07.17.24 I INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT

2024 Outlook Theme #2: Bonds Can Live Up to Their Promise

By Benjamin B. Wallace, CFA

Benjamin B. Wallace, CFA – Portfolio Manager, Research Director

While interest rate moves are tied to the economic headlines, it is the yield and price change they deliver to investor portfolios that matters. The link between interest rate changes and bond prices is called duration, measuring the sensitivity of a bond's price to changes in interest rates, with the value representing the percent change in a bond's price for a 1% change in rates. For example, a bond with a duration of five would lose 5% if interest rates rose 1%.

Chart 1 shows the yield, duration and ratio of duration to yield of the Barclays Agg back to 2000. Duration to yield is a good metric for Fixed Income risk/reward, because it shows the number of years it would take to earn back the loss in value from a 1% increase in rates. In previous Outlook Themes, we have noted how the record duration/yield ratio of 7 at the end of 2019 preceded several years of poor fixed income performance.

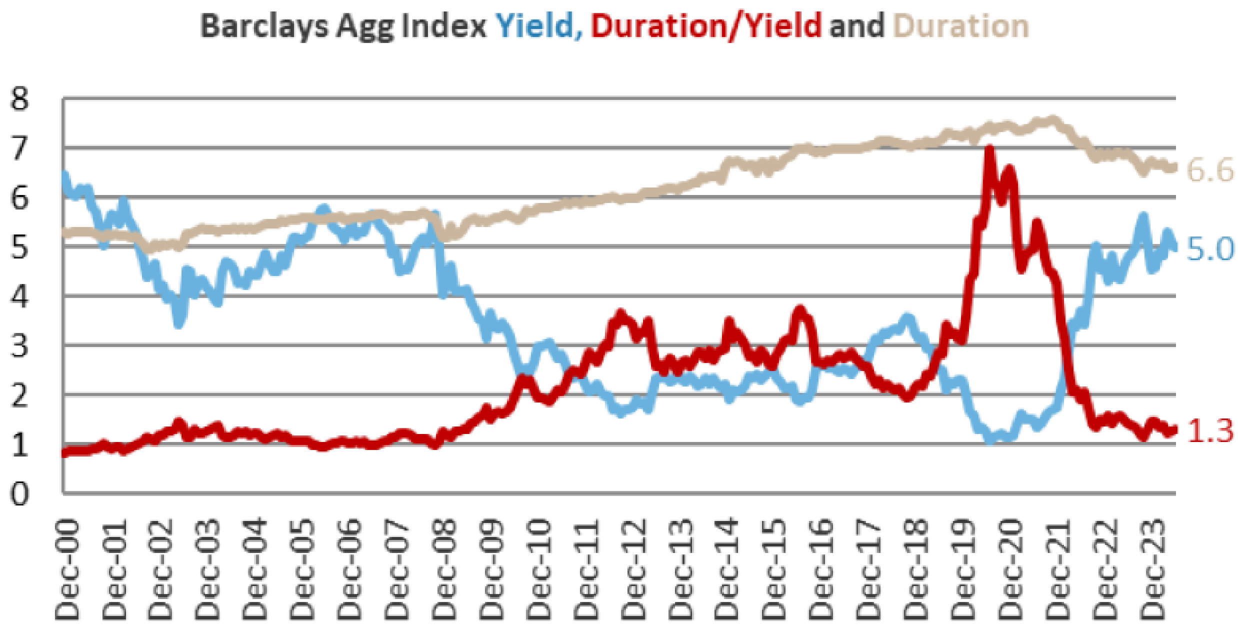

Chart 1

Today, at the end of Q2'24 and with the Agg yield of 5.0%, the 1.3 duration/yield ratio suggests bonds are reasonably priced, and at least have the potential to offer some portfolio diversification, lower volatility, income, and protection in weakening economic conditions. That said, there is no free lunch, and bonds can tread water when economic conditions are seen to be improving.

