

Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • August 1, 2021



The Scriptures

Acts 16:13-15

On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Luke 6:20

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

The Message

"11 Indispensable Relationships: You Need the Rich and Poor"

Mark Briley

The Olympics are in full swing, and I'm loving it. It's odd that they call it the 2020 Olympics – like they couldn't spring for new signage once it got bumped from last summer to this summer given COVID and all. But it is what it is, and I'm sure there's

good reason. I love the spirit of competition – the unique sporting events that I



admittedly pay little attention to until Olympic time, but then when it comes, I become the greatest fan. Seeing the world come together is always inspiring! To see the Refugee Olympic Team enter the stadium for the opening ceremonies – so moving. How incredible and resilient are these people?

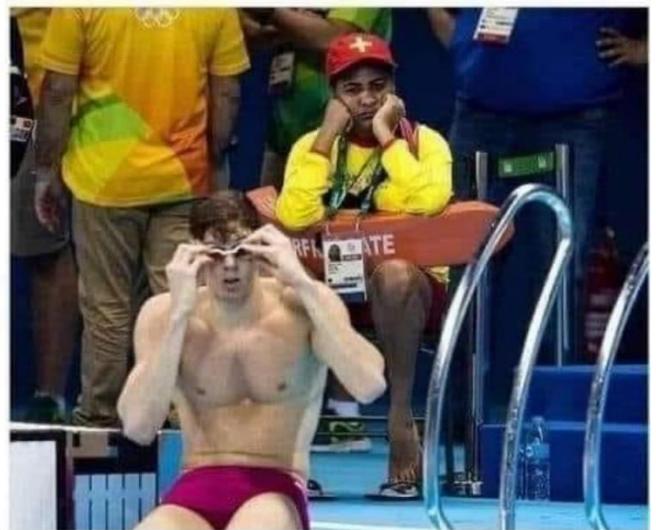
Lots of swimming this week. Having the recent privilege of seeing some of Broadway's young people swim on Championship Night at West Broadway Swim Club – I was all the more interested in the sport and learning the stories of our Team USA swimmers. They all come from somewhere – why not West

Broadway Swim Club? Go get 'em, kids!

I can't recall the country they represented, but I did see one relay team of four who had a 15-year-old and a 37-year-old on the same team. Don't see that in many sports! I also loved this meme that popped up on my feed again this week. It says, "*If you feel useless today, remember somebody is working as a lifeguard at the Olympics.*" "Useless" is a strong word, but I understand the sentiment.

If you feel useless today, remember somebody is working as a lifeguard at the olympics:

Lots of story lines and each of them, while very different, seem to have a common thread – nobody gets to the Olympics on their own. There was a back story of a coach that pushed them; someone who believed in them when no one else would. Teammates that supported them. Someone who got them to the pool, or the court, or the mat often at wee hours of the morning. While incredibly talented, they all had people who "*witned*" them along the way.



And you've seen their *witnesses* watching their beloved compete. They are almost as fun to watch as the athletes themselves. Without those who have been with us along the way, we surely couldn't reach our full potential. That has been the focus of our summer series here at Broadway entitled, "*Eleven*."¹ Who are these *witnesses* you need in your life to help you grow, mature, and become your best self? And... who are you *witnessing*? Equally important! We've focused on a different relationship each week this summer including a true friend, a back-coverer, a protégé, an outcast, and more. Today's *witness* is actually a pair. You need the rich *and* the poor.

And now... I've just opened a can of worms. Any time you start talking "*rich*" and "*poor*," people get uncomfortable. Which am I? Am I rich? My boat isn't as big as theirs. Am I poor? Well... I'm paying most of the bills on time. Are you rich or poor? How do you know? We often say that it is better to give than to receive. But the truth is, it is *best* to be a *generous* giver and a *gracious* receiver.

