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## Panning What the World Has to Offer



There are some true nuggets of wisdom in the story of America's gold rush, and they bear remembering next time your expectations in life aren't panning out.

In January 1848 when gold was found near Sutter's Mill, California, 300,000 people flooded the area. On their way, some stopped near modern-day Reno, Nevada to wait out winter before crossing the mountains. They did some prospecting and stumbled across gold in a nearby canyon. Though the deposits weren't

enough to keep most from moving on to California, a few stayed and staked claims.

At one point, the miners were finding gold worth \$20 a day but easy diggings eventually petered out. When the prospectors hit a layer of thick clay with little gold in it, they assumed the ore had run out so they moved on. But Peter O'Riley and Pat McLaughlin stuck it out.

Since it takes water to sift gold from soil, the men decided to dam up a small stream using strange blue sand they'd uncovered nearby. Without expecting much, they threw some of the sand into a sifter and — when they checked the bottom — were shocked to see a layer of glimmering gold. Compared to others who'd found the precious ore by the ounce, these men were soon mining it by the pound.

Before long, rancher Henry "Old Pancake" Comstock swindled his way into partnership with O'Riley and McLaughlin and the men sometimes found gold worth \$1,000 a day, about \$100,000 in our dollars. The only problem was the blue dirt that clogged their mining gear. "[They were] throwing it anywhere to get it out of the way," wrote author Dan DeQuille in 1876. "They... constantly cursed it."

But when a local judge and miner named James Walsh had samples tested, he was stunned to find the blue sand was silver ore. When he



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shipped 40 tons of raw ore from the area to San Francisco, it yielded \$118,000 worth of gold and silver, prompting another mining rush.

Since nobody knew how long the precious metal would last, many short sighted miners sold their claims early, for what must've seemed a fortune. But the gold and silver kept coming. Between 1859 and 1878, more than \$320 million worth of gold and silver was pulled from the Comstock Lode, which would be \$450 billion now.

The equivalent of the gold rush continues today as those seeking a quick fix and a lasting happiness flood casinos and lottery stands, porn sites, cosmetic surgery clinics and high-end, high-tech temples of technology, convinced they're missing out on what others have found.

Discontent is rampant. Many cope by emotionally pulling up stakes and changing jobs, houses, spouses or even cities. They prospect for satisfaction, living in distant places or distant times — the past or the future — even though the treasure is close at hand. Sadly faith and family are often no match for fantasy.

Though we decry the me-ism and materialism around us, we often share our culture's conviction that success and salvation are found in what seems to be passing us by: money, toys, youth, recognition or sexual satisfaction. So when the easy diggings peter out in our relationships and spirituality, we move on rather than dig deeper. In doing so, we lose the mother lode of love and satisfaction that comes of knowing who we are, why we're here, and where we're going.

Only those of us who persevere and delve well below the surface with God and the people in our lives are rewarded in the search for passion, purpose and peace of mind. And sometimes the things we curse and cast aside are the most priceless of all. Families and churches are often scarred by the rejection of those who can't see the true worth of the precious things they overlook and undervalue.

Even when we recognize the people and principles that make live worth living, we sometimes sell out early, convinced there's something more or better, only to be crippled later by guilt and regret. So don't fall for the fool's gold. *"For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions,"* says John. *"This world is fading away... But anyone who pleases God will live forever."* (1 John 2:16,17) It's the Father lode that matters most. *Rick Gamble*