

You Can't Say \$#%&X in Church!

Good morning! My name is Mike Lynch and 40 years ago, my life was transformed by Jesus Christ. He forgave me and brought me into His family, and I have not been the same since. I am still amazed by the love of God! I hope you are too.

Well, today, we're going to talk about... The Bleep word! **Money**. There it is. I'm not going to soft-pedal this or sneak up on you from another direction. I'm going to square up, shoot straight and hit you right in your bank account!

Now I know what you're thinking... "Oh great... the first time I go back to church in years, and they're talking about money! I knew it! That's all they ever talk about... all they want is my money!"

But before you run screaming from the building, or mentally change the channel to something a little less threatening, consider this: When you go to the doctor for your annual check-up, it's her job to poke you and prod you, to ask uncomfortable questions, and guys... to turn your head and cough. I hate that part.

The point is, a doctor **has** to talk to you about your overall health. It's her job! And she may say some things and do some things that make you squirm a bit... they may be a bit uncomfortable. But in the end, it's for your own good. Your physical health is on the line.

Well, today, our spiritual health is on the line... so I get to start an awkward conversation about Bleep!

Quick. Besides the Kingdom of God, what did Jesus talk about most often?

Love? Peace? Prayer? Worship? Church?

No, you already know... besides the Kingdom of God, Jesus mentioned **money** more than any other topic! Why would He do that?

Maybe He knew something... about human nature... about our hearts... about the connection between our spiritual lives and our financial lives.

Let's take a quick look at just a few things Jesus said...

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." MT 6:21

"If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven!" MT 19:21

"You cannot serve both God and money!" MT 6:24

Jesus wasn't shy about bringing up the subject of money! Not only that, but in the Bible, there are over 2,000 verses about money... and we're going to read **every single one** of them... jk!

It can be easy for us to think that "money" is a dirty word in church. Maybe it's because of the greed we see in the world around us (and in ourselves). Maybe it's because we cringe when we think of televangelists living lavish lifestyles and flying around in private jets. Maybe it's just because we like to keep our finances private.

Whatever our excuse or reason, the truth is there's a deep connection between our spiritual lives and the way we view and treat money. In this series, we're going to take that "dirty word" BLEEP! and get to the bottom of what it really means to view money the way God wants us to view it.

This sermon series is called: Don't Say "\$#%&X" in church! And each of those symbols of that fake curse word represents something about money. Each week, we will address one of these questions/topics:

Today, I'm leading off with **"How can we have a generous attitude?"**

Next weekend, Kelly is speaking on **Avoiding Debt**: How can we avoid using money to buy a life we can't afford? That is one I need to hear over and over!

So, **How can we have a generous attitude?**

Short answer: **by getting to know God as the Ultimate Owner and Ultimate Giver.**

Let's be honest. No matter who you are, **money matters!** It's huge. It matters to you... it matters to your family. And, it matters to God. Money can be a source of **great blessing**. It can also be a **curse**. Most of us will buy a lottery ticket every now & then, with the thought in the back of our minds... Man, if I hit this, wow... life will be wonderful! So how many Lottery Winners end up being truly happy and fulfilled? The answer is about 55% actually. Just a little over half of those who pocket a lottery windfall would term themselves happier because of it.ⁱ

Among those who made the most of it are **Jim and Carolyn McCullar**. They bought a winning Mega Millions ticket in January 2011 worth \$190 million. Nice! They've set up trust funds for their four kids and 23 grandchildren, they have given generously to charity, and still have millions to spare.

Then there's **Evelyn Adams**. She won the New Jersey lottery **twice!** \$5.4 million. But she totally blew through the money with reckless spending, bad investments, extravagant gifts to family and gambling. Today she lives in a trailer.

Bud Post won \$16.2 million in the Pennsylvania lottery in 1988. Yay for him! But within a year, his **former** girlfriend sued him for part of winnings, his brother hired a hit man to kill him, and he was \$1 million in debt. When he died in 2006, he was dead broke.ⁱⁱ

Money can be a blessing, it can be a curse... but for most of us, money simply creates **pressure**. You have to earn enough to pay the bills, to keep a roof over your family's heads, to feed everyone, to drive a car. You have to save up for the future! You have to take care of your elderly loved ones. And if you're anything like me, there's always **too much month at the end of the money!** And this actually touches on what is our primary attitude about money... **fear**. Fear that we will have enough... for retirement... for college... for the mortgage, the rent... or even for groceries.

So, **How can we have a generous attitude?** when we are full of fear and insecurity about our finances?

Again, the answer lies in this: **Getting to know God as the Ultimate Owner and Ultimate Giver.**

Money matters! But it's not the **most important thing**. When it becomes the most important thing, then it becomes a hole in our buckets, as we saw in the last series. And worrying and obsessing over it will drain us of life.

The biggest problem we have with money is that **we think it's ours**.

Have you heard the **Toddler's Creed**? If you have kids you've heard it:

*"If I want it, **it's mine**.*

*If I give it to you and change my mind later, **it's mine**.*

*If I can take it away from you, **it's mine.***

*If I had it a little while ago, **it's mine.***

If it's mine, it will never belong to anyone else, no matter what.