Leonard Sweet shares that God's fundamental category is *giving*, and our fundamental category is *receiving*. How we receive is a matter of our spirituality just as much as the gifts we give. Jesus was good at receiving. Other than the Communion Table, Jesus never really seemed to play host. He always stayed with others, received their gifts of hospitality, and encouraged them with his gifts of ministry. Sweet's challenge is summed up in this quote, "*The rich need to discover their poverty, and the poor need to discover their riches.*" The problem with talking rich and poor is that we immediately think of money and material possessions. We *will* talk about possessions and the use of our resources – that's part of it – but focus on this question this morning: "*What grounds me?*" "*What is my spiritual center?*"

Consider two biblical characters, Lydia and Lazarus. Lydia, first. She is a dealer... a small business owner, per say. She sells purple cloth, not because she was a TCU Horned Frog alum (*Go Frogs! It's a Disciples of Christ affiliated school by the way*). She sold purple cloth because it was the hot seller to the wealthy. Those with great means wore purple cloth. It was a status symbol for sure like Gucci or Louis Vuitton... or Wrangler Jeans (?) – Fashion has never been a strength of mine. Wranglers work for Brett Favre. Lydia was successful – company car; nice expense budget to entertain clients but... she comes across the teaching of the Apostle Paul that opens her to her spiritual center. She connects with the deeper purpose of Christ and her whole household follows suit and is baptized. She's in! And here's where her *witness* comes into play. She wants to use her gifts to grow the movement, too. It wasn't enough to *believe*... she wanted to *participate*. At her baptism reception barbecue – hot wings and slaw I'm guessing – Lydia says to Paul who surely had wing sauce all over his hands and cheeks – no graceful way to eat wings – I'm a boneless wing fan myself.

¹ 11: Indispensable relationships you can't be without. Leonard Sweet. David C. Cook publishing. Colorado Springs. 2008. This series is grounded in and inspired by Sweet's work in this book. Any quotes or references to Len Sweet are linked to this work.

But here they are, and she says to Paul, *“If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, let me help. I believe in what you’re doing, and I know you need help. Come and stay here and make my house home base for this ministry.”* Her hospitality and financial support pushed forward God’s message of love and grace through Christ in a way that they could not have otherwise imagined. That is a gift!

This happened recently at Broadway. There was a woman in a partner organization of Broadway that was looking for a home to start a recovery house for women, who were now sober and needing a foundation to rebuild their lives. Another Broadway friend had a rental home they longed to give to serve some good purpose. Yet another friend of Broadway had ears to hear and was privy to both of these desires and said, *“Ministry, meet gift”* – and Boom! Isn’t it amazing? Notice what is most important in this story and Lydia’s. Wealth is less important than their spiritual center. Lydia and these current day Lydia’s are grounded in faith, and it is their faith that says – *“Let this resource bless and grow the effort forward.”*

That perspective makes all the difference – because if the dollars are most important, you’ll get tripped up every time. Jesus knew people would get lost in the money. He said things like *“It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.”* He said, *“You cannot worship both God and money.”*

Something has to be your center. We all build our lives around some priority. Money messes with things, because it can provide some false sense of security that tricks us into thinking money is the only *withness* we really need. Len Sweet puts this in some perspective as he twists a very well-known Scripture verse to support this reality. *“Money is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.”*

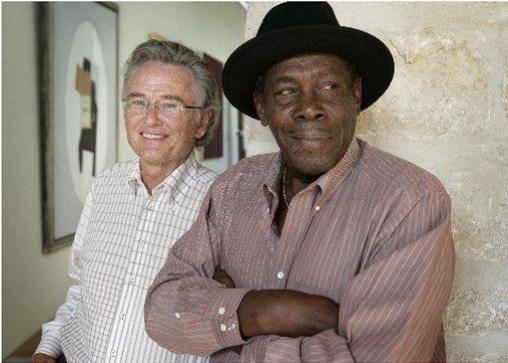
It just sounds greasy, right? And it’s a slippery slope. Money *does* open some doors, creates some opportunities, can be an incredible blessing to God’s purposes as we’ve heard already today. The risk is money becoming our god by default. When it does, we can’t hear the actual Scripture passage that says, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.”* The difference is our center. If money is god – then we use it to fix every problem we face, but it falls short when our relationships crumble and another necklace won’t cure the pain, or when our kids really need a parent and not another video game system, or when the transformation only exists in the side-by-side service with another who is trying to give of themselves to make the world a better place.

Lydia has found a new center and it’s now the driving force behind her new direction. She’s got business savvy and resources, and she’s says to Paul: *“Pour it into the movement.”* Many of you have discovered this, too. There are many stories that would

rise from these pews if they could talk. Stories of gifts shared anonymously to transform people's lives in our church or community or neighborhood, or all the above.

