alert and oriented times four.” She knew who she was, where she was, what time it was, and what was happening in the here-and-now. Though weary from a failing heart and a fearsome cancer, she happily shared her past history and hoped-for future activities. She was realistic. While she had a bucket list, she knew the bucket wouldn’t be emptied before her final breaths. I was impressed that every future hope involved family. There wasn’t any doubt that anticipating a high school graduation or family reunion mattered hugely because they involved people she loved.

While the patient and I chatted, her five-year old grandchild dashed from one room to another. Children hardly notice differences between poverty and wealth, cramped homes and sprawling mansions. Most places easily become a playground.

Suddenly, clutching a round something, the child plopped at my feet. She announced she must give me money.

Money!

Well!

As our adult-talk continued, the child scratched the bottom of the object with her fingers. While she focused on her “work,” I saw what she held: a piggy bank. After a few moments she removed a rubber stopper. Coins tumbled from the pinkish pig’s interior.

She handed me a dime and nickel.

I thanked her and told her it would be better if she kept them. Solemnly, she agreed and took the money back.

She peered into the pig’s innards. She gave it a shake. Her tiny fingers probed through the bottom’s opening.

Next she whispered, “How ’bout some quarters?” With the selected coins—two shiny quarters—cradled in her palm, she offered them to me.

I took them, carefully examined each one, again thanked her, and again returned them.

I knew her tricks. Hey, I used 'em myself as a kid. This pint-sized person wanted my attention. Grandma shouldn't have all the fun!

But I believe she also knew money was valuable and I seemed like an OK guy . . . so why not give me something worthwhile? She was young enough to know money could buy stuff, but not so old as to hoard or flaunt it. If it's good, give it away! If it's good, share it!

What else is there but to offer the currency of God's eternal, here-and-now love like time, listening, and empathy when we are with others? But are those truly easy to share? Nope. Too many act like, well, adults. Adults focus more on hiding or accumulating coins.

[Pope Francis](#) challenged Congress to examine their global responsibilities. "Here we have to ask ourselves: Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply *for money*: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood." [Italics are mine.]

The child scampered away, perhaps to give coins to someone else in the house. As I prepared to leave, the grandmother shared she was grateful for everyone helping her. We held hands, and we prayed, and I knew the currency of God's love had been shared.

Would the grandmother, soon, be in a "better place?" I hoped and prayed so. But she was also about making here-and-now a better place.

Jesus, ever the contrarian, tramped through the cities and villages, encountering the rich and the poor, offering them all a "better place."

It wasn't in the innards of a piggy bank, but right in front of them.

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