

UPSIDE DOWN LIVING

Talking ¢

**The GOSPEL
of JUBILEE**

**Where
is your
treasure?**

**7 weeks
x 7 years**

**IF MONEY
COULD SPEAK,
WHAT WOULD
IT SAY ABOUT
YOU?**

m o n e y

UPSIDE DOWN LIVING

money

The Upside-Down Living series emphasizes living out one's Christian faith through the lens of Jesus, by following values that seem so countercultural they appear to be upside down.

Leonard M. Dow



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Upside-Down Living Money

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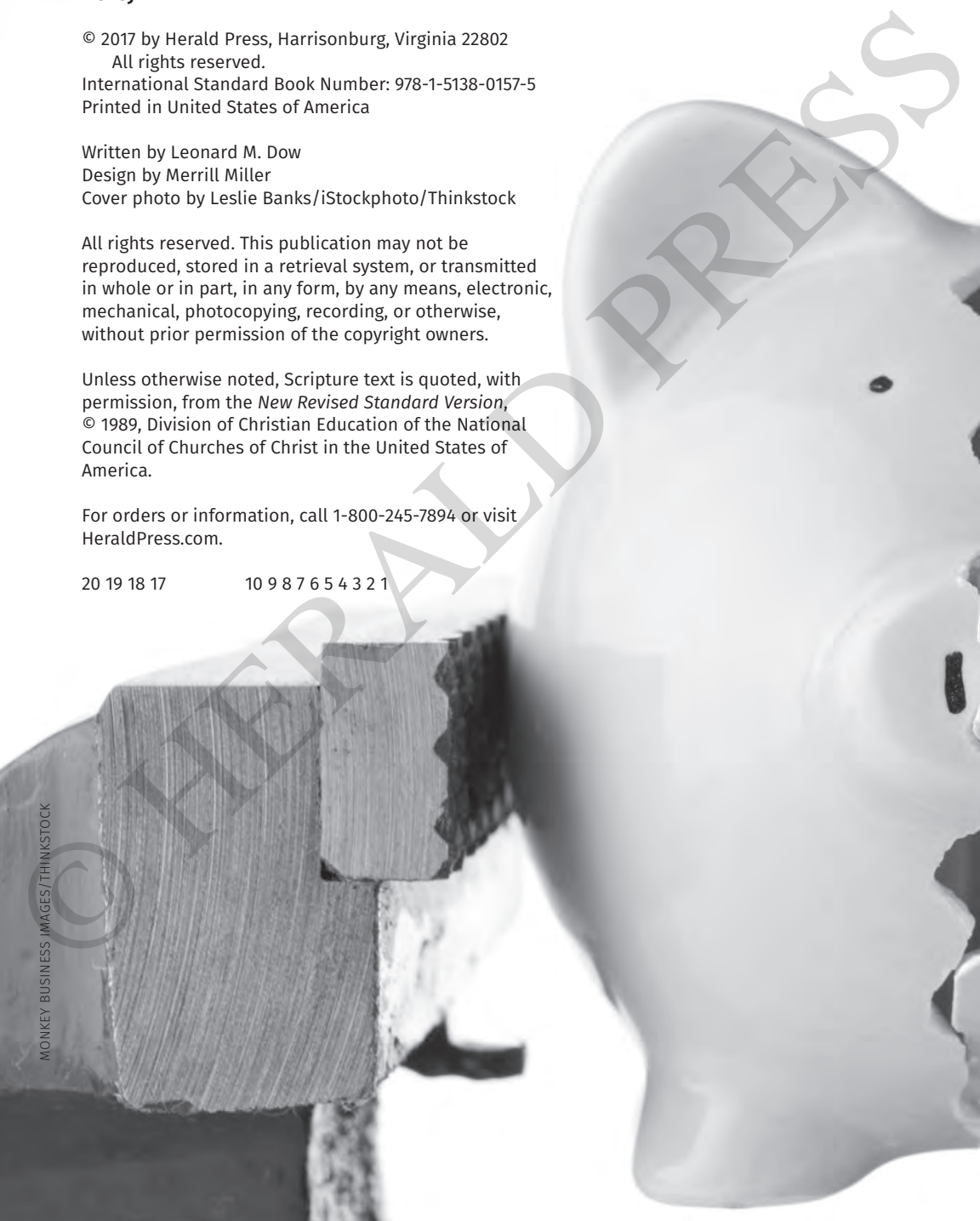
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1: [God's Gift of Jubilee]

Every few months I come across an article in my news feed lamenting our noisy world and the lost disciplines of stillness, solitude, silence, and Sabbath rest. A look at Leviticus shows a key distinction of Yahweh's followers was that they knew how to rest—specifically, a Sabbath rest. The gift of Sabbath rest is in direct contrast to those who worshiped pagan gods and whose earthly rulers demanded 365 days of consumption and production.

Yahweh is just, and provided the gift of rest to all of creation—humankind, livestock, land, and vegetation. Today in the West, we are no longer forced by religion, slavery, or economic forces to work constantly, yet the battle to rest still rages on. It is the voice that whispers, “There is always one more thing I can do; one more thing I can consume; one more thing I can produce; one more phone call, text, email, Facebook post, tweet I can respond to.”

The command God gave to Moses is a needed corrective for today: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exodus 20:8 NIV).

We need to practice a Spirit-led Sabbath rest in which our identity, our life purpose, and our value in God’s eyes are not measured by what we do for a profession, what we produce, or what others say about what we do. Rather, our ultimate value comes from trust in the One who created us and compassionately provides to all who seek a Sabbath rest.

