We need to cultivate the skills necessary to survive. Men in agrarian societies learned at a young age to hunt, use an axe, fish, farm or yoke a pair of oxen. Women learned to skin the hides, erect shelters, cook the food, gather herbs, bring in a harvest and bear another generation of workers. As urban life emerged, shopkeepers, cobblers, tinsmiths, artisans, bookkeepers, autocrats, politicians, writers, philosophers, and others plied their trades. Clearly, some professions were more lucrative than others.

As this was happening, spiritual leaders, including Paul, realized that the need to earn a living was fraught with potential problems. If one becomes too wealthy, others might covet your possessions and even steal what they could. Envy might cause some souls to work harder than necessary. Employers might prefer to see their employees starve rather than give them a decent wage. Careers are sometimes judged based on the *earnings* they provide, when they ought to be evaluated in terms of the *service* they offer. A teacher, one could argue, has more intrinsic value to society than a professional football player.

Our text narrows the discussion to money, specifically the *acquisition* of money, the *benefits* of wealth and the *dangers of greed*. Paul reminds us that Christians are not just a peculiar cohort of citizens who value spirituality, worship, and Judeo-Christian ethics; they also need to earn a paycheck. Spirituality is other-worldly. Earning a living is very worldly, and to do it successfully, one must work hard, and develop one’s skills without sacrificing moral and ethical values.

Not everyone can do this. Why? The love of money gets in the way. Some people cannot be content with “food and clothing” (v. 8), but rather are vulnerable to the temptation to acquire more than they need. The Bible says that “there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment” (v. 6). So, the questions are: What are the bare essentials? With how little can we be content?

The reality is that there is always going to be someone wealthier than you, and there are countless millions who are poorer than you. It is all relative. If you make $14,500, are you poor? Not if you live in India, for example, where the per capita income is just over $2,000. But in the United States, if you make $14,500 per year, you are living in abject poverty. According to the “Remember the Poor” website:

* If you made $1,500 last year, you are in the top 20%of the world’s income earners.
* If you have sufficient food, decent clothes, live in a house or apartment, and have a reasonably reliable means of transportation, you are among the top 15% of the world’s wealthy.
* If you have $61,000 in assets, you are among the richest 10% of the adults in the world.
* If you have any money saved, a hobby that requires some equipment or supplies, a variety of clothes in your closet, two cars (in any condition), and live in your own home, you are in the top 5% of the world’s wealthy.
* If you have more than $500,000 in assets, you are part of the richest 1%of the world.

It is all a matter of perspective. Unfortunately, we live in a culture of outrage and discontent, a culture that glorifies and indulges desire. Sometimes, it is hard to feel blessed and difficult to be truly at peace and content with what we have. Everywhere we go, we are bombarded with advertising messages whose purpose is to fan the flames of desire. “Look, honey. There’s a kitchen appliance we never imagined was possible until now…but look at all the things it does! It slices, it dices, it tenderizes. It cuts things into the shape of flowers, then hermetically seals them inside plastic bags. Best of all, it’s only $19.95. But wait! If we call in the next few minutes, they’ll throw in a second one, absolutely free (except for a small processing fee). Yesterday, I never knew it existed, but today I can’t live without it!” By indulging in spur-of-the-moment desires, we fool ourselves into thinking we are being free and spontaneous. Paul is right to warn that such desires “trap” and imprison us. A life of true spiritual freedom is a life set free from desire, to be content with what we have, not to ceaselessly strive for more.

Jesus had what social theologians call a “preferential option for the poor.” Maybe it is because he himself was poor. Jesus did not own a house. He had no stocks listed on the Jerusalem Stock Exchange. He did not even have transportation. Jesus did have a trade, but when the disciples knew him, he was not gainfully employed. Jesus owned no property, had no retirement plan, and never seemed to touch money. Is Jesus asking us to live as he did? No. And neither is the apostle Paul. The biblical consensus concerning personal wealth is that we should decide what we need, be content with that, and give away the rest.

