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Have you ever noticed that once you give a donation to an organization, they keep sending you mail asking for more? Maybe you made a one-time contribution as a memorial for someone you loved who died, or maybe you were moved by an ad that prompted you to send some money for a worthy cause. Soon the requests flood your email or your mailbox. I sometimes wonder if my original donation funded all the mail that continues to arrive, thereby negating my original gift.

One year when my children were young, I decided to keep samples of those donation requests that arrived in the mail. I put them in a shoebox, and we would look through the requests and decide together where to send a donation each month. I turned those donation requests into an opportunity to teach my children about generosity, helping them learn how to discern the best ones to support.

Some of those organizations still send me mail, and at times, I want to shout, “Give it up. I’ve selected other organizations this year!”

It may feel at times that so many people and groups invite us to give it up, to let go of our

resources for their wonderful purposes. That’s not always easy to do, is it? To give it up? We have worked hard to earn whatever resources we own, and it takes wisdom to discern how to use them.

You and I are blessed to even have the opportunity to give it up, for some may not have that luxury. Did you know:

- If you made \$1500 last year, you’re 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.
- Have \$61,000 in assets? You’re among the richest 10% of the adults in the world.
- If you earn \$25,000 or more annually, you are in the top 10% of the world’s income-earners.
- 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 earn more than \$50,000 annually, you are in the top 1% of the world’s income earners.¹

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In light of this information, I'm guessing that each one gathered here today is considered wealthy from a global perspective. Since we have so many resources, we may also succumb to the temptation listed in the letter to Timothy: the love of money, which the letter suggested is the root of all kinds of evil. The letter warned the listeners to avoid the temptation of being trapped by harmful desires that can destroy one's life. The addiction of greed can lead one to pursue wealth at the expense of living a meaningful life or helping others. When focused on amassing more and more money, one may push aside other people along the way.

Writer and theologian Frederick Buechner offered his thoughts on money. Although he died last month after living to the age of 96, he left behind many tidbits of wisdom, such as this one on money:

The more you think about [money], the less you understand it. The paper it's printed on isn't worth a red cent. There was a time you could take it to the bank and get gold or silver for it, but all you'd get now is a blank stare. ... Money has worth only if there is not enough for everybody. It has worth only because the government declares it has worth and because people trust the

government in that one particular, although in every other particular they wouldn't trust it around the corner. ... Great fortunes can be made and lost completely on paper. ... There are people who use up their entire lives making money so they can enjoy the lives they have entirely used up.²

The letter to Timothy suggests we give it up, not our money, but give up our love for wealth. We need money for food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and for fun, but the love of money can prompt some to cling to it, accumulating more than they need at the expense of others. Give it up!

The letter suggests that "godliness is a great source of profit when it is combined with being happy with what you already have" (CEB), or as another translation suggests, having "contentment" (NRSV). Have you ever been content, satisfied with what you have? Or do you find yourself wanting something others have? The letter to Timothy would suggest, "Give it up. Be content with what you already have and celebrate the gifts God has provided, such as clothes, food, and shelter."

In another letter in the Bible, one written to the Romans, Paul spoke about spiritual gifts, such as

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teaching, being prophetic, ministry, encouraging others, cheerfulness.³ Included in the list is the giver, the spiritual gift of being generous. Along with prayer, compassion, kindness, and the other ways to express your spiritual life, have you ever thought of *giving* as a spiritual practice? Giving it up is not a demand, but a way of expressing your spiritual connection to God and your connection with humanity. We often think of money in terms of budgets and paying bills, but it's more than that—it's a spiritual practice, a way of life that reflects your faith and trust in God.

Sometimes we get confused, as was the case with someone overly focused on time and money rather than one's spiritual practice.

While on a trip to Switzerland, an American businessman was watching a Swiss clockmaker carving the case of an ornate cuckoo clock. As the businessman watched the clockmaker carve

out the case, he was astounded at his slow rate of progress. The businessman finally said, "My good man, you'll never make much money that way."

"Sir," the clockmaker replied, "I'm not making money, I'm making cuckoo clocks."⁴

Do you focus more on making money or on the enjoyment and spiritual practice of making beauty in the world by using your resources? If your focus is on the money, give it up. Instead, try to refocus on making beauty, using your gift of creativity as a spiritual practice. That might include compassion, music, art, listening, cooking, recycling, loving, smiling, sending cards, tending your yard, and even generosity. May you discover the joy in what Timothy learned as he read the words written to him and to us: "godliness is a great source of profit when it is combined with being happy with what you already have."

¹ <https://irememberthepoor.org/3-2/>

² *Whistling in the Dark: An ABC Theologized*, as quoted on HomileticsOnline.com.

³ Romans 12:6-8.

⁴ Hodgin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #762.