



BALANCED

**GOING DEEPER  
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**January 5, 2014**

# Discussion Guide

## Balanced

*Matthew 6.19-24*

### Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

### Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Where did you learn what you know about how to handle money? How might you sum up what you learned about money in a couple of phrases?

### Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Matthew 6.19-24 aloud slowly. Pause and then read once more, allowing the group to imagine Jesus physically speaking these words to them personally.

- In the text, Jesus claims that money does things to people. According to Jesus, in what ways can the pursuit and use of money affect us?
- Jesus notes that the way people pursue and use money shapes them. In what ways, if any, do you see this demonstrated (emotionally, physically, spiritually)?
- Do you think these are easy or difficult for people to see? Why might this be the case?
- Do you see any of these effects of the pursuit and use of money in your own life? Would you elaborate?
- Jesus states that in our pursuit of money, we can move from a position of using money to a position in which money uses us; that is, it becomes our god. How would you be able to tell if this was happening? What might be an appropriate response to the discovery of this sort of movement?
- Think about your own use and pursuit of money. Consider your spending habits and what they say. Would you say that you are using money or that money is using you? Would you explain?
- Spend some time holding this before God. Listen for what he might have to say about the place and use of money in your life. Share these insights with your group.

## Context and Background

### *Hoarding*

Hoarding is a pattern of behavior that is characterized by the excessive acquisition of items and the inability or unwillingness to dispossess oneself of these items. Hoarders have little or no intention of using what they collect which distinguishes them from those who save or collect items for the purpose of using such items in the near or distant future. As recently as 2013, hoarding was classified as a mental disorder, and research into this disorder only began in earnest in the 1990s. What distinguishes many hoarders is a lack of internal insight which makes it impossible for them to understand the true nature of what they are doing. While hoarding in the extreme—that which is officially classified as a mental disorder—is fairly rare, the tendency to hoard is present in all people to some degree. When a person collects things with no intention of using them save for the sheer enjoyment of collecting, that person is displaying hoarding tendencies. Hoarding can lead to obsessive tendencies in the pursuit of that which is being hoarded, and often the collection of items incapacitates the hoarder's ability to function along normal life patterns.

### **The Text**

#### **Matthew 6.19-21: *The treasure principle***

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has just discussed the spiritual implications surrounding the motivations which undergird the spiritual practices of prayer and fasting. Because Jesus mentions the giving of alms within this discussion, it is no surprise that his next topic centers upon money. In this discussion, Jesus starts out by defying common investment wisdom. Jesus urges his audience to refrain from storing up earthly treasures because they do not last.

With this reference to storing up treasure, Jesus touches upon the ancient practice of hoarding wealth. (See Hoarding.) Jesus is not talking about saving for future needs or projects. Rather, Jesus is addressing the practices of collecting goods and monies for the purpose of having them with no intention of spending them. Such collecting gave ancient people—modern people are no exception—a sense of well-being and safety. However, Jesus states that such feelings are misplaced because of the transitory nature of worldly wealth. Instead of recommending the pursuit of earthly riches, Jesus encourages his audience to pursue heavenly riches. On the surface, Jesus' argument is logically sound but was probably less than convincing to his audience. Therefore, Jesus adds a second caveat to the pursuit of earthly wealth. The treasure one pursues has life-altering implications, for such a pursuit shapes a person's heart. Basically, Jesus states that money—and all goods of any worldly value—is not all that important, but one's use or pursuit of money can have important implications.

#### **Matthew 6.22-23: *The Midas effect***

Jesus has raised the issue that a person's approach to money (wealth) has important life-altering implications. He explores these using a traditional proverb about one's eyes and heart. The proverb is about the implications of having a good or evil/bad eye. In the ancient world, the eye was understood to be the window to the soul. The eye reflected what was inside a person and allowed influences from outside a person to influence and shape that person's inside. It is in this latter manner in which Jesus uses the proverb. The larger context about the use and pursuit of wealth provides the grist for the parable's true meaning.

Accordingly, a proper view and use of money leads to a person whose inner being is whole, but an improper view and use of money leads to a person whose inner being is corrupt; that is, how one uses and views money shapes the heart.

### **Matthew 6.24: *Who's your God?***

To this point, Jesus has been urging his audience to maintain a proper view and use of worldly wealth which involves avoiding the hoarding of wealth; that is, Jesus states that collecting money with no intention of using it has negative implications for one's heart. Jesus explains why this is so by noting that people were made to serve but that in reality a person can only serve one master. To try to serve more than one master leads to a conflict of interest and devotion. This is important in the immediate context because Jesus holds up money (wealth) as a key competitor for devotion in the lives of people. Money can become a person's god. When money becomes a god, people stop using money and money starts using people. This seems to be the point Jesus is driving toward, an end which can be avoided if one maintains a proper perspective and use of money.

### **Application:**

Money is part of life. We use money as a means of ensuring the exchange of goods and services. We could not live without money. Because of this, we grow to understand that money is good, something that we should pursue since our very lives depend upon it. However, money is neither good nor bad. Money itself is neutral, but its use and pursuit is not. Our lives may depend on the possession and use of money but how we seek to possess and the manner in which we use monies shapes our soul. When pursued as an end to itself, money becomes a god to us, pushing out God himself. This has a disastrous and darkening influence on our lives. We begin to pursue money for the sake of having more money (hoarding) and this in turn bends our lives in such a way that money begins to master us. We often do not realize this until it is too late and our lives have become unhinged or unbalanced. However, we can avoid this end by recognizing that money is to be used and God is to be pursued.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at [blakeshipp.blogspot.com](http://blakeshipp.blogspot.com).



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