

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Comfy Couch

Buyers Find More than Loose Change in Lumpy Sofa
By Paul Asay

What Happened

A few months ago, roommates Lara Russo, Cally Guasti and Reese Werkhoven of New Patz, N.Y., picked up a couch for \$20 at the Salvation Army; although frankly, the thing might've been overpriced.

“We almost didn't pick that couch,” Russo later told the *Little Rebellion*, the student newspaper for the State University of New York in New Patz, where the friends went to school. “It's pretty ugly and smells, but it was the only couch that fit the right dimensions for our living room.”

However, after buying the couch, the trio discovered it was not just ugly, but strangely lumpy. After a couple of months, Werkhoven stuck his hand under the sofa's arm to find out what was making the thing so uncomfortable. He pulled out an envelope that held \$700. “The most money I'd ever found in a couch was, like, 50 cents,” he said later.

Yet that wasn't the last of it. The roommates decided to investigate the couch more thoroughly and discovered several more envelopes containing a grand total of \$40,800. That's a lot of money by anyone's standards, but particularly for a trio of impoverished college students.

They whooped and hollered about their good fortune—until Russo found a name printed on one of the envelopes. “We had a lot of moral discussions about the money,” Russo told the *Little Rebellion*. “We all agreed we had to bring the money back to whoever it belonged to...It's their money. We didn't earn it.”

They scoured the local phone directory and tracked down the previous owner—a 91-year-old widowed grandmother. As it turns out, the couch was where she kept her life savings. She slept on the thing, too; but no one knew about the woman's secret savings stash. When she started having health problems, the grandmother's daughter donated the couch to the Salvation Army and bought her a cushy new bed to replace it. The honesty of these youth corrected a \$40,000 mistake.

The roommates returned the money and were given \$1,000 as a reward. It's not enough to pay off their tuition or student loans, but it would be enough for a new couch.

Talk About It

It's not every day thousands of dollars land in your lap—or in this case under it.

Maybe not everyone would've turned in the money. Would *you* have given the money back? What if the owners turned out to be bad people? What if they had earned the money illegally? Would you have given it back then?

Before returning the money, the roommates talked about buying gifts for their parents and traveling the world. If you suddenly found \$40,000 in your couch, what would you like to do with it? Who would you help with it? What would you buy for yourself? How much would you give to your incredibly talented youth leader?

Do you think giving the money back, as these roommates did, is unusual these days? Are people generally honest and would give the money back, or do you think most would've kept the money?

What the Bible Says

“Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool” (Prov. 19:1).

“For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man” (2 Cor. 8:21).

“Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5).

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Beliefnet.com* and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *PluggedIn* and wrote the Batman book *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He recently collaborated with Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, on his book *The Good Dad*. He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and his two children. Follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.