

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario

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Do you believe in abundance?

Jesus said “Give and it shall be given to you: Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete out withal shall be measured to you again.”

A rich industrialist from the North was horrified to find a Southern fisherman lying lazily beside his boat enjoying himself doing nothing.

“Why aren’t you out fishing?” said the Industrialist.

“Because I have caught enough fish for the day,” said the fisherman.

“Why don’t you catch some more?”

“What would I do with them?”

“You could earn more money. With that you could have a motor fixed to your boat and go out faster and into deeper waters and catch more fish. Then you could make enough money to buy nylon nets. These would last longer and bring you more fish and more money. Soon you would have enough to own two boats...maybe even a fleet of boats. Then you could be a rich man just like me.”

“What would I do then?” asked the fisherman.

“Then you could **really** enjoy life!”

“What do you think I am doing right now?”

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What do we personally believe about money?

Are any of these statements our beliefs?

*“Money doesn’t grow on trees. Money is evil. Rich people are crooks. I will never get a good paying job. I will never make any money. Money always goes out faster than it comes in. Poor people never get out from under. I am a starving artist. I don’t deserve. I never lend money. My job is my only source of income. I could never charge that much for my services. Poverty is next to Godliness. I can’t afford that!”*

In 2007 after the book called **The Secret** was published I decided to preach a sermon series on it during that summer. If you know anything about church finances, you realize that churches always have a fall off in givings during the summer. But that summer of 2007, when I preached on **The Secret** the givings actually went up for the first time **ever** in that church’s history. Strange??

**The Secret** is based on the words of Jesus. Here they are. **“Whatever you ask for in prayer. Believe that you have them already and they shall be yours.”**

These are strange words, aren’t they? But they are touching something mysterious and spiritual, something that is part of the makeup of the universe, something hidden... They are asking us to believe that when we have something that lies in the future, we are to imagine having it now and the future will materialize. Doesn’t make any sense or does it?

The authors of **The Secret** say that if we hold negative beliefs about money, those beliefs will block good from coming to us. They say that we need unwavering faith instead.

What do we think? Do negative thoughts block our good from coming to us? How could they not? is perhaps a better question? And what gets rid of negative thought patterns? According to the authors of the Secret Believing you have it NOW! So, there is some wisdom here!

St. Paul says about giving that: “Whatever we sow we reap.” St. Paul says that if we believe in scarcity, that will become our reality. “Thin sowing means thin reaping.” If we say, “ I can’t afford that!” that will be true for us. How could it not?

**Scripture tells us that what we believe is very important.** If your parents taught you that money doesn't grow on trees and we never re-examine that belief, then the likelihood of that becoming our reality is greatly enhanced for us. "For as a person thinks so are they," Scripture says. In fact, scarcity can become our subconscious intention. The authors of **The Secret** say that we can counter any negative phrase we hold about money by using a simple little phrase: "Money comes often and easily." Do we believe that?

Did you know that John Calvin, who was a theological reformer who helped found our Presbyterian Church, he taught that there was a **positive role for money** to play in the Christian life and society? He said money was like blood in the body. It needed to circulate. He was the one in the Protestant tradition who gave permission to charge interest on money, allowing a modest return on investment. This was one of the factors in the rise of capitalism and the free market.

There is not much question that Jesus was young, innovative and controversial. His parable of the talents is an example of his deep insights. Jesus thought differently from other people.

In the parable, the man with the five talents and the man with the two talents are both risk takers. Their intention was to double the money. They succeed.

The man who was given only one talent was no risk taker. He tried to believe in total safety and so he buried the talent secretly in the ground. I guess he thought he would look good if the economy crashed. The master would still have something...

A talent was worth 500 denarii. A denarius was the equivalent of a labouring person's one day's wage. In today's world a talent would be about \$500,000.

Lots of folks have difficulty with this parable because they feel sorry for the man who buried it in the ground due to his fears. But the parable sees this man as lazy and not using his God given intelligence. As one commentator pointed out it would take more effort to dig a hole to put the money in than it would be to give it to the bankers for interest.

What is Jesus teaching here?

One church I knew had a group of trustees who were into total safety when it came to trust funds. They believed that the only safe thing to do was to buy GIC's or treasury bills. Over the years these securities had yielded less and less. At the time in question the interest from these funds was below 1/2 of a percent. When the money came in, the trustees gave it to the board of managers to use in the operating budget, less and less every year...

The Session gradually became alarmed at the behaviour of the trustees, so much so, that they did not want to give them any more money to manage. A proposal came along from the Presbyterian Church in Canada to invest with them. The congregation went for it. The trustees resigned and the first year the interest came in at 11%.

When you are dealing with a lot of money that is very significant. That congregation would have been lost years ago without that calculated risk taking...

What had happened here? The congregation realized what Jesus had taught in the parable of the talents- **risk and prosperity are connected.**

But that is not all Scripture teaches us.

Scripture says that God is a God of abundance. Whatever we measure out, God will give us back not only that amount, but it will flow over. In other words, God is generous. If we are to take God up on this generosity we must get rid of our fears of scarcity and instead become cheerful. Being cheerful gets rid of fear.

St. Paul says that God loves a **cheerful giver**. That we are not to give out of compulsion. We are to realize that we are into **reciprocity**. If we sow sparingly we will reap sparingly, if we sow bountifully we will reap bountifully.

St. Paul says that we are to give **as we have made up our mind**. We are to think before we give, decide and then act.