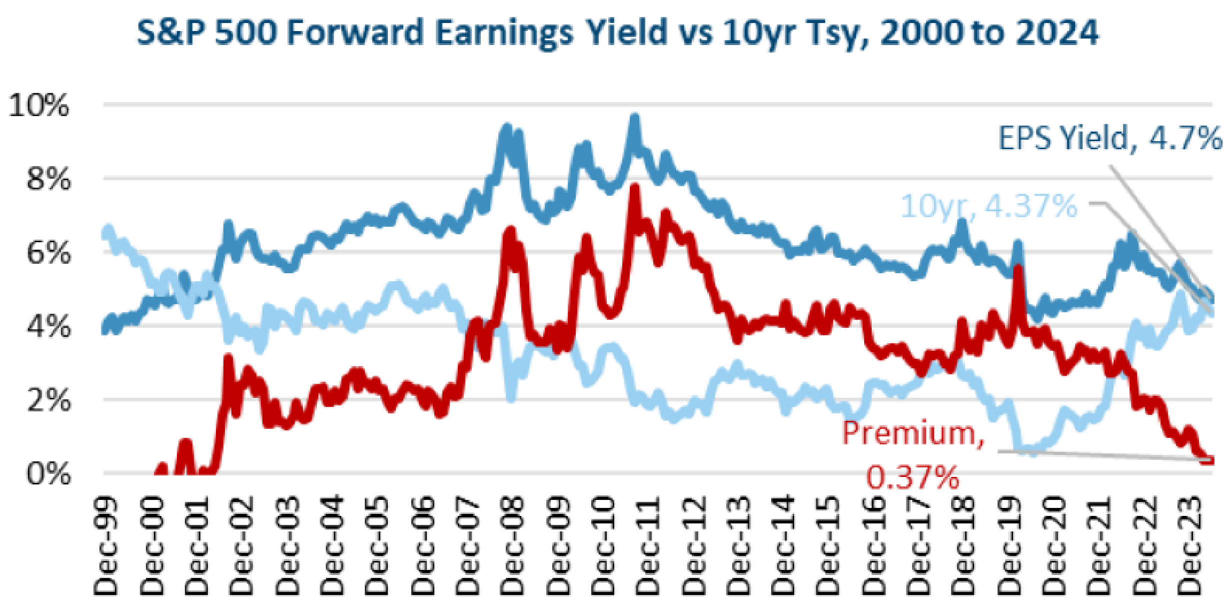

Chart 2

The improving backdrop for bonds, paired with rising stocks, has stretched the relative appeal of these two asset classes. Chart 2 shows the earnings yield on the S&P 500, the yield on the 10yr Treasury, and the difference between the two, known as the Equity Premium. A higher Equity Premium means stock investors are getting more compensation relative to bonds. From 2002 to 2007, prior to the Fed's QE interventions, a 1-3% Equity Premium was common. With both interest rates and the stock market higher thus far in 2024, the Equity Premium has declined to 0.37%, which makes stocks sensitive to interest rate changes.

Entering 2024, we noted it would be challenging for both Equites and Fixed Income to continue to post strong returns, as both did in 2023. Thus far, 2024 has illustrated that with a good economy, Equities could still do well, but Fixed Income could be challenged. But with interest rates reflecting a reasonable Fed outlook and the Duration/Yield ratio closer to pre-Global Financial Crisis levels, *Bonds can Live Up to Their Promise* of delivering reasonable income, modest price return, and some price upside, should the economy deteriorate and interest rates fall, which could offset a decline in Equities.

benchmarks, and/or categories have been provided for general informational/comparison purposes only, and generally do not reflect the deduction of transaction and/or custodial charges, the deduction of an investment management fee, nor the impact of taxes, the incurrence of which would have the effect of decreasing historical performance results. It should not be assumed that your Grimes account holdings correspond directly to any comparative indices or categories. **Please Also Note**: (1) performance results do not reflect the impact of taxes; (2) comparative benchmarks/indices may be more or less volatile than your Grimes accounts; and, (3) a description of each comparative benchmark/index is available upon request.

The information contained herein is based upon sources believed to be true and accurate. Sources include: *Factset Research Systems Inc.,* Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Congressional Budget Office, Board of Governors of Federal Reserve System, Fred: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Research, U.S. Department of the Treasury

-The Standard & Poor's 500 is a market capitalization weighted index of 500 widely held domestic stocks often used as a proxy for the U.S. stock market. The Standard & Poor's 400 is a market capitalization weighted index of 400 mid cap domestic stocks. The Standard & Poor's 600 is a market capitalization weighted index of 600 small cap domestic stocks.

-The NASDAQ Composite Index measures the performance of all issues listed in the NASDAQ stock market, except for rights, warrants, units, and convertible debentures.

-The MSCI EAFE Index (Europe, Australasia, Far East) is a free float-adjusted market capitalization index that is designed to measure the equity market performance of developed markets, excluding the US & Canada. The MSCI Emerging Markets Index is a free float-adjusted market capitalization index that is designed to measure equity market performance of 21 emerging markets. The MSCI All Country World Index is a free float adjusted market capitalization index designed to measure the performance of large and mid and cap stocks in 23 developed markets and 24 emerging markets. With over 2,800 constituents it represents over 85% of the global equity market.

-The Barlcays Aggregate Index represents the total return performance (price change and income) of the US bond market, including Government, Agency, Mortgage and Corporate debt.

-The BofA Merrill Lynch Investment Grade and High Yield Indices are compiled by Bank of America / Merrill Lynch from the TRACE bond pricing service and intended to represent the total return performance (price change and income) of investment grade and high yield bonds.

-The S&P/LSTA U.S. Leveraged Loan 100 is designed to reflect the largest facilities in the leveraged loan market. It mirrors the market-weighted performance of the largest institutional leveraged loans based upon market weightings, spreads and interest payments.

-The S&P Municipal Bond Index is a broad, comprehensive, market value-weighted index. The S&P Municipal Bond Index constituents undergo a monthly review and rebalancing, in order to ensure that the Index remains current, while avoiding excessive turnover. The Index is rules based, although the Index Committee reserves the right to exercise discretion, when necessary.

-The BofA Merrill Lynch US Emerging Markets External Sovereign Index tracks the performance of US dollar emerging markets sovereign debt publicly issued in the US and eurobond markets.

-The HFRI Fund of Funds index is compiled by the Hedge Funds Research Institute and is intended to represent the total return performance of the entire hedge fund universe.