

Laying the foundation: Whose money is it anyway?

Message for Sunday, January 13, 2012
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Psalm 24; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; Matthew 6:32-33

Children's Message: Matthew 6:24, 33
Show the children a \$20 bill. Ask, "What could I do with it?"
Then show them a hammer. Ask, "What could I do with it?"
Both are tools. I can take them and use them to do things.

What would you think of someone who fell in love with hammers? (hug and kiss the hammer).

- Collected them
- Stored them in a vault
- Hired guards to keep people away

Weird!

Money is a tool, just like a hammer. When people fall in love with money (hug and kiss the money), strange things happen.

The Bible tells us to make God # 1 in our lives, not money. It's impossible to love both God and money.

Sermon "Laying the foundation: Whose money is it anyway?"

Three children were playing together. Their conversation turned to how their parents made their living. One boasted, "My Mom is a psychologist. Someone comes in to see her, they talk for an hour, and she gets \$60."

The second child thought his family was better. "My dad is a doctor. Someone comes in to see him. He looks at the person, taps their chest, asks some questions, writes a note, and gets \$100."

The third child thought she could top them all. "My Mom is a minister. On Sunday morning, she speaks for 20 minutes, and it takes six people to gather up all the money!"

Money — it's a popular topic for conversation wherever you go: money in our personal lives, money in the church, money in the government, money in the economy. Disagreements about money are the second greatest common cause of marriage break-up, after alcohol abuse.

Money is a popular topic in the Bible, too. Jesus talked a great deal about money. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. Altogether, the Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions.

That's why we're going to spend a few Sundays reading some of those passages, learning what God wants us to know about money.

I'm excited about this! We need to know God's principles for how to use money and possessions. If we don't get a grip on money, then it gets a grip on us — and that's not pretty.

I believe that as we study what God has to tell us in the Bible about money, rather than feeling guilty, we will be inspired and encouraged. We will see the proper place of money in our lives and in our church. We will find practical help for how to handle money. That's why I'm excited about this. So let's start!

1) It all belongs to God

Psalm 24:1, Today's English Version:
**The world and all that is in it belong to the LORD;
the earth and all who live on it are his.**

Edwin Hughes was an English preacher who once preached on this verse, saying how everything in the world belonged to God, and we are stewards responsible for looking after it. There was a wealthy farmer in the congregation who took offence at this notion. The farmer invited Hughes to come to his home for lunch. After the meal, the farmer took the minister out to look around the farm, the gardens, the woodland, the buildings, the crops in the bins. It was the result of many years of hard work and wise planning.

"Now are you going to tell me," he demanded when the tour was completed, "that all this land does not belong to me?" Hughes smiled and suggested, "Ask me that same question again a hundred years from now."

This principle that our money and our possessions are really not ours, that they belong to God, is not based just on one fluke verse in the Bible. It is theme of the whole Bible, from cover to cover.

- God created the world. He has owner's rights.
- God is Lord over all the world, over all the people.
- On the day of judgement, we will be accountable for how we used the things he gave us: the world, our time, our money, our relationships. We are

accountable for how we used these things because they are *God's*, not ours.

In other words, God is the owner, we are the managers. Our job is to wisely and rightly use the resources that God has given us.

2) God wants us to use our (his) money to help others

Here is another verse where we see again that principle that it all belongs to God:

1 Timothy 6:17-18, New Living Translation:
 “Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them.”

Are you rich? Well, at the end of the day, do you have a place to go to which is warm and safe? Then you're rich. Did you eat a good breakfast today? If so, then you're better off than 2/3 of the world's population. Can you turn on a tap and just like that get hot water for washing? You're rich. Speaking of water, can you drink water from your tap without fear of getting some horrible disease? Friends, we are among the richest people on earth!

Like the farmer in that story, it is tempting to be proud of our achievements and our successes. This is especially true in the area of money, which our culture worships as its god. The newsstands are full of magazines and newspapers which idolize the rich and famous. But God says, “Don't be proud of your money. First of all, it's not really yours. Secondly, it'll let you down. Put your trust in me instead.”

