

Seeking God's Way, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 02080525
1 Corinthians 4:1-5 and Matthew 6:24-34
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I read an interesting obituary in the newspaper this past week.¹ It was the announcement of the death of Huntington Hartford at ninety-seven years of age at his home in the Bahamas. Hartford was heir to the fortune of the A & P Tea Co., a huge grocery business. As a young man, he was provided with an income of \$1.5 million a year. Hartford was a failure at founding a gallery of Modern Art, in developing a resort at Paradise Island in the Bahamas, and in constructing an automated parking garage in New York City. He was a failure in the founding of a handwriting institute, in starting a modeling agency, in producing a revival of *Jane Eyre* on stage, and in the founding a magazine.

Hartford inherited \$90 million and lost \$80 million of it. He had four failed marriages. He finally lost his job at the headquarters of A & P (the family business) when he took a day off to attend the Harvard-Yale football game in 1934. While serving as commander of a supply ship in the Pacific, he ran the ship aground twice, claiming one time that the navigational charts were out of date and the other time that he mistook feet for fathoms. His daughter Catherine, who suffered from drug and alcohol-related problems, was found dead on a beach in Hawaii in 1988. I applaud Hartford's attempts at being a Renaissance man, but he was a failure in all he tried. There was so much promise, and so little to show for it.

As I read about Hartford's life, I was reminded of how wealth, rather than solving problems, often creates them, especially when our priorities are mixed up. I have often seen the striving after wealth, comfort, and security creating pain and misery, if not for the individual, then for those around that person. If you'd like someone to lose their friends and alienate their relatives, pray for them to win the lottery.

Echoing Moses' proclamation from the Mountain of God's law to the Hebrews, Jesus proclaims God's law anew in what we call the Sermon on the Mount. Beginning with "Blessed are the poor in spirit" in Chapter five of Matthew, Jesus continues, don't murder and don't even nurse your anger. He continued to command, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."²

Then, Jesus spoke about the impossibility of serving two masters, God and wealth.³ Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other." The word "hate" is a strong word. Holly Hearon says these words are not about feelings, but about the setting of our priorities. "Love" is demonstrated as loyalty or commitment. The other, "hate," is demonstrated by disregard or scorn. Neither word is concerned with how we feel about things so much as how we orient ourselves and consequently, how we will behave"⁴

How do you orient yourself? Jesus was teaching his disciples about what it means to seek God's way and live in the present and future reign of God. He said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was

¹*New York Times* 5/20/2008

²Matthew 5:44

³Matthew 6:24-34

⁴Holly Hearon, *New Proclamation* 2008

not clothed like one of these.”⁵ *Consider*: Look at. Observe. Look at and observe the lilies of the field. Learn something about God’s abundance by studying nature. Sue and I have been trimming and cutting in our garden all week. Why? Because of God’s abundance. The English Ivy grows rampantly and abundantly. It’s growing up three of our trees. It’s grown over a path that we use at the side of our house. It’s even worked its way between the foundation and the wood frame, growing into the interior of our garage. Such is the abundance of God. This is God’s world. This is how God provides. Even bushes that we thought had been killed by drought, the rhododendron, have come back with a fury this spring.

Look around you and see, not with your eyes, but with your heart, what is real and true and worthy of your attention. The world around us teaches us to focus attention on wealth or on security. But, those are not to be trusted or worthy of our attention. Center your life on God. This is the opposite of anxiety. If you truly center your life on God, you will have less need of Paxil, Valium, or other anti-anxiety drugs. Don’t worry!

Marcus Borg speaks of a radical trust in God.⁶ He says that Jesus appealed to his listeners to use their “imagination and intelligence” so that they might see in new and meaningful ways, not missing the deeper truth at the heart of things: “a glimpse of the divine earth ‘filled with the glory of God,’ permeated by the divine radiance...reality as marked by cosmic generosity.” Anxiety makes us miserable inside, but it also wreaks havoc on our relationships with one another and with God.

A need for security stifles us and keeps us from doing good things for God. It distracts us and keeps us too busy with tasks to recall the deeper meaning of our lives. Thomas G. Long wrote, “Living the good life and living a good life pull in opposite directions.”⁷ *The good life* is characterized lying in a hammock sipping a mixed drink on the beach of a Caribbean island. A good life is characterized by bringing joy or justice into the lives of others. It is the giving of yourself for others, not using others for the good of yourself.

You cannot serve God and wealth. “If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?”⁸ God takes care of things. We will be taken care of if we put God and God’s kingdom first. I am not speaking here of the afterlife or heaven, but kingdom right here on earth: the way God wants things to be, where people are considered more important than things and where all people have enough to survive.

I invite you to pray this prayer of Thomas Merton:

“Lord, I have not lived like a contemplative. The first essential is missing. I only *say* I trust you. My actions prove that the one I trust is myself – and that I am still afraid of You. Take my life into Your hands, at last, and do whatever You want with it. I give myself to Your love and mean to keep on giving myself to Your love – rejecting neither the hard things nor the pleasant things You have arranged for me. It is enough for me that *You* have glory. Everything You have planned is good. It is all love.”⁹

⁵Matthew 6:28

⁶Borg: *Jesus: a New Vision*

⁷Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion

⁸Matthew 6:30

⁹A Book of Hours, Kathleen Deignan, ed.