

Being Generous By Spending Money On Yourself

The Bible speaks abundantly about money and is pretty straightforward: Work hard. Be generous. Save money. Don't be materialistic. Be content. Do not spend money selfishly.

Let me be clear that I get that. Let me be equally clear that part of the reason ramblingeveryon.com exists is to use writing as a way to encourage people to dig deeper beyond the obvious. To push back against thinking boxes. To eviscerate platitudes and cliches. Jesus often blows my mind about how to live and I want to share that with others.

With that in mind, I want to rethink the exact applications of the biblical principles mentioned above. Working hard is non-negotiable, though that can look very different for different people. But on the issues of saving money, being generous and being selfish, it is my contention that we can (and perhaps sometimes should) live these things out in ways that are counterintuitive and countercultural.

What I mean is this: What if there are times it is really the more selfless thing to spend money instead of saving it? When generosity is spending money on ourselves? What if the more noble thing is to spend more on an item instead of finding it cheaper? What if concepts like minimalism, while entirely appropriate for some, isn't necessarily the best approach for all?

The biggest application I think of when it comes to this are simple and are often mentioned as a way to be a good neighbor: buy local and support small businesses. I hear this advice frequently, but I do not think we discuss enough in the framework of Christianity.



Click [here](#) for a deeper dive into giving and generosity.

Anyone who knows me well knows I am frugal. I saved up as much money as I could before I got married so that I could have a huge safety net to provide for my wife. This causes my wife to be concerned when she wants to buy something one of her friends is selling via their personal small business on Facebook. She thinks I will get mad about it. Yet very quickly into our marriage, I began realizing how selfless it can be to support our friends who really are working hard and using their gifts to provide a quality product or service. Therefore, quite often when my wife asks my opinion (Note: NOT my permission) on buying something from a friend on Facebook, I enthusiastically tell her I hope she does.

Same for where we shop and eat in Bel-Cragin, Chicago where we live. We can (and do) shop at huge nationally known stores that allow us to save money. But we could also spend a little more shopping at a place that someone in the neighborhood owns. If I can buy a book from Amazon for \$5 or buy it for \$7 from a local bookshop, my initial reaction always is, "Go for the bargain. It's the wise move financially." But who probably needs it more? Same for eating. If it comes down to buying a meal for \$6 at McDonald's or a similar quality meal for \$8 from Endi's at Diversey and Central, whose owner I see all the time, is it always worth it to save the \$2?

My wife and I have a child coming in February. You better believe we are thinking about money and how to provide for the child. But thanks to the grace of God, we are not in a position where we have to count pennies or truly worry about whether we will be able to make it. I have a ton to learn about parenting, yet right now I have learned from the wisdom of others (including my parents) that I want to teach my children from birth that they do not really need everything our culture says they do. I hope they learn that we will be generous by giving money to church, missionaries and social justice causes, but also to people who have earned it through selling goods and services.



REO's look at managing your money wisely.

Additionally, I have learned in my marriage that spending money on things like vacations and date nights isn't about living a certain lifestyle or materialism as much as it is about creating memories and a bond in my marriage that is invaluable. So when I look up tickets to *Wicked* and see prices that would cause pre-marriage Gowdy to shriek in horror, I remember that it is an investment in my wife and my marriage. While I obviously love going to the beach and enjoy every second of it, spending the money to do it doesn't have to be selfish. My wife loves it as well and the time away matters to us.

Jesus helps me to crystallize this is the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16. That is one odd passage if you read

it on its face. The manager is in trouble and cuts deals with people who are in debt. And the rich man commends him. Trying to figure out how to apply that today is a challenge. Yet something Jesus draws out of this, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself." The reason, I think, is because we need to understand how desperately we need other people. We need community. The manager was in a desperate situation and the only way out was to be shrewd with his money. In the same way, I can use my money on others to communicate to them that I need them. I take a guy from my church out to lunch and I pay. He gets blessed with a lunch but we both get blessed with the friendship. We think we are helping others when we spend money on them, but they are actually doing us a relational favor by being helped. Only the Bible could be that counterintuitive and countercultural.

A couple of disclaimers I feel are important. First, I realize some people do not have excess or for other good reasons need to be saving money, even the \$2 for the burger. My intention in writing this is to challenge traditional thinking, not to present my thinking as absolute truth for everyone. If a person or couple is going in debt from their spending, then a change sounds prudent. In those cases, people may need to be creative in finding inexpensive ways to support local business or their marriage. (Being creative is something we all can stand more of anyway.)

Also, I want to be clear that I am not writing this from a place of success. These are things I need to practice much, much better. I am an Amazon addict. And even though you can buy from individuals on Amazon, I find myself wanting the new things with free shipping. This kind of thinking isn't easy for me. And it is my hope that by writing about it, I will bring myself accountability.

To me, the worst thing you can do biblically with money is to hoard it. I don't think, however, we were created to just pay bills and give it away either. We also should spend money on

ourselves in a way that benefits others, so that we are completely aware of how badly we need relationships and community. That's just one of many ways Jesus has blown my mind about how to live.