*If we are building something together, all the pieces are **mine.***

*If it looks just like mine, **it is mine.***"

Something tells me that this little "creed" isn't just about toddlers...

In the Gospel of John chapter 6 we read this story: "After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, "**Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?**" He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

Philip replied, "**Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money** to feed them!"

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"

"Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, **gave thanks to God**, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. **And they all ate as much as they wanted.** After everyone was **full**, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left over..."

What did Jesus want the disciples to take away from this big picnic miracle?

Philip said, "Lord, we don't have enough!"

Jesus said, "Thank you, Father!"

And there was more than enough.

Here's the thing: **God is the Ultimate Owner.** It's all His! God created everything and He owns everything. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... down to every atom and molecule, everything was created by God: the atoms & molecules that made up those loaves of bread and those fish were created by God in the beginning. The atoms of copper and silver and

gold that civilizations have molded into idols and minted into coins and said, “These are our gods! These are our money!” How God must chuckle at our foolishness; hey, they’re only metal! All things were created by God in the beginning. And everything God created is ultimately His.

That’s why Jesus didn’t perform any magical incantations. He simply “**took the loaves and the fish and gave thanks to God**, the **Ultimate Owner and Giver**! And the food multiplied. It was enough... it was more than enough!

I’m so often with Philip: “**Lord, we don’t have enough!**”... but I need to be more with Jesus in simply **giving thanks** to the God who has more than enough.

God is the Ultimate Owner and the Ultimate Giver

When I **own** my money and my things... when my grip is tight, then I’m like Philip: “we don’t have the money... we don’t have enough... we can’t make that happen...” But when I realize that ultimately, everything is God’s... That changes everything. I realize that nothing is impossible with Him. And I acknowledge that He can reallocate His resources according to His perfect will at any time and in any place He desires. That’s what the Owner can do. It’s all His.

In Ps 24:1, David writes, “*The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*” Ps 50:10-12 God says, “*for every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all that is in it.*”

Ultimately then, there is only one Owner: God Most High, Creator and Possessor of heaven and earth.

Because God is the **Ultimate Owner & Ultimate Giver**, here’s the first piece of advice the Bible gives us about money:

Keep Calm and Trust the Lord! – Peace comes as we realize the truth that God owns everything... **and** that He loves us! He is our Father who is in heaven... Down through the generations, people have prayed the Lord’s Prayer and said this line countless times: “**Give us this day, our daily bread.**”

Most times we gloss over that line quickly and without much thought, but have you ever been in the position where you are praying that deeply? Lord, give us today our daily bread! Money for the rent... for the electricity... for tuition...

Praying that prayer is a way of saying, Father God, You are the Ultimate Owner and Giver... I place my trust in You today. **Keep Calm and Trust the Lord!**

The apostle Paul had experienced a lot of tough times... times when he didn't know where his next meal was coming from. He wrote, "*This same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*" Phil 4:19 He's your heavenly Father... He is the Ultimate Owner of everything... and He loves you. **Keep Calm and Trust the Lord!**

Secondly, because God is the Ultimate Owner,
Hold it loosely!

If you want to catch a monkey... not sure why you'd to... but if you want to catch monkey, you need a jar small neck, and some peanuts.

Then this is apparently what happens>>>>>>>

I've never tried this... if you do, let me know if it I think we get the point though, right? The tighter we onto what we think is ours, the more frustrated we



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We work so hard for our money, then we grab that little paycheck in our grubby little paws and deposit it in a bank account with our name on it! And then we feel better... Ah... I've got my money, I'm all set! But what if it just disappeared?! I went to Russia two years in a row in the early 90's; the first year, the exchange rate was 100 rubles to the dollar, 12 months later it was 800 rubles to the dollar! (That's like a loaf of bread costing \$3 today, then costing \$24 next year!) The bottom had fallen out of Russian currency! Anyone who had been **trusting** in their bank accounts was ruined! Think the **Great Depression** in our own history.

The first Christians realized something that we often forget: they realized that **all of life was God's** and that included their money and possessions. It was God's to give and His to take away. God is the **real Owner** of all we have, He has provided it, and has given it to us as a **stewardship**. A steward is a person entrusted with the management of funds and properties

not his own. A steward is expected to **manage** those things entrusted to him according to the wishes of **the Owner**. So the question becomes, “Lord, if my money is really Your money, what do **You** want done with **Your money** today?” Hold it loosely!

God is the Ultimate Owner and the Ultimate Giver

1) Keep Calm and Trust God

2) Hold it Loosely!

I love this parable of Jesus:

*For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work. ³ “At nine o’clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. ⁴ So he hired them, telling them he would pay them **whatever was right** at the end of the day. ⁵ So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o’clock he did the same thing. ⁶ “At five o’clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, ‘Why haven’t you been working today?’ ⁷ “They replied, ‘Because no one hired us.’ “The landowner told them, ‘Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. ⁹ When those hired at five o’clock were paid, each received a full day’s wage. ¹⁰ When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day’s wage. ¹¹ When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, ¹² **‘Those people worked only one hour, and yet you’ve paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.’** ¹³ “He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual wage? ¹⁴ Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. ¹⁵ Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?’*

What point was Jesus making with this parable? It’s really a surprising story when you think about it. I mean... what boss would ever do that?!

