

God, Man, & MAMMON

Navigating the tension between
the material and the spiritual

Chapter 3



with
Mitch
Anthony

IN THIS CHAPTER

THE SUPPLY PARADOX

The world tells us to focus our energies on seeking after the things we need. Jesus tells us to focus on his Kingdom and doing well in it. But what will happen if we don't prioritize our needs?



THE SUPPLY PARADOX

Do not worry then, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we wear for clothing?” For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things

— Matthew 6:31–32, NASB

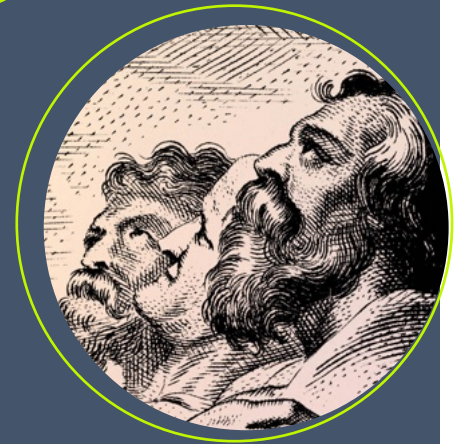
Jesus offers a paradox that the world struggles to understand. Change your focus. Lose the obsession with money and things—and they start showing up at your door. Imagine the possibilities for our lives when we fully embrace this truth. We will then begin to understand what it means to trust God for all that we need. We trust him to supply our needs and then give him gratitude when the provision arrives. The world operates according to a different law of focus: “Obsess over prospering and make sure everyone understands you are the genius behind the prosperity.”

Jesus tells us to focus on him and his example of caring for people. What does the world tell us to focus on? In the former best-selling New Age tome, *The Secret*, the author championed the law of attraction as being a magnetic catalyst for money, lovely things, lovely people, and even choice parking spots. The author, promoting a narcissistic noetic code sprinkled with holy water, failed to recognize that this desire to attract things is tantamount to obsessing upon oneself. I laughed out loud when reading the author’s advice to not look at an overweight person—as you certainly wouldn’t want that image in your head. It was then that I fully realized what *The Secret* truly was: “Think only about yourself.”

Compare this substance-driven, self-absorption and material madness to Jesus’ philosophy of losing ourselves for his cause and allowing him to bless us. New Age blather pales in motive and fails to deliver quality of life. It is but one more example of a so-called, “light” that is destined to fill us with darkness. Two points are important in this text. First, when Jesus talks about the possibility that the object you expect to get light from actually provides darkness, he is talking about a material focus. Second, the darkness that results from such deception is so great that Jesus intones gravely, “How great is that darkness!”

Jesus would advise us not only to look at that overweight person but also to talk with, befriend, respect, and love him or her without any regard for physical appearance. He calls his followers to demonstrate a transcendent quality of love—especially toward

BUT IF THINE EYE
BE EVIL, THY
WHOLE BODY
SHALL BE FULL OF
DARKNESS.



those whom the world labels unlovely—and to lose themselves in the tasks before them, appearances aside. Although we can't all be perfectly sculpted, we can all be loving.

The world that gullibly rushes to this ilk of self-indulgent logic will certainly struggle to embrace Jesus' ironic "the less you care about it, the easier it will find its way to you" approach to material gain. Jesus is literally saying that the thing (money) has a greater chance of appearing to the degree that you do not care about it. Put that in your Forbes 500 pipe and smoke it. I have experienced firsthand Jesus' paradoxical philosophy in my life. "These things will be added to you" has become a reality in my life that I had not bargained for.

Instead of obsessing over money, we have attempted to throw our energies into ideas we believe in—and the money seemed to come directly as a result of these ideas. There were many years in which these ideas attracted little attention and even less income, but I still enjoyed laboring over the ideas. These were ideas about helping people and finding purpose. I recognize that these ideas never would have attracted a dime of profit without God miraculously opening roads for these ideas to travel upon. This is the "will be given to you" piece of the equation.

