**Investment Strategy**

**FBC Albemarle**

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In August 2010, 40 of America’s wealthiest individuals and couples joined together in a commitment to give more than half of their wealth away. Created by Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett, the Giving Pledge came to life following a series of conversations with philanthropists around the world about how they could collectively set a new standard of generosity among the ultra-wealthy.

Here is what The Giving Pledge is about according to its website: “*The Giving Pledge is a simple concept: an open invitation for billionaires, or those who would be if not for their giving, to publicly dedicate the majority of their wealth to philanthropy. And it is inspired by the example set by millions of people at all income levels who give generously–and often at great personal sacrifice–to make the world better. Envisioned as a multi-generational effort, the Giving Pledge aims over time to help shift the social norms of philanthropy toward giving more, giving sooner, and giving smarter.*”

Today, the pledge includes 171 of the world’s wealthiest individuals, couples, and families, ranging in age from their 30s to their 90s. The list includes Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffet, Paul Allen, Michael Bloomberg, Richard and Joan Branson, Elon Musk, Ted Turner and Mark Zuckerburg and his wife Priscilla Chan. The combined net worth of those who have signed the pledge is $734 billion and the total amount pledged is over $365 billion. Both the Gates and Warren Buffet among others have committed to donating 99% of their total wealth to charity. These billionaires from all over the world have decided to INVEST their wealth in matters like world hunger, education, health issues and other worthy philanthropic ventures.

Now, I know what many of you are thinking. “If I had that much money, I would give it away too!” Well, if we are honest with ourselves, I am not sure that would be the case. Walter Brueggeman, one of our great contemporary theologians, says, “We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. We must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God’s abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity — a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly.” I think Brueggeman is right. Most of us have a difficult time repelling the power of our belief in scarcity. We have a difficult time in knowing what or when is enough. The lure of needing “more” is pretty powerful.

To be sure, 1 percent of $78 billion dollars of Warren Buffet’s net worth is still too much money for any one person to spend. However, I don’t think the actual amount of money or resources really has anything to do with our mindset. No matter what we have in our bank account, whether it is $5,000 or $5 billion, if we have a hard time letting go of what we have, that attitude doesn’t necessarily change with more resources. Either we believe we have enough or we believe we lack for something more. It is about the mindset more than anything else.

What would it mean to us to invest out of our abundance? We have all been given an abundance of gifts, talents and resources. No matter what our bank statement might say, we have been blessed with abundance. How are we investing our time? How are we investing our talents? How are we investing our experience and our wisdom? How are we investing our wealth?

Truth be told, I have a lot of problems with today’s text. It makes me uncomfortable in many ways. I have a problem with the fact that each servant received a different amount “according to his ability.” That doesn’t seem very fair does it? Just because someone has more ability than another, why should he or she receive more than the next person? Then there is the part of the parable where the three servants had to account for their actions. The two that doubled their original amount were praised while the one that still had the same amount was thrown out into the darkness. Where is grace in this story? Does this parable teach us that we have to earn our salvation? Why was the one talent given to the servant that ended up with 10? Wouldn’t it have made more sense to give it to the one that had four? Like I said, I have lots of questions about this parable.

Yet, at the core of the parable, Jesus was pointing to one thing: He defined the task of good stewardship for his kingdom of all that he has entrusted us with, which we are to be occupied with until Christ returns. God entrusts all people with a portion of his resources, expecting them to be good stewards. When we are like the first two servants who faithfully carried out the commission of being good stewards, we will be commended and rewarded. However, if we are like the last servant who failed to use his gifts for the kingdom, we will be punished by separation from God and all things good. The punishment may seem harsh and I don’t understand fully the intricacies of grace and judgment in the parable but Jesus didn’t mince any words when referring to the punishment of the “wicked” servant. That servant represents those who profess commitment to Jesus but show no evidence in their lives of the reality of their profession.

It is clear from the parable that we are to be good stewards of the resources we have been given. So, how are we to be good stewards? What should be our investment strategy?

First, we need to invest intentionally and knowingly. Between 1995 and 2010, the number of registered public charities increased 78 percent. The number of para-church organizations – religious missions and ministries beyond the traditional church and denomination – increased 195 percent. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of charities and ministries that seek our support. It is easy to spread out our volunteer hours and financial resources to so many missions and ministries that we get spread too thin to make a real impact.

So, we need to do our research. We need to be more intentional about knowing the mission of the organizations we support and its effectiveness in accomplishing it. There are many wonderful ministries in our community that are doing kingdom work. How do we determine which ones to support? We invest intentionally by surveying our own passions and gifts to match them to the ministries that are best fit. As a church, we invest in missions and ministries that maximize our gifts, talents and resources to make the greatest impact. We can’t be all things to all people. So we choose the ones that match our mission, gifts and talents. In the same way, we should do that individually. We should invest intentionally and knowingly.

Second, we should invest in people. In the parable, the Master invests in his three servants. Both the servant who received five talents and the one who received two talents doubled the Master’s original investments. Since they both received the same praise and reward from the Master, we can assume that what he really was concerned about is what they did with what they had, not who made the most money. In the same way, we should also invest in people who will take what is given to them and make the most of it for God’s kingdom.

I love the fact that our church has the mindset of being a teaching congregation. Through our summer internship program, we invest in the life of a college student who is exploring their call and their vocation. Through our Music Scholar program, we give a student like Mandee Schaub an opportunity to use her gifts for the glory of God. Through our Children’s Ministry Internship, Scottie is learning more about his passion for children and sharpening his skills in working with them. Even during the interim period of searching for our next Associate Pastor, we have given Alyssa an opportunity to discover her passion in working with students and her calling into ministry. Even when Jacob and Brittani Waldrip come to be part of our church in January, we will help him discover his gifts and talents by being a grace-filled mentoring church. Certainly, everyone who we have invested in has given to us as much as we have given to him or her. Isn’t that the goal of a good investment?

Finally, we need to be focused on investing in God’s Kingdom, not our own personal kingdoms and queendoms. All who believe in Jesus Christ are part of the Kingdom of God. That kingdom is neither a political entity nor a geographic turf of ground here on earth. The Kingdom of God is everywhere Jesus is allowed to rule. Jesus expresses His love and devotion to us as the Savior who has come to rescue us and reunite us with our heavenly Father. He seeks access to our life through His presence in our lives. When we say, “Come in, Lord Jesus,” we are inviting Jesus as King to rule in us. So the Kingdom of God is an invisible kingdom embedded into the world everywhere a believer in Christ lives. The kingdom of God is in you and me. The Kingdom of God is all around us. The kingdom of God is wherever we are as we live out the call of Jesus to love God and love others.

Therefore, if the kingdom of God is in us when Christ reigns in our hearts, than we need to give up our personal kingdoms and queendoms. We cannot serve two masters. We will love the one and hate the other or hate the one and love the others. So what does it mean to invest in God’s Kingdom? We direct our time, energy, talents and resources to help people see and experience Jesus. I believe that when people see and experience Jesus in real ways through our words and actions, they will be changed. God’s kingdom is that attractive.

Yet, we cannot underestimate the power of our own kingdoms and queendoms. Our fleshly desires are powerful. Galatians 5:17 says, “What the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each others, to prevent you from doing what you want.” Our flesh and the Spirit are like oil and water. They do not mix. So we should invest in what produces God’s love, peace and joy, which are signs of God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We’ve been given abundance. God is the source of all good things and in God’s kingdom, the blessings never run dry. Therefore, what are we going to do with our abundance? What will you invest in? Investing with knowledge, investing in people and investing in God’s Kingdom are good investment strategies. Invest wisely.