“You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (Leviticus 25:8-10).

God established the Jubilee year as part of the Sabbath cycle.¹ Everyone rests on the Sabbath day, which is every seventh day. Debts are canceled and farmers let the land rest during the Sabbath year, which is every seventh year. Everyone and everything gets a break during the Jubilee year (Sabbath of Sabbaths), every 49th year, including land, livestock, prisoners, slaves, and people in debt.

¹ See Kim Tan, *The Jubilee Gospel: The Jubilee, Spirit and the Church* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2008), 6–18 .

| DAYS | YEARS | 7 YEARS |
|------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | 1 | 1-7 |
| 2 | 2 | 8-14 |
| 3 | 3 | 15-21 |
| 4 | 4 | 22-28 |
| 5 | 5 | 29-35 |
| 6 | 6 | 36-42 |
| 7: Sabbath | 7: Sabbath | 43-49 |
| | | 50: Jubilee |

The Jubilee year was a season:

- > to trust and be reminded God is our ultimate provider;
- > to rest together and worship God; and
- > of economic reform, where the land goes back to its original owners, debts are forgiven, and slaves are released.

Jubilee is not only for the financially poor; Jubilee is also desperately needed for those in positions of power, privilege, and wealth.

Why did God outline Jubilee?

First, God wanted the Israelites to be a nation built on justice. This differed from the nations around them that built their economies on oppressive practices of slavery, servitude, and debt. Second, Jubilee reminded the Israelites that they depended on God for their land, food, and prosperity. The people and the land rested, and God provided. Third, God knew some people would do well with their land. Others, through injustice, mismanagement, or bad decisions, would lose it all. They would sell their land to the rich, and sometimes sell themselves or family members into slavery to pay



their debts. God wanted to prevent this, so every 50 years there was a systemic correction with debts being canceled, slaves being set free, and every person and family being given back their original allotment of land. The wealth of the land was redistributed and families were reunited for another 50 years.

Jubilee ensured that no one person, family, tribe, or people group would be stuck in the cycle of poverty generation after generation. We often forget that Jubilee also ensured that no one person, family, tribe, or people group would be stuck in the cycle of wealth dependency generation after generation.

Jubilee was radical! Imagine that every 50 years, everyone who has maxed out their credit cards, overextended borrowing for an education, spent all their inheritance, or has difficulty

trying to keep up with a mortgage—everybody's debt is instantaneously canceled! Many of us might think, "Those people got into those situations through their own mistakes. They should get out on their own!"

In God's Jubilee economy, allowances are made for people's mistakes and bad decisions; it's called grace. People, their children, and their children's children don't have to live with a legacy of bad decisions longer than one generation. This is Jubilee and good news to the poor—because they weren't going to be poor any longer! The whole concept of Jubilee sounds too good to be true. And perhaps it is, because unfortunately we have no record that the people of Israel ever carried it out.

Consider the role of money in our culture, and economic disparity. In the United States, for example, the official poverty threshold is \$24,000 for a family of four. In 2015, 43 million people lived in poverty in the United States, equal to one in seven Americans living in poverty.² Although America's poor are disproportionately people of color who live in urban areas, poverty numbers are shifting from the cities to the suburbs. Those living in poverty no longer reside in distant urban centers, but are in the midst of our churches and communities. They include the most vulnerable in our society—the elderly, children, and persons with disabilities.

Can the church be a place of Jubilee, spreading it to our neighbors in our world today? Jubilee is a signal to the world that, unlike the profit-first model, God's children will be known as people who are generous, kind, just, restful, and dependent on a loving and caring God. Jubilee is God's gift to us.

2 "Poverty Facts," Poverty USA, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.povertyusa.org/the-state-of-poverty/poverty-facts/>.

[Talk about It]

- ▶ Jubilee is good news to the poor. Discuss how the Scriptures refer to it, and then consider how Jubilee matches up with Western culture's obsession with self.

- ▶ Are there aspects of Jubilee that could be practiced today? Are there aspects of Jubilee that are not possible to practice today? Consider how Jubilee is outlined in Scripture, and think about your family. What would be the most difficult to embrace? What would be the most life-giving aspect of Jubilee?

- ▶ Read the following passages and look for similarities, themes, observations, and differences between the authors, contexts, and messages.

Leviticus 25:8-55

Isaiah 61

Luke 4:14-30

UPSIDE DOWN LIVING money

Weary of Christian faith wrapped in a flag and trapped in your heart?

Tired of faith as usual?

Live out your Christian faith through the lens of Jesus. Follow values that seem so countercultural they appear to be upside down. Each compelling six-session Upside-Down Living Bible study helps us encounter the teachings of Jesus and wrestle with living out the kingdom here and now. The Bible isn't a cookbook with solutions for every ethical dilemma, but it helps us raise the right questions, encounter the teachings of Jesus, and discover new ways of faithful living in the world. Ideal for Sunday school or Bible study sessions, each topical study covers a specific theme or issue and comes with thought-provoking discussion questions and activities. Be inspired and transformed in your faith.

Live upside down.

Every day we face decisions that affect our wallets—and these decisions say a lot about our priorities. The way we use money can communicate power and strength, charity and selflessness. How do your decisions about the use of money and resources reflect or expand your faith? This study takes an honest look at financial choices and economics through the lens of Jubilee, highlighting how the community and the world around you can be affected by your decisions.



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