The Bible says that what we have has come from God. That immediately raises an important question: why did God give us so much, and others so little? I'm afraid I don't have the answer to that question. But I know what the answer *isn't*: it isn't so that we can keep it all to ourselves.

Some people get hung up on trying to figure out then answer to that question. It's not a useful pursuit. It's a bit like the story of General Stonewall Jackson in the American Civil War. Jackson's army found themselves on one side of a river when they needed to be on the other side. Jackson told his engineers to build a bridge so his army could cross over. He then called in his wagon

master to tell him to have all the equipment ready to cross as soon as the bridge was ready.

The wagon master started gathering all the logs, rocks and fence rails he could find and built a bridge. Long before daylight the wagon master told General Jackson that all the wagons and artillery had crossed the river. Jackson asked where are the engineers and what are they doing? The wagon master's only reply was that they were in their tent drawing up plans for a bridge.

Look again at the verse above:

Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them.

Rather than worry ourselves with the unanswerable question of “Why?”, God is telling us to act on the questions “Who?” and “What?” and “How?”

- Whom can I help?
- What can I do for others?
- How can I best make a difference?

What about you? How can you best make a difference in your world?

3) God supplies all that we need

I heard about a man who had always been a terrible worrier. Then he lost his job, and he *really* had something to be concerned about. Shortly after that, his friends were astonished to find him happy and carefree. They asked him about his worrying.

“I found an ad for a professional worrier. He does all my worrying for me, and it's taken a great load off my shoulders. And he only charges \$1,000 per day.”

“What?!!” his friends exclaimed. “Where are you going to find that kind of money?”

“Oh, that's *his* worry,” came the cheerful answer.

Good joke, but here's something true that's even better: Jesus has promised that we really don't have to worry about where things are coming from. God will supply our needs:

Matthew 6:32-33, Living Bible:

“Your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well what you need, and he will give them to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to.”

I realize that for some people this bold statement may seem too simplistic and even irresponsible, but it is biblical. This is where we draw the line between a money problem and a spiritual problem. The question really is: do I trust God?

That's what it really comes down to: Who or what is Number One in my life? If it's my job or my status or my standard of living, then I will have to constantly worry and work to maintain that position. But if I make God Number One in every area of my life, then I can put that energy to use in more productive ways.

I've read biographies of many Christians who testify over and over again to the truth of this promise. One of the most famous is George Mueller, a minister in Bristol, England, who not only served a congregation, but also ran a group of orphanages. We actually have his diary, which records his circumstances and God's supply over more than 50 years.

He never told anyone when he was in need, only God. His diary shows many times that he went to bed at night with no money in the account and no food in the kitchen for breakfast for the children. Yet they never missed a meal. Here is what happened one day in 1840:

One morning the plates and cups and bowls on the table were empty. There was no food in the larder, and no money to buy food. The children were standing waiting for their morning meal. Mueller prayed, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat." Right then there was a knock on the door. The baker stood there, and said, "Mr. Mueller, I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn't have bread for breakfast and the Lord wanted me to send you some. So I got up at 2 a.m. and baked some fresh bread, and have brought it." Mueller thanked the man. No sooner had this transpired when there was a second knock at the door. It was the milkman. He announced that his milk cart had broken down right in front of the Orphanage, and he would like to give the children his cans of fresh milk so he could empty his wagon and repair it.

He said he counted more than 50,000 specific answers to prayer for their needs. Altogether, he received seven and a half million dollars. And just so you don't get the wrong idea, he kept almost nothing for himself. He and his wife lived in a small house, and left no estate when they died.

God says to us, "You look after the big things, and I'll look after the details. You focus your whole life on

following me and obeying me, and I won't let you down. That's a promise."

Next Steps:

- Choose to put God first in your life. Everything else depends on that.
- Dedicate all that you have, and all that you are, to God. "Lord, all this is yours. Help me to use it wisely for your glory."
- Look around you. How can you help make a difference in the lives of people, near and far? (Hint: this involves a *lot* more than just money. It means your time, your life.)