

greed, and contentment

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greed, the smiling assassin

The 1970s Swedish super group ABBA, best known for their beards and ridiculous costumes, had a mega-hit called *Money Money Money*. The girl in the song dreams up a plan to “get me a wealthy man”, which she thinks would solve all her problems. “Money, money, money” means “it’s always sunny in a rich man’s world”. Thirty years on, we may think that her costume looks pretty lame, but few people would argue with her thinking. Even Good Charlotte, wannabe punk rockers confess that², “girls don’t like boys, girls like cars and money”.



Most of us think that our lives would be better if we just had more money. Money brings fun, it brings enjoyment, it brings opportunities, it brings security, it brings death. Death? Yes, death. Perhaps nothing brings spiritual death to Australian Christians more than being greedy for money. Greed is a smiling assassin.

An assassin is someone who is sent to kill another person. Usually in movies assassins find themselves on the rooftop of a building. They assemble their sniper rifle quickly and quietly, stare through the sight mounted on their gun, looking for their target. They pull the trigger and a split second later their target is dead. They disassemble their sniper rifle quickly and quietly, climb down from the rooftop and disappear into the crowded street below. Assassins are merciless, emotionless and extremely effective at taking out their targets. Money and

² In their 2001 hit song *Girls and Boys*.

greed are the same; extremely effective at taking out Christians. But greed for money is not just an assassin, it's a smiling assassin because it appears to be offering us good things like security, enjoyment and opportunities, at the very same time as it takes us out of the game as Christians.

So what do we do with money and our human desire to always want more, and to never be satisfied with what we have? Christians tend to go to extremes when it comes to money—either it's all good, so get as much as you can (the minister of the biggest Christian church in Australia wrote a book called *You Need More Money: Discovering God's Amazing Financial Plan for Your Life*)—or it's completely evil, so have nothing to do with it (typically, to be a monk or a nun you have to take an oath of poverty).

But if we are going to love God with all our mind, as well as our heart and soul (Matthew 22:37) we need to think more sharply about money and turn a keener ear to what the Bible says about it. So let's get into it then.





TREASURES in heaven or on earth

What things do you treasure most? What things are you most devoted or attached to? What do you spend the most time thinking or worrying about? These are the things that are likely to be “gods” in your life.

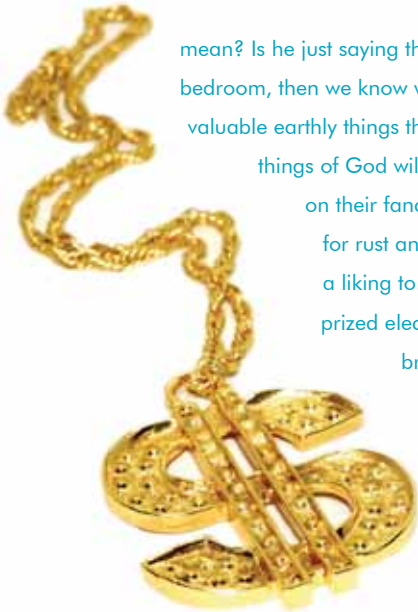
Unsurprisingly, Jesus has a bit to say about money, greed and contentment. Perhaps surprisingly, he has more to say about greed and money than he does about sex, school, sport or friends. And he seems especially concerned that we don't make money a god in our life, by replacing our devotion to the one true God with a desire for more money.

YOU CANNOT SERVE BOTH GOD AND MONEY

So firstly, we turn to Jesus' brilliant words in the Sermon on the Mount. In his teaching here, Jesus blew the top off what the people of the day thought it meant to be a good disciple of God. He said things like; anyone who is angry with his brother is like a murderer (Matt 5:21-22), that it's better to gouge out your eye or cut off your hand than enter hell as an adulterer with your body intact (5:27-30), and that true disciples love their enemies (Matt 5:44).

But in Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus gives a straight out command to everyone who would be one of his disciples. He says, “do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal”. That seems plain enough; we are not supposed to store up for ourselves treasures on earth. But what exactly does he





mean? Is he just saying that once we cannot fit another computer game in our bedroom, then we know we've gone too far? No, he is telling us not to store up valuable earthly things that can be lost one way or another, because only the things of God will last! In Jesus' time, they would have had moths feasting on their fancy clothes, precious metals and jewellery becoming food for rust and been robbed of anything else a thief might have taken a liking to. We have even more possessions, including the many prized electronic gadgets we run our lives with. But they too can be broken, stolen or made obsolete. Even money itself doesn't provide security, as it is a victim of inflation.

However, it doesn't seem that Jesus is saying you can't have anything by way of gadgets, goods or money. Rather, he is telling us not to store them up as if they had ultimate importance. Instead, he says to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal". In other words, Jesus wants us to place ultimate importance on things that cannot be taken by moth and rust, thief or inflation. These treasures in heaven include a love for God and godliness, honesty and faithfulness, love and good deeds done for others. Most importantly, Jesus tells us that our hearts follow our treasure! If our treasures are earthly (i.e.: Playstations, iPods, shoe collections, bank accounts), our heart, our mind, our attention and our devotion will be attached to such things. But if we focus ourselves, our devotion on God... we are storing up