Veteran's United, here in Columbia, will soon give away ten-million dollars to celebrate ten years of giving – of pouring into our community. They are being a Lydia *witness*! And they're inviting their team members to nominate people or organizations that are trying to improve the lives of the neighbors of our city. This generous spirit is centered in something beyond money itself.

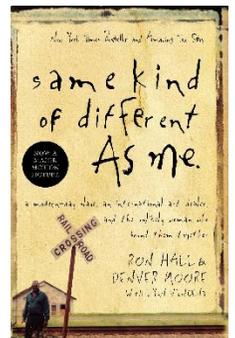
And it's contagious! Lydia's are wonderful at creating momentum giving. They inspire others to give, too. Sometimes a spark is all it takes to inspire that next movement of the Spirit that will transform the community. I think we're on the cusp of such a momentum moment at Broadway. The actions prioritized out of our visioning process after months of listening to you, praying, and discerning together, are soon to be revealed. To see any dream come to pass, it will take an act of God and a movement of the people behind it. Any true vision holds such magnitude – but if these Olympians come up as kids like you and me; from places like you and me – could a God-sized transformation in our city come from a place like Broadway? We'll soon see! Rich or poor... we've got to know our *center*. There's typically no flip of the switch. It can be a tough road to get to that place... a place of spiritual centeredness in God.



About a decade ago, Ron Hall wrote an incredible book with Denver Moore about their own storied relationship entitled, "*The Same Kind of Different as Me*."² It was made into a movie in 2017. It's a beautiful story about needing each other – *withing* each other – no matter rich or poor. It is an inspiring true story of a rich art dealer and homeless man who become close as brothers. It is a story of discovering what grounds you. In an early part of the story, before Ron and

Denver even cross paths, Ron shares of some struggle in his marriage essentially surrounding the differences of what centered his wife, and what centered his own life. Listen to what he shares...

"In Dallas, I threw myself into my work, traveling more, striving for more international market share. I changed cars like I changed Armani suits and tired of each new toy I acquired as quickly as a toddler on Christmas morning. Deborah, meanwhile, plugged into God. While I pursued the material, she plunged into the spiritual. While I dedicated my life to making money and spent a few minutes parked in a church



² *The Same Kind of Different as Me*. Ron Hall and Denver Moore. Thomas Nelson Publishing. 2006.

pew on Sundays, she spent hours at Brian's House, a ministry to homeless babies with AIDS. When I stormed Europe impressing billionaires with my art savvy, she stormed heaven, praying for the needy. My passion was recognition and success. Her passion was to know God."

It is a difference of refuge. Is your refuge God? Is it wealth? Recognition? Success? The answer, when you're sitting in church, is easy. God's our grounding force. But Monday rolls around, business calls, the stock market bell rings, the human drive kicks in, social media and the 24-hour news cycle lures us to chase the shiny spinning things and we lose focus. Does our material gain and success drive us *back* to our Center or does it *become* our center?

Wealth is not to be vilified. The most misquoted verse in all of Scripture is the one about the root of all evil. Most of the time it is quoted, "*Money is the root of all evil.*" But 1 Timothy 6:10 actually says: "*The **love** of money is the root of evil.*" The challenge for all of us is to step back from our lives and take a real honest look. If I could have an out-of-body experience and look at my life..., what would I see? What is driving me? What is grounding my purpose? Len Sweet says it this way, "*Tell me what you get angry at, and I'll tell you who you are.*"

Professor and Preacher Tony Campolo tells the story of a sermon he preached where he used a four-letter word when describing a bleak picture of poverty. He followed up that statement by saying to the congregation, "*The unfortunate part is that most of you are more upset because of the word I used than the fact that children in our own city are starving to death.*"

We are passionate about that which centers us. If money centers our being, we'll do all we can to actively pursue its gain. If our faith in God centers us, we will do all we can to pursue God's gain by caring about the things God cares about. Lydia did this as well as any and her gifts to propel the early church's ministry were as needed as Paul's teaching was to accomplish the same. You need a Lydia. But you also need a Lazarus.

