

Stuff: The insatiable desire for more

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 31, 2006](#) issue

It is conventional wisdom that ministers hate stewardship season and dislike talking about money. A feature article in *Time*, “Does God Want You to Be Rich?” (September 18), observed that the “relative absence of sermons about money—which the Bible mentions several thousand times—is one of the more stunning omissions in American religion, especially among its white, middle class precincts.”

In the meantime, some popular televangelists are talking about money a lot. It’s called the prosperity gospel, or the health and wealth gospel, or name-it-and-claim-it theology. “In a nutshell,” said *Time*, “it suggests that a God who loves you does not want you to be broke.”

The magazine cited a man who moved from Ohio to Texas to be close to preacher Joel Osteen, landed a job, made some money and said, “I’m dreaming big—because all of heaven is dreaming big. . . . Why would an awesome God want anything less for his children?”

As I read the *Time* article, I kept thinking about Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words: “When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.” And, of course, Jesus’ words: “Those who want to save their life will lose it. And those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” Not much prosperity theology there.

I’ve always rather enjoyed stewardship season, for it brings us close to the heart of the church’s mission. And it has also inspired a few laughs along the way. One of my favorite stewardship chairpersons was a successful businessman and legendary money-raiser for many good causes. He wanted me to arrange to have “Amazing Grace” played by a bagpiper on Stewardship Sunday. “Presbyterians can’t resist it,” he assured me. One time he suggested that we reconsider the sale of indulgences—“the best stewardship program ever.” “Couldn’t you just imply that they’re going to hell if they don’t raise their pledge?” he asked.

How we use resources is a central issue. Americans have become the world’s greatest accumulators. The self-storage industry is booming, the *Chicago Tribune*

reported recently: there are 55,000 self-storage facilities throughout the nation, which means 6.9 square feet of rented storage space for every American. In his recent book of essays *The Way of Ignorance*, Wendell Berry concludes that we “seem to be living now with the single expectation that there should and will always be more of everything, including ‘life expectancy.’ This insatiable desire for more is the result of an overwhelming sense of incompleteness, which is the result of the insatiable desire for more. This is the wheel of death.”