

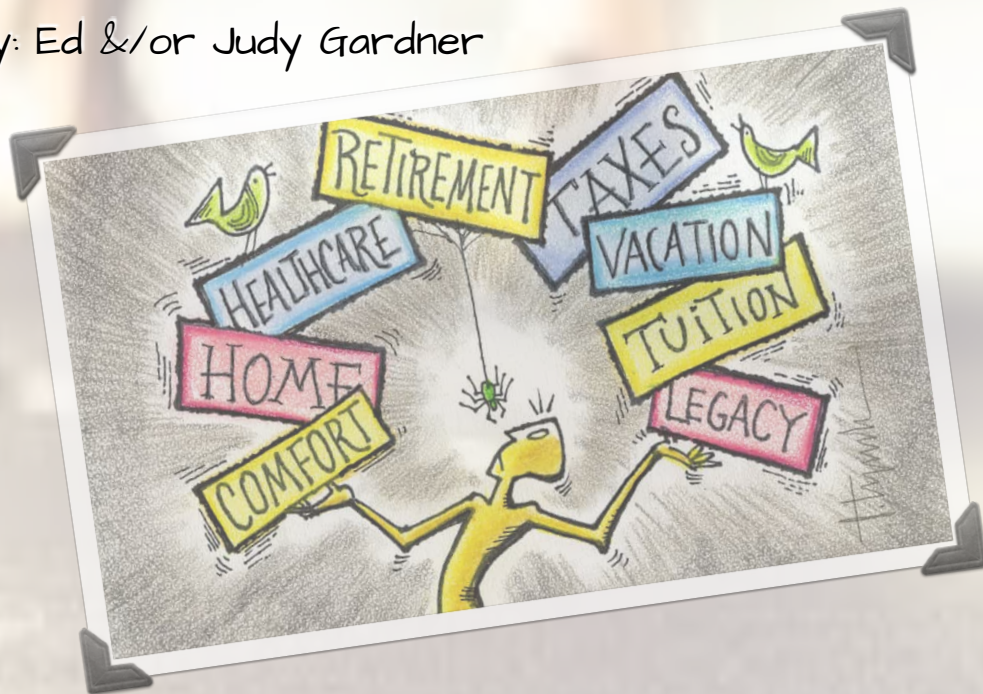
August 4-8, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 187

How Money Makes Us Worry-
No Matter How Much We Have (or haven't) Got

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

August 2/3, 2025



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to spend some time looking at the other side of the coin when it comes to worrying about money. Last weekend we talked about the parable of the rich fool. That story is pretty important for us to remember as we get ready to jump into this next part of Jesus' teaching on money worries.

If you were at church last weekend (or if you read last week's reflections) you might remember how the parable of the rich fool goes. Jesus is teaching a huge mob of people. He's talking about eternal life, the Kingdom of God and all that other good stuff He spent so much time telling us about. While He's in the midst of his lesson some guy interrupts and asks Jesus to mediate a probate dispute between he and his brother:

Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." Luke 12:13 (NLT)

Wow. Money can really blind us to what's appropriate and what's not. So what's going on here? Well Jesus' main audience in the first century was the poor and the dispossessed. There weren't a lot of wealthy people who flocked to follow Him. This guy asking Jesus to be the mediator between him and his brother would have been different. This guy had money- it was currently tied up in probate but he had money. So Jesus tells a story about a rich fool. This rich fool has a fertile farm that produces a huge surplus of crops one year and so the guy starts having an inner monologue (a one person staff meeting of sorts):

He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"'
Luke 12:17-19 (NLT)

This guy has more than he needs but instead of thanking God for this windfall he takes all the credit for himself and doesn't consider using some of his windfall to bless others with less than he has or to give part of it back to God's Kingdom. He is the original bellybutton gazer. Nobody else really exists in his world- not even God. Everyone else is just bit players in the movie of his life- including God. The punchline of the story (if you want to call it that) is that the guy has no idea that his ticket is getting punched later than evening:

But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' Luke 12:20 (NLT)

When I was little I'd hear this story in church and think that God killed the guy because he kept all his money to himself. But that's not what's going on here. It was just the guy's time and God knew it. The reason this made the rich man a fool is because he invested only in this life and ignored the next one- and the next one will last for eternity instead of 80 years (give or take). And so Jesus finishes the story with this advice for all of us:

This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." Luke 12:21 (NIV)

So that's Jesus' advice about money to people who have a lot of it. I wonder what his advice would be for those who struggle with making enough money and they're living paycheck to

paycheck and barely getting by (or not getting by at all)? What advice might Jesus have about money for those of us who don't have a huge surplus of it? That's what we'll look at this week but for today maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on whether or not we're investing in the next world (you know the world that will last forever) or are you only investing in this world? Are you living a life that is "rich toward God" and what would that even look like?