Jesus had a soft spot for the poor, showing love and compassion toward those on the bottom rungs of society, including the sick, outcast, and those whom others considered sinner. This provides a clue as to how we should come to terms with the tension that exists between the need to survive (for which a paycheck is necessary) and the thirst (or lust) to acquire more than we need. Jesus and Paul argue that our actions must be guided by compassion. Consider the following if you are well-off in today’s market and economy:

* **Be humble:** You had luck, privilege, advantages, options, and opportunities that millions in the world can only dream of, even if you worked your tail off to get to where you are. Humility goes a long way. The Bible says, “As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty” (v. 17).
* **Be realistic:** There are no guarantees. The market may crash tomorrow. Who could have predicted the coronavirus and measured its economic impact? If you practiced a policy of contentment, you were in a better position to weather this storm and any that may come. Your peace and stability are not tied to your financial situation.
* **Be generous:** We live in a sharing economy. Be a part of it. Join forces with local charities. Be creative in the methods by which you can generously distribute your assets among those who need a helping hand.
* **Be faithful:** Watch for any signs that you are starting to love money. This is the root of everything that can go wrong in your life (v. 10). Instead of lusting after riches, Paul says, grow your desire for morality: “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness” (v. 11).

The apostle Paul advises us to be content with what we have and to give away the rest with humility, generosity, and faithfulness. Generosity is a spiritual gift. In Romans 12:6-8, Paul writes: “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation, the giver, in generosity” (italics added). Giving is a spiritual gift! We tend to think of money in purely material terms, imagining that money, somehow, is vaguely dirty or unholy; a necessary evil to be used. But Paul sees money as a spiritual gift when it is used in compassionate ways, ethical ways. We all have that gift to some degree.

If, as you sign your check for the Sunday offering, or set up your smartphone or computer for an electronic payment, you ever say to yourself, “I feel so inadequate, just giving money, when other people are doing the real work,” don’t ever think that again! What you do, in making generous gifts of money, is of vital importance to Christ’s work. Your generosity is a gift that is given to you by God, so you may share with others, and they may come to know the abundant life God offers!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, there are many things that can displace the Lord Jesus from His rightful position in my heart, and the love of money is one that I know can cause much distress and destruction when it is not correctly bridled under the authority of Christ. Help me to use the money that I have wisely, and help me to always regard money and my possessions as my servant and not my master. Take my life, together with all that I own for Your greater glory, and let it be consecrated to You, from this day forward and forevermore. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

**Sources:**

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* “India’s per capita income will reach $10,000 in 15-20 years: Mukesh Ambani.” Devdiscourse.com, February 23, 2022. Retrieved March 3, 2022.
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**Bare Essentials**

Sunday, September 25, 2022 [1 Timothy 6:6-19](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+6%3a6-19&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Nasreddin Hodja was born in what is now Turkey in the early 13th century and quickly developed a strong reputation as a quick wit and a man not easily fooled. The word “hodja” is an honorific meaning scholar or teacher. One of the many stories about Nasreddin concerns a poor man who had a piece of bread, but no butter, jam, or sauce to put on it. Hoping to get something to go with his bread, he went to a nearby inn and asked for a handout. The innkeeper turned him away with nothing, but the beggar sneaked into the kitchen where he saw a large pot of soup cooking over the fire. He held his piece of bread over the steaming pot, hoping to thus capture a bit of flavor from the good-smelling vapor.

Suddenly the innkeeper seized him by the arm and accused him of stealing soup. “I took no soup,” said the beggar. “I was only smelling the vapor.” “Then you must pay for the smell,” answered the innkeeper. The poor beggar had no money, so the angry innkeeper dragged him before the qadi (judge). Now Nasreddin Hodja was at that time serving as qadi, and he heard the innkeeper’s complaint and the beggar’s explanation. “So, you demand payment for the smell of your soup?” summarized the Hodja after the hearing. “Yes!” insisted the innkeeper.

“Then I myself will pay you,” said the Hodja, “and I will pay for the smell of your soup with the sound of money.” The Hodja drew two coins from his pocket, rang them together loudly, put them back into his pocket, and sent the beggar and the innkeeper on their way.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,” writes the apostle Paul. What else but the love of money can explain why the greedy shopkeeper would try to charge a poor beggar for the smell of his broth! In verse 7 of the text, the apostle recalls the words of Job, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Paul writes, “We brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it.” It is commonly agreed that whatever you have in this life, you can’t take it with you. Or to put it another way:There’s no trailer hitch on a hearse.

Still, we cannot live without money. We need to put food on the table and clothes on our back and a roof over our heads. We need a paycheck, a steady income, and a little set aside for a rainy day. We came into the world empty-handed, and we will leave life empty-handed, but we cannot survive empty-handed in the interim.