

The Advent Conspiracy – Spend Less
Luke 16:10-13
GCF – November 22, 2009

I. Introduction

Open with the clip from “Jingle all the Way.”

SOME OF THE IDEAS FOR THIS MESSAGE WERE TAKEN FROM THE BOOK, ADVENT CONSPIRACY: CAN CHRISTMAS STILL CHANGE THE WORLD?, BY RICK MCKINLEY, CHRIS SEAY, AND GREG HOLDER.

The Advent season will soon be upon us, and if I were to ask you what or who we are to worship in this holiday event we call Christmas, I would assume that your response would be, “Jesus.”

But does the way we spend our time, money, and energy testify that we worship Jesus Christ and His coming to earth to live among us?

Jesus said, “*No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*” (Luke 16:13, NLT)

Does the way we spend our money, often sinking ourselves deeper into debt, reflect our worship of the Christ child?

The Advent Conspiracy challenges us to be countercultural in regards to our utter commitment (worship) in our nation to spend and consume.

To enter into the conspiracy, we commit ourselves to spend less – not only at Christmas, but in every area of our life.

To say we are celebrating an Advent Conspiracy means that we are conspiring against our cultural tendency to worship consumerism and material things during this season and to fix our hearts to worship Christ.

This year, we want to share some ideas that we believe will help us enter more fully into the Christmas story. To engage in an Advent Conspiracy is to: worship (God) fully, spend less, give more, and love all.

Today, let’s look at the idea of spending less.

II. Spend Less

In thinking about the idea of spending less, there may be some of you who are thinking to yourself – I have so little income that I hardly spend anything as it is on Christmas.

And not only are you challenging me to spend less, but then you are going to ask me to give more. I have nothing left over to give.

While we are going to talk more specifically about giving more next week, I would like to share with you Colleen's response to the challenge of spending less and giving more.

We talked about this when we were handing out candy on October 31st. Initially she thought there was no way for her to spend less and give more. Then she thought of the necklaces and bracelets she makes with her beads. She said (with joy), "Through the season, I'll sell my necklaces and give all but what I need for materials to someone in need."

Colleen is on a limited income, but she is looking for a way to honor the precious gift of Christ's birth.

Even if you only spend five dollars per person on Christmas – there are creative ways to spend less.

In our passage that was read earlier, Jesus said, *"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. 11 And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? 12 And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own? 13 No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."* (Luke 16:10-13, NLT)

I think we often believe that when we have limited amounts of money we are exempt from the idea of planning, spending less, and giving.

But what does Jesus say here? *"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones."*

You need to start now. I know people who complain about not having enough money and being unable to give, yet they spend \$150-200 a month on cigarettes.

Or they spend \$600 or more a month on eating out when they could plan better, go shopping and cook their food for \$150.

I know these are tough words, but I think we need to think about such things.

Christmas is a season of excess. I have seen "impoverished" families still spend hundreds of dollars on gifts for their kids.

Spending less requires that we plan, research, and cultivate **relationships**.

Spending less does not mean we love our friends and family less. In fact, we will often find that those to whom we give creative, personal gifts will see our love – and perhaps God’s – more clearly than ever before.

A. Spending Thoughtfully

As you prepare to spend this Christmas, I invite you to consider a few things.

First, let’s try to balance our desires with the needs that exist in our **community** and the rest of the world.

Do I really need that fourth pair of shoes when there are many in the world who do not own one pair? Do I need to give my child that 100th toy when I could take my child out to shop for a toy for a child who does not have any?

“Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food.”
(Isaiah 55:2, NLT)

Second, what about community and **environmental** consequences? Are we buying stuff that supports businesses that treat their employees well or advocate for causes you believe in? Does the company we are buying from employ child laborers?

We need to learn not only to spend less, but to spend **thoughtfully**.

What story are we telling our children? Is it healthy to give our children whatever they want? Does it build character? Are the gifts the central emphasis on Christmas?

Often our kids are so overwhelmed with gifts that they are totally distracted from the celebration of Jesus.

Christmas in America is more about getting what we want than giving what people need. Is that really the legacy we want to pass on to our children?

Spending less does not mean spending nothing. It does mean that we thoughtfully evaluate what we support with our spending and allow our spending to support products, people, and causes that are worthy of being supported.

“Even common people oppress the poor, rob the needy, and deprive foreigners of justice.”
(Ezekiel 22:29, NLT)

Does our spending oppress the poor, rob the needy, and deprive foreigners of justice? Do we **care**?

B. Spending Beautifully

Do we need to spend more on stuff we do not need?

Read “Spend Less, Except When You Should Spend More” from *Advent Conspiracy: Can Christmas still Change the World?*, pages 55-57

III. Conclusion

How strange and sad it is that debt and consumerism reach their pinnacle during the season in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus – the Savior who came to liberate us from these things.

We are to live our lives with an **open** hand. We spend less in order that we can give more.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says, *“Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. ‘For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.’ 8 And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.”* (2 Corinthians 9:6-8, NLT)

“Give in proportion to what you have. 12 Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. 13 Of course, I don't mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality.” (2 Corinthians 8:11-13, NLT)

Are we willing to rethink the way we use whatever resources God has given to us? Whether we have a lot or a little, we can honor God by spending less on ourselves and giving to others.

I think our celebration of God coming to earth in Jesus provides us an excellent opportunity to rethink our spending habits.

“You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9, NLT)

Close with the clip from “God Grew Tired of Us – Is Santa in the Bible?”