Tuesday Reflection: So the first thing that Jesus tells us in this section of His teaching on money where He's speaking not to those who have a surplus of money but to those who are struggling to get by is that money can make anybody worry. And worry about money is what allows it to control our lives so effectively.

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear." Luke 12:22 (NIV)

As I pointed out in yesterday's reflection, the parable of the rich fool is Jesus speaking directly to the well off. He's talking about how to not let an abundance of money rob us of our humanity. But then Jesus changes tracks- notice how Luke makes sure and let's us know that who Jesus is talking to has just switched. With the parable of the rich fool Jesus was talking to the rich guy (and wealthy people in general) about the dangers associated with money. Now Luke makes a point of telling us that now Jesus is talking to His disciples. His disciples were not from the upperclass. The only one who probably had much money would have been Matthew but the Bible doesn't really say if Matthew got rid of all of his ill-gotten wealth or held on to it and put it towards Jesus' ministry. But for the most part Jesus' disciples were peasants. They were the working poor. They would have been out in the audience listening to the parable of the rich fool thinking to themselves that they didn't have to worry about the dangers of money because they didn't have enough to worry about. But Jesus points out that even those among us who have very little still allow money to dominate their lives.

The worries of those of us that are barely getting by and living paycheck to paycheck are different than the worries of the rich but money still dominates the thoughts of both ends of the spectrum. And all of us in between. At least they will if we don't learn to let Jesus help us and fix us. And don't worry- Jesus will tell us what will fix us and keep money from dominating our lives and we'll get to that prescription later in the week but first it's important to understand how Jesus works in our lives. He doesn't act like a drill sergeant who just screams "STOP IT!!!" in our face, expecting that somehow by the power of our own will we can break the power of money in our lives. Instead He works as a heart surgeon who will help us remove what is at the root of our worries and then as a spiritual therapist (sort of like a physical therapist) who will build up in us what we need to be freed from those worries. And what do we need to be freed? Jesus tells us:

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things. Luke 12:29-30 (NIV)

What's Jesus' advice? Don't run after money. Don't let it control you. Don't let it dominate your life. Don't set-your-heart on money because it will eventually let you down. And again, notice He's not talking about having a surplus at this point- He's talking about what happens when we struggle with money for food to feed our families. Of course we are going to have

serious concerns when we are wondering where the money for our food or clothing or shelter is going to come from because it's surely not going to come from my bank account. What Jesus is advising is not to ignore it and pretend it's not there but to refuse to let it have your heart. What He's saying is money can control your life if you have too much of it and money can control your life if you don't have enough of it.

I always feel a bit like a used car salesman when say stuff like this because even though there are a lot of people in our church who have more money than my wife and I have I know there's a lot of people at our church that have less than we have. And for me- who doesn't struggle over where I'll find money for food or gas or clothes or shelter- to tell those of you who do have to struggle over those things to just buck up feels quite awkward. I often feel like a used car salesman when I do that. Hey! What will it take for me to put you into this contentment where you don't let money dominate your life today?

So please don't take this as me telling you how to deal with your money worries. Take it as it's offered- as Jesus telling you how to deal with your money worries. Because all I'm doing is relaying what Jesus taught and trying to break it down into an understandable lesson- although I do struggle with "understandable" part more often than I'd like ;o) Tomorrow we'll begin talking about how to set our hearts and how not to run-after the things that the world runs after but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on how money has the power to control the very rich and the very poor and what Jesus' advice to each group is.