My wife and I marvel at the charitable opportunities we have today. In the last decade we were able to give away more than we lived on in the decade before. This was not the result of being obsessed with making money. It was the result of attempting to do something meaningful and God simply blessing the effort. By "seek ye first the Kingdom" God is basically saying that he pours out his material blessings on those who pour out themselves.

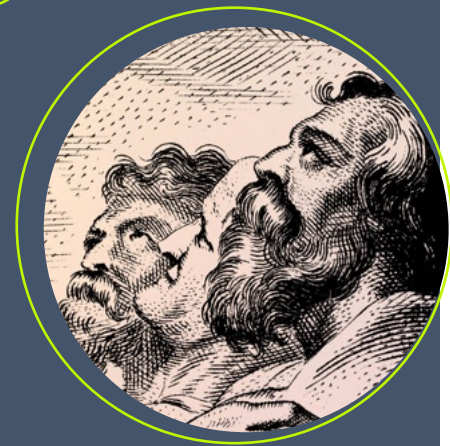
A couple of years ago I met Dr. Aila Tasse, founder of Lifeway Mission International in Nairobi, Kenya. His organization has won and made disciples of over a half million Africans in the last 20 years—close to half of which were practicing Muslims, as Dr. Tasse once was. Outside of his office was a pile of bricks that looked like rubble, and so I asked him what they were for. Dr. Tasse began describing the Catalyst Center that he felt he was supposed to build. This center would serve to train and house the many church and mission organizations that came to Lifeway Mission to learn the "Disciple Making Method" which had led to their astounding Kingdom success.

I asked how it had gotten to this point (there was about a three-foot-high wall erected for what was to be a four-story dormitory for 70 people) and he replied, "Some people bring bricks, and some bring cement. As they bring it, we continue building."



JESUS'S LOGIC:

"THE LESS YOU
CARE ABOUT IT,
THE EASIER IT
WILL FIND ITS
WAY TO YOU."



I then looked at the map of Eastern Africa on the wall showing the hundreds of churches they had planted. I asked Dr. Tasse, “What is your budget for all this?”

“Whatever God brings,” was his answer.

And he meant it. I was stunned by this man’s simple, humble trust for God’s provision in God’s timing. He wasn’t forcing the issue with a building campaign or appeals for matching funds, etc. He was just seeking the Kingdom and allowing God to “add these things to him.” It’s regrettable how scarce it is to find examples of this kind of humble trust in our world today...and incredibly refreshing to find an example like Dr. Tasse.

The catch to “seeking the Kingdom”— if I may call it that—is that opportunities that come our way to do something important quite often arrive with some degree of risk. Just

as Dr. Tasse laid the first row of bricks without knowing where the remaining funds would come from. We must make the decision to capitalize on the opportunities that we have now to build. I am never comfortable saying, “I capitalized,” because I know that without God’s blessing, these risks might well have come to nothing. However, risk does play a role. Faith (in an inspired idea or vision) always involves some

degree of risk (i.e., trusting God) to bring it to pass. I sense that opportunity knocking on your door is one of the portals for “these things being given to you.”

It becomes rather clear upon reflecting on Jesus’ words that things and money are not the problem. God is offering to supply these things to you. Jesus does not require a poverty vow or a rejection of all material ownership. But it is essential that the person owns the thing (and not vice versa) and that one’s grip is light. The fundamental issue is focus. Taken in its context, Matthew 6:31-32 gives catalytic power to focus. Seek to do good, and the building materials appear. Seek to nourish others, and bread appears. Seek to further his cause, and the treasury somehow opens. It is infrequent that the supply appears in the way we suppose it will, but it appears nonetheless.

The “secret” that Jesus offers is not a focus on getting wealth, it is about a focus on being and doing well. This is when your being becomes filled with light. God will provide the means for living, and that life will find its way to meaning...God will make sure of it.

OPPORTUNITIES TO
DO SOMETHING
IMPORTANT QUITE
OFTEN ARRIVE
WITH SOME DEGREE
OF RISK.