Can you relate to the guy who had worked all day and protested because he got the same pay as the guy who had only worked for 1 hour? I can! I think I'd be a bit PO'd too! "Hey! I worked a solid 12 hour day, sweating under the scorching sun. Others worked 9 hours, then others just 6. And if that wasn't bad enough, at 5 pm, this crazy Owner goes and rounds up the "cream of the crop"... and they work for 1 measly hour – they barely broke a sweat - and they get the same pay as me! No way!"

I think he makes a valid point! They did **not** get equal pay for equal work. The owner **was** unfair! Clearly!

But was the Owner unfair, or was he just Generous?

It's hard for us to get our heads around this...

Our economy is based on wages: you are paid in proportion to your production. This is what we are used to. You work, you earn, you eat.

God's economy is based on generosity: you receive in proportion to **God's love**. God's love isn't fair... **it's free**... and freely given! It doesn't depend on whether we are worthy or not... it is simply who He is. **Generous**.

God is the Ultimate Giver because He is the Ultimate Lover.

So here's a third piece of advice the Bible gives us about money:

Give it Generously. In the early days of Christianity, before there were things called church buildings, people met for worship in homes and it says in Acts that

"There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need."

Wow, that's pretty radical! The early Christians reflected the **generosity of God**. They saw clearly that God's love for them **mandated** that they share their bounty with those in need. They took responsibility for each other. They took responsibility for the poor.

It's interesting that the word for "shared" used here is the Greek word: *koinonia* a word most often translated as **fellowship** – but it means more than just being good friends, it means **having all things in common**, it means

bearing one another's burdens,

it means one person with abundance filling up what is lacking in another person's life. It is a tangible demonstration of what it means to love your neighbor.

(Rom 12:13) “**Share with** God's people who are in need....”

To this you are called, child of God! Give it generously!

For the first 15 years of our married life, Katie & I worked in a Christian missionary organization. Our mission field was high school students and we had been assigned to Phoenix, AZ. In order to go, we had to raise our own support for all of our ministry and living expenses. We were totally dependent upon the generosity of others who believed the same thing we did... that lost kids mattered to God. As we were out there, our children started coming... and I believe we had two of them in cloth diapers when our tired old washing machine decided to kick the bucket. Well... two babies produce a lot of dirty diapers and we didn't have the money for a new washer, so we were about to be in a big pickle. But God stepped in... I have no other way to say this... God stepped in. We got the mail that day and found a letter from some old friends of the family, people who could not support us when we were raising support. The note said, “Dear Mike & Katie... God has put you on our minds too often recently for us to postpone doing this any longer.”



And inside the card was a check for \$400! Now this was in the 80's so

\$400 was plenty to buy a nice new washing machine! Which we did. We were so excited! And we were so thankful to God. What a life lesson for us.

We didn't know that our washer was about to die. But God did... and **a week earlier**, He had prompted these good people to send us a gift. And they responded generously. Their check was sent **before** the washer broke! We received it on the day it happened. How's that for provision?

God is the Ultimate Owner and the Ultimate Giver!

He is interested in your money because He knows that our money and our hearts are intimately connected. He doesn't want your money. He desperately wants your heart. He loves you! What He wants is for you to acknowledge His Ownership and His Generosity, and since He made you in His image... to do likewise.

Keep Calm and Trust God.

Hold it loosely.

Give it generously.

Jesus Himself is the best evidence of the **Generosity of God**.

That famous verse, John 3:16 says : *“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”*

God loves us. We're His children, His creations... so when we had gotten ourselves in a pile of trouble, as kids occasionally do, He paid our bail.

When we had walked away from Him and His ways, and gone our own independent way... and gotten thoroughly and completely lost in the process, He came looking, He found us, He picked us up, cleaned us off, and He brought us back home.

When we had committed every sin we could think of, and were looking for new ones to invent. When we had pursued every fleshly pleasure and found that they all left us shallow and sickly. He took our sickness and healed us. He took our shallowness and made us whole. He took our sin and became it, nailed it to the Cross and took it out of the way forever!

Jesus is the Ultimate evidence of God's Generosity and Love. Do you know Him? That would be the first thing I would suggest to you in making this message practical:

1) Press in to know Jesus... let Him into your life to forgive you, to heal you, and to make you new.

2) Ask the Owner what He wants done with His money today. He's given it to you as a stewardship to manage... what are His wishes?

3) Find a Need, and Give Generously. We'll be talking about this much more specifically in the weeks to come. But for now, is there a need that you are aware of, which could be helped by resources that you have been given?

May God bless you! Let's pray.

ⁱ <http://www.statisticbrain.com/lottery-winner-statistics/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahljacobs/2012/11/28/winning-the-lottery-isnt-always-a-happy-ending/#5f59822647da>