Wednesday Reflection: I mentioned yesterday that Jesus is not a drill sergeant who just screams "STOP IT!" in our face. He knows we can't just stop it. If we had it in us to just stop doing the toxic stuff in our lives Jesus wouldn't have had to come for us. No He's not a drill sergeant- He's a heart surgeon. Something God has been talking about for millennia longer than we've actually had heart surgeons in our world:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)

He wants to cut out the old stony heart that resides within us and replace it with a new heart and a new spirit. So rather than just yelling stop it in our faces Jesus offers to remove what is damaging us and install within us the thing that will make us free. So let's start here- what is the issue Jesus is trying to do heart surgery on us in this case? He's trying to remove money's hold on our lives- whether we have a surplus of it or none at all:

And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world.

Luke 12:29-30 (NLT)

Again notice He's not talking about how to deal with too much money- He's talking about how to deal with the reality that I don't have enough of it. And before He shows us what we need to add to our lives in order to free ourselves from the domination of money in our lives he talks a bit about what it is that is at the root of the issue- what is it that dominates our thoughts? Because it's one thing to wrestle with budget shortfalls that will impact food, clothing and shelter but it's not helpful. Why? Why is Jesus able to say stuff like this while looking straight into the faces of some of the poorest and most subjugated people on the face

of the earth? Because He knows what makes up Life. Not life like with a lowercase "l" but LIFE! All uppercase with an exclamation point at the end of it. Jesus knows what makes a person's life- after all He created us. He came up with the idea of LIFE! and he knows what will rob us of that LIFE!

For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. Luke 12:23 (NIV)

While He's talking about the power of money to dominate our lives to the poor people that made up the lion's share of His audience Jesus tells them to not worry about money because life is more than just food and clothing. But if you remember Jesus tells the rich people what life isn't just a few verses before:

Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. Luke 12:15 (NIV)

So to the poor He says don't let worries over how little you have rob you of the LIFE! He came to provide you with. And to the rich He says don't let worries over how much you have rob you of the LIFE! that He came to provide you with. And Jesus tells them both what is at the root of these worries about money and they both come down to the job of a good parent. What are the main two jobs of a parent? To offer a sense of unconditional love and worth to our children and then to make sure they have a feeling of security and safety. When we worry about money- no matter how much or how little we may have- Jesus basically tells us we're trying to play God. We are trying to control things that are beyond our ability to control:

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Luke 12:25-26 (NLT)

Worry doesn't change anything except the health of our bodies, our minds and relationships. Worry does a bang-up job of impacting our physical and mental health as well as our relationships. Why is that? Because we look to money to provide for us what only God can truly provide. Money promises that it will give you your sense of worth (if you have enough of it or a deep sense of being unworthy if you don't) and your sense of safety/security. But ultimately it's an illusion that will rob you of the LIFE! Jesus came to provide for you. Jesus tells us only the unconditional love of the Father can truly provide our sense of worth (no matter if you have a lot of money or none at all) and our sense of safety/security.

And that's why Jesus tells us that there's something within us that has to be cut out by the Heart Surgeon if we're ever going to be freed from the power of money to dominate our lives. And what the Surgeon needs to cut out of us is our belief that we can provide our own sense of worth and safety- in this case through the accumulation of enough money. Again this is something that all of us require no matter how much (or how little) money we've got. Tomorrow we'll start talking about what the Spiritual Therapist will build up within us to ensure that our desire to play God isn't able to rule our lives anymore but for today let's spend some time reflecting on how we like to play God in our lives by providing enough money to give us a deep sense of worth and safety.

Thursday Reflection: So far this week we've seen that money has the power to control not just the rich who have a ton of it but it can also control the poor who don't have

enough. We've talked about how Jesus is not a drill sergeant that screams "STOP IT!" in our faces but instead He's more like a heart surgeon that wants to help you remove what is at the core of our worries about money- the idea that we can play God in our lives by getting enough money that it will provide the sense of worth and sense of safety that can truly only be provided by God Himself. That's the surgery part- He removes the part of us that wants to play God by getting us to consider a few things. First He tells us to consider the birds:

Consider the ravens. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Luke 12:24-25 (NLT)

Why does He tell us to consider the ravens? He's trying to explain to us how much God cares about us by talking about how much He cares about the ravens. And then He tells us God cares far more about us than He does about the birds. Doesn't mean God doesn't like the birds. He does. He loves them. But we are on a different level to Him. Basically Jesus is telling us to get our sense of worth and value not from how much money we do (or do not) have. Rather we are to get our sense of value from God Himself who cares about us and promises to provide for all of our needs. Again let's remember Jesus is talking to some of the poorest people on the planet when He says this. These aren't my words- they're Jesus'. But then He tells us to consider the flowers in the fields:

Consider the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? Luke 12:27-28 (NLT)

Once again He talks about our worth but here He's also talking about our sense of safety and security- something we often turn to money for. Jesus seems to be saying that even if you don't know where your next meal is coming from or what you'll do tomorrow you can still prevent that lack of resources from robbing you of your sense of worth and safety. So that's what the great Heart Surgeon needs to cut out of us if we're going to stop being dominated by worries about money. But once He's begun the work of removing our God-complex (which we do by considering the birds and the flowers) He then switches roles and becomes our Spiritual Therapist.

He can't just leave you torn down by showing you that you aren't God and you can't control your money let alone your life. Now He turns to the final step by telling us what will drive the control of our hearts by money right out of our lives. That step is once again (surprisingly) the same advice He gave the rich guy about not letting money control his life- He just sort of repackages how He says it. First He reminds them of why they worry about money in the first place:

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. Luke 12:29-30 (NIV)

The reason we worry about money is because we've set our hearts on it. Whether we have a lot or not much we set our hearts on money and look to it to give us our sense of worth and

safety. In fact we run after the things that money can provide for us. Basically He's saying money dominates our minds when we are in that situation and when that happens to us Jesus' assertion is that we've forgotten that we have a Father in Heaven who cares about us desperately and who wants to provide for our needs. Jesus is saying we are trying to get money to play the role of God in our lives and when we allow it it sets our hearts on money rather than on God and our relationships. He tells us not to worry because God isn't trying to keep the Kingdom from you- he wants nothing more than to give you the Kingdom:

So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. Luke 12:32 (NLT)

This is why Jesus is saying we shouldn't let worry make us fearful and worried- you've got a Father in Heaven who wants nothing more than to give us the Kingdom and that ultimately will have nothing to do with money. It's easy to let money control our lives whether we're rich or poor or anywhere in between which is why Jesus keeps reminding us that we've got a Father who wants to provide us with the things we truly need. It's also easy to let money convince us that God doesn't care about us or He's forgotten us. Think about this- every single time Jesus speaks directly to God He uses the word, Father. Every single time with one exception- when He was on the cross:

At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Matthew 27:46 (NLT)

This is the only time Jesus doesn't refer to God as Father when He's speaking directly to God. Why the sudden change when He's on the cross? Because He was experiencing what all of us humans experience for the very first time. Every day of His life while on this earth Jesus felt the connection with God that provided Him with the sense of worth and safety that comes with that felt connection. Until now. Now on the cross Jesus is experiencing what all of us experience at some point in our lives- the feeling that God has abandoned us. That He doesn't care about us and He won't provide for our ultimate safety. And when He experiences that feeling He can't help Himself- He cries out in frustration and pain.

But Jesus went to the cross so that the feeling that God doesn't care about us could never have the last say in our lives. He died so we could find life- life here on this earth that can only be found in Jesus and a promise that no matter how hard this life may be this isn't the end. Your struggles will not have the last say in your life- God will. And this is the same God who Jesus describes as the Father who wants nothing more than to give us the Kingdom. So the surgeon will cut out that cancer of our striving to let money take the place of God in our lives but it's not His final act. Now comes the work of the great Spiritual Therapist and we'll talk about what Jesus says we need to do if we are going to break free from the power and control of money in our lives. We'll talk about that tomorrow but for today many you and I could spend some time reflecting on why it is that money plays such a large role in our lives and why we allow it to dominate our hearts and minds- whether we've got a lot of it or not very much.

Friday Reflection: Today we're going to finally get to what Jesus tells us is the prescription to keep money from controlling your life. As our Spiritual Therapist Jesus knows that He can't do all the work for us. If you've ever been to physical therapy you know that

what they do is work you over and show you who to exercise or stretch or move so you can rebuild what you've lost over time. Jesus the great Spiritual Therapist works in a similar way. First He cuts out of us what we need to have cut out of us by changing the way we think about money and then He gives us homework to do on our own in order to build up our spiritual muscles (so to speak and while we're here this reminds of of a story so you're going to hear about it even though it has nothing to do with today's reflection. I was talking about the fruit of the Spirit once and I was talking about how things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, humility and self control are very much like muscles and you have to exercise them every day if they're going to get stronger. On that particular day I was talking about love and how we needed to build up our capacity to love and so when I finished praying after the lesson was over I looked up at the congregation and said the fateful words, "now everybody get out there and work your love muscle." I didn't realize yet that I just made a faux pas but I would soon. As I walked back to the tech booth to put up my mic I saw one lady frantically whispering to her husband and when she saw me approaching she got out of there quick. The guy leaned over to me and said, "I'd recommend never using the phrase love-muscle" again. Like I said it has nothing to do with today's reflection but when I mentioned spiritual muscles it made me think of it).