The story of Lazarus comes from one of Jesus' parables about our question for today, "*Where does your spirituality reside?*" (Luke 16:19-31). It's the only parable that Jesus actually names one of the characters. *Lazarus*. The name Lazarus literally means "*God helps.*" Lazarus really needed help. He spent his days hanging outside of a rich man's estate in hopes of getting some table scraps from the regular buffet his counterpart enjoyed. It's a sad and somewhat gruesome depiction of life. As the parable goes, Lazarus dies and is whisked to heaven. The rich man dies and goes to Hades and begs for Abraham to allow Lazarus to give him a drink. He says, "*If nothing else, let me go back to my house and tell my family that the material things of this life are not what life is really all about.*" Abraham replies, "*They've got the prophets and Moses to listen*

tell them that. They've already got access to this word in Scripture, but if they won't listen to their biblical heroes, they won't listen to a guy holding a cardboard sign at the intersection that says, "Hungry. I love leftovers."

On the surface we hear this story and we say, *"It's good to be poor... it's bad to be rich."* Reading closely, this is not the greatest point of this story. When you read the parable, you can see that both Lazarus and the rich man are pursuing the center of wealth in this life. Lazarus is longing for the life of this wealthy man, and the wealthy man is consumed in the life he has. We know well the story of wanting more.

"How much is enough?" one billionaire was asked. He answered, *"Always just a little more."* We chase the examples of success we see in the culture yet we lose sight of the goal to keep our center in God. Jesus says often, *"Care for the poor,"* and he also says, *"The poor are always with you."* Poverty is everywhere. Some are hungry for food and should be fed. Some are starving in spirit and may need to do some feeding of others.

I remember walking up to old Busch Stadium in St. Louis before a Cardinals game and there was a guy yelling and holding a sign that said, *"Need tickets"* and another guy just a few feet away also yelling and holding a sign that says, *"Got tickets."* I wanted to tell them both to quit yelling and introduce them to each other, but I guess that's not really what they were looking for, but maybe we are.

What's poignant about Lazarus and the rich man is their lack of relationship. The rich man and Lazarus don't ever speak a word to one another even though they essentially live at the same address. Sweet shares that *"only bottom-up relationships built on respect and reciprocity have any chance of making a different world. Anonymous relationships between donors and recipients are doomed to failure."* Eradicating poverty of every kind is not just about writing checks... it is about relationships, too. Do you have a Lazarus in your life? A Lydia?

Lazarus and Lydia are *witnesses*' we need because they point us toward a grounded center. At one time or another each of us will experience the riches of faith and the poverty of spirit. The challenge is for us to remember where to go to renew our spirits, to refresh our faith. From these *witnesses*, you will learn how to give generously and how to receive graciously. Each will give you a different perspective from your own.

Sometimes one will fill your gas tank so you can make it the next stretch down the road, and sometimes one will borrow your ride and bring it back on empty. Give. Receive. Poor. Rich. Exposure to, and in, these very different relationships will keep you humbled and growing. The breadth of these relationships help us figure out what we'd willingly trade our lives for and naming that passion will help us know what we

should trade our time for. Whether an Olympian, a Lydia, or a Lazarus – give thanks for each one – for they’ll help you figure it out and... as you discover who you are truly made to be, living that passion inevitably makes you the answer to someone else’s prayer, too.

Song of Response
“Beware! Your Circle Is Too Narrow”

Ed Varnum

WORDS: ED VARNUM

TUNE: O, HOW I LOVE JESUS, TRADITIONAL AMERICAN MELODY

Refrain:

Beware! Your circle’s too narrow. So small, your soul might get sick.
Beware! Your circle is too narrow. Souls suffocate inside a clique!

Verse 1:

Lord Jesus Christ was criticized; his circle was too wide.
“Be careful where you socialize to still be on our side.”

Refrain:

Beware! Your circle’s too narrow. So small, your soul might get sick.
Beware! Your circle’s too narrow. Souls suffocate inside a clique!

Verse 2:

With wider circles, differing gifts bring new perspectives, insights shift
to bring solutions, paths to take and hearts and hands that lift.

Refrain:

Beware! Your circle’s too narrow. So small, your soul might get sick.
Beware! Your circle’s too narrow. Souls suffocate inside a clique!

Verse 3:

“You’re not like us,” small circles say. “We’re right and you’re all wrong!
“Be more like us! Assimilate! You’ll be welcome (but not for long).”

Refrain:

Beware! Your circle’s too narrow. So small, your soul might get sick.
Beware! Your circle’s too narrow. Souls suffocate inside a clique!

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH