

The Jesus Box **Money (and stuff)**

Our problem isn't our profits; it's our priorities.

1. Jesus Box people are stewards, not owners.

- *Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 14:8; Deuteronomy 8:18; Luke 14:33; 1 Chronicles 29:11*

2. Jesus Box stewards are managers.

- *1 Timothy 6:20; 1 Corinthians 4:2*
- **Time**
 - *Psalm 90:10, 12; Ephesians 5:15-16*
- **Talent**
 - *1 Peter 4:10*
- **Treasure**
 - *1 Chronicles 29:14*

3. Jesus Box stewards get paid.

- *Philippians 4:17; Matthew 6:19-21, 6:33*

4. Jesus Box people are generous.

- *Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:10-11*
- **Jesus Box people are blessed to be a blessing!**
 - *2 Corinthians 8:13-14; Proverbs 30:8-9*

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The Jesus Box: Money and Stuff

Today is the big day! While you and I have been planning our parties and menus filled with food that tastes so good and yet is so bad for us, there are a whole bunch of people who are cashing in on the game, from the NFL to the host city and venue to gambling sites to your local grocery store.

The amount of money expended by Americans on Super Bowl-related items for today's game is astronomical.¹ If you total it all up, from food, drinks, decorations and clothing to the box of Velveeta cheese that you bought for the dip, the average fan spends between \$90-\$95 dollars *each*. The total is estimated to be over \$20 billion! It's the second biggest day of food consumption in the US after Thanksgiving. By the way, 1.5 billion chicken wings will be consumed today. That means there are 750 million wingless chickens running around. Over 12.5 million pizzas will be eaten today,² but do you know what leads the list? Guacamole! Over 63,000 tons of avocados will give their life today.

Total advertising sales will be over \$800 million dollars, with each 30 second ad costing about \$8 million.

Total *legal* wagers are expected to be over \$1.4 billion, but if you add illegal gambling it's estimated to be over \$23 billion. You thought today was about a football game – it's all about the Benjamins.

Money is important to us in our society and don't you dare try to take it from us! (Even though we seem to throw it to the wind so easily for today's game).

Why am I talking about this in a sermon about The Jesus Box? Because if there's *any* box that we keep *out of* the Jesus Box, it's our money box.

Today I want us to consider the box of money – not just money, but all our stuff too. If you haven't been with us, the reason we are calling this series "The Jesus Box" is because too many of us Christians live compartmentalized lives; we have a Jesus Box, but we keep other areas of our lives separate from Christ because we try to manage them on our own, or we don't want Jesus to change things. We've looked at our work box, our relationships box, and the box of our stress and anxiety and difficulties. In each of those, the Bible shows us what an abundant life looks like when those things are placed in the Jesus Box, and the Bible has A LOT to say about the money and stuff box.

Our nation is obsessed with money, consumed by money, driven by money, revolves around money, is fueled by money, and possessed with and by money.

We as Americans are pretty good at the consumption of wealth; we are less than five

¹https://www.google.com/search?q=estimate+of+total+money+spent+on+superbowl+with+ads%2C+gambling%2C+tickets%2C+food%2C+etc&oq=estimate+of+total+money+spent+on+superbowl+with+ads%2C+gambling%2C+tickets%2C+food%2C+etc&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRiPAjIHCAIQIRiPATIBCTI0NDgwajBqN6gCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

² <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/O5mbYSS5CQW8>

percent of the world's entire population and yet we consume 25-30% of the entire world's goods. And for all of our money, we are not doing well. According to a study by the World Health Organization and Harvard Medical School, America may be the saddest nation in the world. Researchers found that 9.5 percent of American adults suffer from depression and a staggering nearly 20% of youth do, too. Last year the US was the second most depressed country in the world, behind Ukraine.

In his Wall Street Journal article, "The Great Depression," Bret Stephens argues that one reason America scores poorly as a nation is because its population is generally comfortable and wealthy. Those luxuries allow us much more time to critically pick apart life situations and personal circumstances; those who live in countries torn apart by war and economic issues have less time to fret over personal gain and ambition. They are simply too busy trying to survive.

So what could turn our sad nation around? The research shows that the citizens of the world's happier nations find a steady source of joy in their families, their religion, and their traditions – not in money.³

There is something called "the fulfillment curve," which comes from studies attempting to measure how much money we need to be happy. For folks who make \$35,000/year, they say it would be \$50,000. For folks who are making \$50,000/year, they say it would be \$75,000. For them, \$100,000 ... it goes on and on. And the research states that, when it comes to income, once we move past the survival stage of income we strive for the comfort stage, and when we get comfortable, we strive for luxury, and then luxury becomes that "never enough" scale. In fact, it's inversely proportional; in other words, our happiness and fulfillment index keeps going down further and further and never comes back up⁴ – not without a change in our perspective.

It seems to me that...

Our problem in the US isn't our ***profits***; our problem is our ***priorities***, which sounds to me *exactly* like a Jesus Box issue. Getting our money and material possessions into the right perspective in Christ is going to be the answer, and the Bible says *a lot* about that. Let me remind you of that famous saying in the Bible about money from 1 Timothy 6:10 – "Money is the root of all kinds of evil..." Is that what it says? No. It says, 'For the LOVE of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.' (niv). Money itself is neither good nor bad; it is simply a tool. The problem is when we start to love money, which is to worship it.

Putting money in the Jesus Box means we can have the right attitude toward it, while loving the Lord and not money and stuff. So what is the right attitude? The right attitude, according to the Bible, is something called "stewardship." A "steward" is someone who has been commissioned to care for and best use something that belongs to someone else. Another word for steward is "caretaker."

³ Bret Stephens, "The Great Depression," The Wall Street Journal (3-9-07)

⁴ <https://www.authenblissity.com/ponderings/fulfillment-curve>

Imagine that you have a very rich friend who owns a beautiful 5000 square foot home on Lake Washington. Your friend is so rich that he doesn't live there – he only makes it there once every couple of years for a week at a time. But he doesn't want to leave it empty, so he asks you if you would live there free of charge and take care of it. He will provide all your food and all your expenses, even your medical coverage. Sounds like a great deal, right? But make no mistake: the house is not yours; it is his. The bills are paid with his money. But as you take care of it, you get to enjoy it. But if he calls and says he wants you to use his things in a certain way, you have to do it, because they're his.

Well, in that story, God is like your rich friend, and he has entrusted you with everything – things like life, health, and material and financial resources. And He expects you to care of them while you enjoy them, but also, He expects you to use them in the way He wants His resources to be used, whenever he tells you to.

Now, before I go any further, I know some of you might be getting uncomfortable because we are talking about money in church. "I wondered how long it would take him to start talking about my money."

If you're uncomfortable with me talking about money, just be glad that I don't talk about money as often as Jesus did. Sixteen of Jesus' thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. That's forty two percent of his teaching! If I preached about money as often as Jesus taught about it, then 22 of 52 Sundays each year would be a sermon about money. That's 5 ½ months out of twelve. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses deals *directly* with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on *prayer*, less than 500 verses on *faith*, but more than 2,350 verses are on money and possessions! Jesus knows how much of a challenge this is for us, which is why he talked about what we should do with money more than He talked about Heaven and Hell combined! It is vital that we put money and stuff into the Jesus Box. So again...

1. Jesus Box people are stewards, not owners.

Take inventory, right now of what you have on you: Think about what you carried in here (*give a minute*). Your purse? Your wallet? Whatever's in them... Don't forget the clothes your wearing...all of it belongs to God. The breath in your lungs? That's His, too. And not only that: your spouse? Your children? His. *Everything* you have and are belongs to Him. The Bible says:

"The earth is the Lord's, the world, and all who live in it." (Psalm 24:1, niv)

That includes you and everything that goes along with you. In fact, God says:

"Every soul – man, woman, child – belongs to me." (Ezekiel 18:4, tmt)

The attitude of every Christian in the Jesus Box is that *all* of our life belongs to God:

"If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." (Romans 14:8, niv)

Let that sink in.

Now listen: I understand that if you are not familiar with what God's Word says, then this

might sound weird to you. What does it mean to say we belong to God? You might as well understand right now the clear truth that nothing you have is yours; it *all* belongs to God. I know; you are thinking, “But *I’m* the one who worked hard to earn all this stuff. I put in the hours to get the paycheck. I saved and invested to get what I have. I’m the one who put in years for this retirement.” Here’s the problem: God says that *He* is the one who has given you *even the ability* to earn that money in the first place:

“But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...” (Deuteronomy 8:18, niv)

...and Jesus said:

“Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”
(Luke 14:33, niv)

We must quit trying to hang on to it; we need to acknowledge it is his.

This fact that everything is God’s is actually one of the things we worship Him for. 1 Chronicles 29:11 says:

“We adore you, Lord, as the One who is over all things.” (Chronicles 29:11, nlt)

It *all* belongs to Him, and we gladly give it to Him and worship Him for it.

Swiss watchmaker Patek Philippe is known for making luxury watches; for instance, this particular watch sells for \$11.1 million. The company is also known for their advertising slogan that says, “You never actually own a Patek Philippe; you merely look after it for the next generation.” That ought to be the Christian’s slogan when it comes to money and stuff. The things we think we “own” – money, skills, accomplishments, resources, time, even our very lives – *we don’t actually own*; God does. We merely take care of it all for him.



God has *loaned* us what we have. All the raw materials of life—time, health, family and friends, intelligence, skills, possessions, everything we have belongs to Him. We are not the owners. That means that...

2. Jesus Box stewards are managers.

Jesus made this very clear in what has been called the parable or the story of the talents in Matthew 25. In today’s language, we define “talents” as gifts or skills or abilities. But in the Bible, a talent was a measure of money. A single talent was equal to several days’ wages. Jesus told a story of a landowner who went on a trip. He entrusted his possessions to three servants who were staying on his land. To the first servant he gave five talents, to the second servant he gave two talents, and to the third he gave only one talent.

It’s interesting to see how each of the servants used what had been entrusted to him. Then they reported to him after he returned. The man with five talents had invested his master’s money and had doubled it and so gave the master back ten talents. The second did the same and returned to the master four talents. But the last servant had hoarded his “loan”

by digging a hole and burying the money. He gave back to the master exactly what he had been entrusted with. Not all the servants shared the same amount, but all the servants shared the same opportunity. Two of them put the money to work responsibly. One did nothing with it. The master was very upset with the third guy who buried it. You might think that the master would be pleased with the third servant because at least he got his money back. But the master was furious with him because he did *nothing* with it. The master commended and rewarded the ones who invested his money wisely and increased it. The one who did nothing with the money lost that money along with his job and got thrown out. The point Jesus was making is that God expects us to manage what He's given us for His Kingdom.

That's why the Bible says:

"Guard what has been entrusted to your care." (1 Timothy 6:20, niv)

We have been entrusted with quite a lot, so we've been given an enormous responsibility, because, the Bible says:

"It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."
(1 Corinthians 4:2, niv)

What have we been entrusted with? What is it we are to manage that belongs to God? Three things that sum up the entirety of what we've been given:

- Time —

We have all been given a certain amount of time in this life. The Bible says:

"The length of our years is 70, or 80, if we have the strength... Teach us to number our days correctly, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:10, 12, niv)

So it's not the number of years, it's *how* we invest our time that makes the difference. Ephesians 5 says:

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:15-16, niv)

We have all been entrusted with only so much time to use for God. When you get to the end of your life, don't you want to say your time was used to make a significant contribution in this world, rather than frittered away?

Next is:

- Talent —

I'm using this word as we mean it today: God has given you gifts, talents, and abilities that are intended to be given to God and used for others. That was the point of the parable that we talked about. Here's the bottom line: Use it or lose it! We are either enlarging the Kingdom of God, or we are losing our talents. There is no hanging on to them for ourselves. That's why the Bible says:

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received (WHY?) to serve others.”
(1 Peter 4:10, niv)

In fact, if we were to look seriously at that story of the talents, it would seem to indicate that we might even lose *more* than what God has given us; we might even lose out on being in the Kingdom of God. The punishment for that one servant who didn't invest what the master gave him was pretty bad – he was thrown out. Time, talent, and finally:

- Treasure.

If it bothers you that we are talking about money, think of it this way: when you go to a doctor for your annual check-up, he or she will begin to poke, prod, and press various places, all while asking “Does this hurt? How about this?” If, when the doctor is poking you, you cry out in pain, one of two things has happened. Either the doctor has pushed too hard, without the right sensitivity, or, more likely, there's something wrong, and the doctor will say, “We'd better do some more tests because it's not supposed to hurt there.”

The same thing happens when pastors preach about money and some people get uncomfortable and begin to criticize the message or the messenger. One of two things has happened; either the pastor has pushed too hard, or, most likely, there is something wrong with the person: there is an illness in the wallet, because it's not supposed to hurt there.

But like we said earlier, all that we have is from God, and it is to be used however, and whenever, He asks for it.

Our attitude about this should reflect what the Bible says:

“Everything comes from you and we have given only what comes from your hand.”
(1 Chronicles 29:14, niv)

And God reminds us in another place in the Bible that the land is his and we are only strangers and aliens. (Leviticus 25:23)

We like to think that we have “squatters rights” – that's the notion that if we occupy a place long enough, then it becomes ours. But it doesn't work that way. Everything is God's and always will be God's, no matter how much time God gives us to live here. We are here only to manage it.

God's stewards are not owners, they are managers. But the good news is that...

3. Jesus Box stewards get paid.

God pays us for it when we manage it well for him. We talk about heavenly rewards; popular thought over the years has been that Heaven is a place where we sit on clouds and strum harps for infinity ad nauseam. Who in their right mind would look forward to that? Heaven is definitely a place of rest and relief from the burdens of sin and suffering. But it will also be a place of great learning, activity, artistic expression, discovery, camaraderie, and service. It is also a place where we will receive a great reward. The Bible says our reward will come for doing good works, persevering under trouble and persecution,

showing compassion to the needy, and treating our enemies kindly. (Ephesians 6:8; Romans 2:6, 10; Luke 6:22-23, 35; 14:13-14)

God also grants us rewards for being very generous givers. Every act of generous giving that we make, if we are Christians, is credited to our account in heaven as a reward. The Apostle Paul was talking about the financial giving of the church in Philippi, asking them to give generously and said:

*"Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be *credited to your account.*"* (Philippians 4:17, niv)

This is not some sort of “sweet by and by” thought about rewards; this is actual, real reward in the currency of heaven. We get paid *there* for our generous stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure *here*.

Look at it this way: Imagine you are alive at the end of the civil war. You are living in the south, but you are a Northerner. You plan to move home as soon as the war is over. While in the south you've accumulated lots of confederate currency. Now, suppose you know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and the end is imminent. What will you do with all your confederate money? If you're smart, there's only one answer. You should immediately cash in your Confederate currency for US currency—the only money that will have value once the war is over. Keep only enough Confederate money to meet your short-term needs.⁵

As a Christian, you have inside knowledge that the end of this world's governments is coming – possibly soon. Christ will return soon and the currency of this world will be worthless. It will also happen when you die—whichever comes first. And by the way, either event could happen at any time, and you and I don't know when that might be. But you have the ultimate insider-trading tip! Jesus is the best investment adviser there is—we have the sure promise that the currency of this world is one day soon going to be worthless, and we are told to switch our investments from the funds of earth to the funds of heaven.⁶

There's nothing wrong with Confederate money, as long as you understand its limits. But knowing that its value is short-term should radically affect your investment strategy. Here's the point: to accumulate all kinds of earthly treasures that you can't hold onto for long is just like stockpiling Confederate money even though you know it's about to become worthless. And according to Jesus, storing up earthly treasures isn't only wrong; it's just plain foolish:

"Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or--worse!--stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it?" (Matthew 6:19-21, tmt)

Here's the point of all this: *when we use the resources that God has given us in the generous ways He tells us to, we are exchanging this world's currency for Heaven's.* We are getting paid for that. Anything else forfeits our payment, our reward. But it's more than just payment as a reward someday in heaven. We also get taken care of *here*:

⁵ Randy Alcorn, The Treasure Principle, pgs 13-14

⁶ Alcorn, pg 14

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need." (Matthew 6:33, nlt)

Live *God's* way with *his* stuff (time, talent, treasure), and he will take care of everything you need.

Finally, then, the last important part of our attitude toward money needs is like we've said...

4. Jesus Box people are generous.

God has not given you what you have so that you can stash it away somewhere. It is given to you so that you can be generous with it. Of course, God expects you to take care of those whom you are responsible for. But we need to remain generous.

And as long as you keep giving it away, he will keep giving it back to you. Jesus said:

"Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands---all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you." (Luke 6:38, gnt)

The more you give, the more comes back to you, because God is the greatest giver in the universe. You cannot out give God. Go ahead and try. See what happens.

R.G. LeTourneau became wealthy by inventing large earth-moving machines. He gave away 90% of his income in his life. The money came in faster than he could give it away. LeTourneau said, "I shovel it out and God shovels it back—but God has a bigger shovel!" That's a lot for a guy who made giant earth moving shovels!



In principle, he is right. But before I go further, let me say this here: God is not some kind of heavenly slot machine that's broken and keeps paying out. We do not give generously *in order to* get rich. We give generously because God tells us to. Giving is a *sacrifice*, and that means it doesn't always feel good. Sacrifice means we give without expecting to get it back. God's payoff is very real, but the Bible says it comes at *the proper time* (Galatians 6:9). That may be now, or it may be in eternity. God knows when you need it, and that is when you will get it.

God has given you lots of material blessings. Have you ever asked yourself, "Why has God given me so much?" You don't need to wonder. The Bible tells us exactly why He provides us with more money than we need:

"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that . . ." (1 Corinthians 9:10-11, niv)

So that *what*? How do you think God will finish that sentence? "So that we can get rich here on earth"? "So that others will see how much God loves us by making us rich"? That is what the TV preachers will tell you; that teaching is something called "the prosperity gospel," and it's *wrong*; that's the false doctrine that says God wants us to always be

materially wealthy and healthy all the time here on earth. It is not in the Bible; I don't care how many times TV preachers tell you that is. They are greedy for your money, and they are giving you false teaching. Let me tell you exactly why God gives us so much:

"...so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." (2 Corinthians 9:10-11, niv)

God comes right out and tells us why he gives us more than we need. It's not so we can find more ways to spend it on stuff. It's not so we can indulge ourselves and spoil our children. It's so we can give—*generously*, and so that people will see God as we give.

When God provides us with more money, we often think "Well—this is a blessing!" And while that is true, it is even more appropriate if we say to ourselves, "This is another opportunity for me to be a blessing!" That's because...

Jesus Box people are blessed to be a blessing!

God doesn't necessarily expect you to go broke being generous, but he is expecting you to sacrifice for the cause that is greater than yourself—His kingdom and his church. The Apostle Paul said:

"I am not trying to relieve others by putting a burden on you; but since you have plenty at this time, it is only fair that you should help those who are in need. Then, when you are in need and they have plenty, they will help you. In this way both are treated equally." (2 Corinthians 8:13-14, gnt)

God doesn't want you to have too little, nor does He want you to have too much. He intends for you to have enough, and then give it away as he leads you. Proverbs in the Bible says:

"Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8-9, niv)

We keep what we need, and we give away what God asks.

You are not a bucket to collect things for yourself; you are a pipeline for things to flow to others. God doesn't pour into your life to fill it up but to pass through your hands. You use what you need, and the rest passes through.

So you might ask, if I give to West Valley Church, how do I know what they are going to do with it? I can tell you that you can look at our monthly financial statement. We account for every single penny you give. We have a finance team who looks over the books every month and your Leadership Team does the same. We do an external audit by an accountant every year. We give over \$130,000 every year to the work of the Church of the Nazarene around the world and in addition to ministries we support here in town, like Love INC, the Union Gospel Mission, and Life Choices. We also invest in the church's ministries here in West Valley that support the ministries you enjoy and benefit from, and that serve the children and families in our neighborhood at Wide Hollow Elementary and out at Mountainview Elementary. When you give to West Valley Church, you are investing

in the Kingdom through your church, locally and around the world.

So it's only right that we consider money and stuff going into the Jesus Box. Why not be a steward in ways you never have before? Why not try giving more than you ever have before? Realize that you are not the owner, God is, but you *are* the manager, and he expects you to do something with it for him and others. Put your money and stuff into the Jesus Box. Don't leave a penny or an ounce outside the box.

How you invest by giving away what he's entrusted to you will determine how you will get paid. How well you manage God's resources, and the more generous you are with them, the more you will benefit, the more you will be paid, here and forever in heaven.

Jesus said in his sermon on the mount, Matthew 6:21 –

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

That means your heart reveals what you treasure. But it also means your heart will follow your treasure. How many of you want to love Jesus more and more? Then put your treasure in the Jesus Box and your heart will follow it to him. Put it in the Jesus Box.

Prayer

Benediction:

God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:19-20, niv)