Although maybe it does make a good illustration for this idea that Jesus is going to give us "exercises" to do in our lives so that money won't be able to control us anymore. And what are those exercises you ask? Well they both come to what we're doing with our money. Here's the first one:

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need. So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

Luke 12:31-32 (NLT)

First of all, seek the Kingdom of God above all else. Now this is talking about more than just your money but it's not talking about less than that. If you believe seeking-the-kingdom-above-all-else won't have any impact on your money then you're kidding yourself. It's close but as it turns out Jesus talks about money more than He does about any other subject. What's the one that's close? Himself. He talks about Who He is and what He's come to do all the time. Just not as much as He talked about money. Seeking the Kingdom of God above all else will require your whole being. Everything you are. It puts the Kingdom of God front and center in your life. And it's not tough to find it- when we try God is delighted to give us the Kingdom according to Jesus.

So one of the prescriptions Jesus gives us to get over the control of money our lives is to invest in the Kingdom of God with our money and our lives. He doesn't require all of our money but the idea that seeking-the-kingdom-above-all-else isn't talking about your money too is wishful thinking. But there's one specific area of focus that Jesus wants to bring to our attention:

Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. Luke 12:33-34 (NLT)

The poor. I know, some of you are thinking, “but that’s me. I’m the poor. Surely He doesn’t expect me to give when I’m one of the ones He’s talking about people sharing their money with. But unfortunately He does expect it and prescribes it to keep the lack of money from controlling our lives. Remember, Jesus is now speaking to His disciples- not the crowd as a whole. He told the story of the rich fool to the entire crowd but what we’ve been reflecting on all week- how to deal with the control of money in the life of someone who struggles with having enough- He focuses on His disciples. Who were peasants. They were the working poor. Even in the Sermon On The Mount where Jesus is speaking to people even more destitute than His own disciples Jesus tells those who are living in poverty to give to the poor. In fact, He assumes they already are giving to the poor. Remember when it comes to giving back to God it’s not about how much you give but the sacrificial heart that it is given from.

Jesus calls this storing-up-treasures-in-heaven. You can’t take any of your wealth with you when you go to the next life but you can send it ahead so you’ve got something waiting for you when you arrive. And how do we do that? How do we store-up-for-ourselves-treasures-in-heaven? By seeking the Kingdom of God first above all else and by making sure we are giving something back to God by investing in His Kingdom and by investing in the poor.

Investing. It’s an interesting word isn’t it? People will talk about investing in lots of things. The stock market, your health, your mental health, real estate, gold- this list goes on and on. Then there are the things people will talk about “investing” in that kind of cause my eyebrows to raise just a touch. I’ve heard people talk about investing in a really good pillow (because my sleep is so important). I’ve heard people talk about investing in tacos because it’s a commitment to their long term happiness and mental health (I do admit I find that one compelling). I’ve heard people talk about investing in crocs, a Costco sized jar of Nutella, a fridge just for beverages and plants that they will inevitably kill with too much (or not enough) sunlight and water. We all have our ideas about what investments will bring about the greatest bang for our buck but Jesus is the only one with the answer about investments that will last for eternity.

Jesus reminds us that any investments we make on this earth will eventually be eaten by moths or destroyed by rust or stolen by thieves. You can’t take it with you. So the only way we can truly invest in eternity is by putting some of our money into the furthering of God’s Kingdom and by investing in the poor. Those are the two things that Jesus says will free you from the control of money in your life- whether you’ve got a lot of it or not very much. So today maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on how we’re doing with our eternal investments. God doesn’t require all of your money but He does warn us that if we don’t learn how to be extravagantly generous by investing in His Kingdom and in the poor then we aren’t building up any eternal rewards or treasures in Heaven.