God is able to provide us with every blessing in abundance, but there is a catch here: We need to be cheerful givers. Why? You can't be cheerful about giving **and fearful at the same time**. If we get into cheerfulness in our giving something magical can happen- abundance!

Let's remember that the enemy for the third investor was FEAR. This is what Jesus is driving at. It was fear that motivated the man to hide it in the ground. He had no faith in the economy or the bank. He was into total safety and **we don't get that in this world**.

Years pass and the master returns. Inflation happens. The money left in the ground is worth less than it was before it was entrusted. In the bank, at least, it might have kept pace with inflation, but no, this man is too fearful even for the bank. So, he does not enter into joy and cheerfulness as the other two do.

This is not to say that the man with 5 talents is reckless. But it is true to say that he was willing to take calculated risks. He was careful and wise, and a steward of the master's money and his motivation was to do this stewardship for the master. It was not his money that he invested at all. He had a job to do and he did it well.

Note in the parable that the one inflation devalued talent was given to the man with 5 talents. **Having been successful with the five and making ten, he is the best person to give the deflated talent to, to make up for the loss.** He has proved his worth. The man given the one talent was a poor person to invest in, due to one main reason- HIS FEAR DRIVEN VIEW OF THE WORLD>

What Jesus is trying to teach us here, is this: We are to be good stewards, we take calculated risks, we are wise, thoughtful, aware of the markets and placing the money where it will get a good strong return.

If we look at our own finances, we can become very fearful very fast! We ask how much is enough? Will I have enough to retire well? When I die will there be enough money for my beloved spouse and my children? What if I lose my job, what then? What if I can't afford a nursing home?

What if I rack up student loans and can't get out of debt for years and years, what then? What if I have high medical bills. What if the stock market crashes? What if I lose my health and cannot work, what then?

Give? How can I give with all the uncertainty around me? I know charities need help. I know my church needs help, but so does my family. I have legitimate concerns!

What would Jesus say to that?

He would say that you are taking counsel of your fears when just the opposite is needed. **Imagine that you have it already** and your fear index which is the enemy of true faith will decrease. If you already have it, you can't be fearful that you won't get whatsoever you ask for in prayer, can you?

So, what is the answer?

It is Faith.

Faith in God. Faith when God says no. Faith when God says yes. Faith when God says not yet- the timing is not right.

Remember how often Jesus talked about faith? When a miracle is needed he says we need faith. Using hyperbole, he says "if we have faith the size of a mustard seed we could cast mountains into the sea."

If someone has faith in **us** we do, better don't we?

Faith transforms us and there is also a connection between Love and fear. If we are motivated by love, Scripture says, 'that perfect love casts out fear!' So, if we are fearful about money it is also a problem of lack of love...

The man with the five talents has faith in himself, faith in the markets, faith in his investment capabilities, faith in the law of reciprocity. He uses the power of intention to double it because he knows that what we sow we reap. Sow sparingly, reap sparingly, sow bountifully, reap bountifully. And when the master returns he hears from the master:

“Well done good and faithful servant!”

Let's go back to Jesus teaching. Look at the first word “Whatsoever”.

That is a very wide word. **Whatsoever** we ask for in prayer: it can be a good job, a spouse, an increase in salary, a recovery from sickness or even a better world for our children. “Whatsoever” is as wide as the world!

What are we to do next?

**Believe that we have the whatsoever already.** Why? That's counterintuitive isn't it? Isn't that magical thinking something psychologists tell us to avoid?

What Jesus is asking us to do is to use the **power of our intention in this way: We are to behave as if the outcome we want is already a reality.** We are to feel it, vision it as already in place, play it through our minds, particularly if we are sick, as if we were already well. Why? **To do this increases the power of intention.** It is rather like taking Tylenol with a coffee for a migraine. The caffeine intensifies the power of the Tylenol to relieve pain and the migraine does not develop. Intention is like a catalyst. Jesus knew this so long ago, and his statement is the shortest and best summary of how to use the power of intention that I know of. **Whatsoever things you ask for in prayer believe that you have them already and they shall be yours.** That is the secret!

There is an interesting author, Lynne McTaggart, who has written a couple of books about the power of our intentions. If we intend something it can make a difference in outcome. Her first book was called **The Field.**

Her second book was **The Intention experiment, her third The Bond. Now she has a new book out called The Power of Eight.** She is on You Tube and her stuff is very well researched. I haven't a clue **how** it works, but I have had some amazing experiences myself with this power especially in prayer!

I close with one example.

I have personally experienced this God given power with a colleague.

We were in University Hospital here in London.

My colleague was in Intensive Care. He had had a ‘grand mal’ seizure and had not come out of it.

The doctors told us that he was brain dead. The machines were breathing for him. There was no activity in the brain. The family needed to give them permission to disconnect all the tubes and machines and let him die.

When I got there, his dear wife and daughter were there, and we went into a quiet room beside the Unit. We prayed together and then I said that I was going to vision him having an animated conversation with me. This was my whatsoever!

His wife looked very dubious indeed. So, did his daughter, but we linked hands and prayed that we would have that conversation with him. I took one last look at him and left the hospital.

Next day was a Sunday and I stopped the service and asked everyone to pray for his recovery.

The following Sunday he was back in church. Afterwards I talked to his doctor who was a member of the church and asked him what he thought. “David,” he said, “It's a miracle!”

**Whatsoever you ask for in prayer, believe you have it already and it shall be yours.**

What is your whatsoever??