

## “Looking Back”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden  
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, Oct. 24, 2021

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ  
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

*Scripture Text:*

Matthew 22:15-22 [NLT]

### OPENING

“There’s a man down on earth who needs our help.”

“Is he sick?” Clarence, the angel asks.

“No, worse,” God says. “He’s discouraged.”

Discouragement is one of the things we can feel when we’re suddenly drawn into conversations about money. Fear is another. Not fear *of* money, per sé, but fear of *running out* of money... not having enough.

And with that comes all kinds of cultural messages about our self-worth. And that can certainly lead to discouragement because we get “self-worth” confused with “net worth”. We can have very little of the world’s goods but have an amazing sense of self-worth because we know Whose image and likeness we bear, and we know we are beloved of that One. Likewise, we can have billions and have no sense of our self-worth because it’s been distorted monstrously by greed, pride, and other forms of sin in our lives.

Not having a whole lot of *net worth* can certainly lead to discouragement, which is understandable – and that’s the *first* response this series aims to get at: *Grace* – toward others when it comes to our attitudes around

money, but especially toward ourselves.

If we have fear around money issues, there are probably good reasons for that, and “looking back” (\*the sermon title\*) at the attitudes we grew up with towards money and material stability is essential in order to understand how and why we feel the way we do about money. And this “looking back” is essential to learning how to deal with ourselves and others with grace, compassion, and understanding when it comes to this important resource.

### SERMON THOUGHTS

“Looking Back in Order to Go Forward” is one of the chapter titles in Peter Scazzero’s book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. (\*Expound briefly on this aspect of Family Systems Theory and family-of-origin issues that surface from the genogram.\*)

### TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

1. From Marcia McFee, creator of this series (\*She tells of her parents being farmers and sharecroppers whose next harvest was never guaranteed\*). Their choices and language instilled in Marcia an uneasy feeling that she is not in a position to be generous, even if in reality she is.
2. From my own life: my dad’s giving pattern vs. my (step-)grandfather’s (\*funny story about offering plates in my two experiences\*).

When I look back at my family of origin through my dad, his giving practices as an adult were completely understandable from his experiences growing up – even though he had plenty to give as

an adult. (\*It also didn't help much that the churches we were a part of were US Navy Chapels, which were completely funded by the government.\*)

### MORE SERMON THOUGHTS

The practices around generosity in *both* of those illustrations highlight the relationship between fear of the future and the fear of not having enough.

Before going further here, I want to say that I am sure that there are some here this morning – or who are listening – who truly don't have enough and who do an amazing job stretching what they do have to make ends meet. I don't want to imply that concerns about money and whether or not there's enough to pay the bills in the future is all just a matter of perspective.

But I also think that most of us here have household incomes that exceed our living expenses. So our fears related to not having enough money are more connected with what shaped us growing up than they are with our financial reality at present.

### ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION

The story of when Kim and I decided we were going to start tithing – right off the top: When we said “Yes” to God's call to ministry. And the first opportunity we had was the going away gift we got from friends, family, and church members as we were leaving for Kentucky – with no job and four kids and a graduate education to pay for in front of us. But that didn't matter. We promised God, and that was that – and it

was a joy to be able to give 10% of our gift away to various charitable organizations.

This is very similar to Marcia McFee's reflections on generosity coming from her family-of-origin story I shared earlier. She wrote, “This [relationship between our fear of the future and our fear of not having enough] is a very human thing—even evolutionary—to want security. **But it has skewed my perspective and decreased my enjoyment of life.** Because I do love to be generous. I believe that giving creates incredible blessings and feelings of well-being—whether that is giving of money or time or attention or love, grace, and forgiveness. And I want that in my life.”

### SERMON THOUGHTS

I tell these stories simply to offer starting points for your own journey of looking back at your family of origin and where your own attitudes toward money come from. They may be very healthy – or, as in my case, they may be a reflection of a lack of trust in God that God wants to do some work with you on. That makes this matter of our response to money a *spiritual practice*, one through which God will draw you closer to Himself and closer to Christ and Christlikeness.

Maggie Kulyk and Liz McGeachy, whom I mentioned at the beginning of worship had this to say about it:

*“This is the spiritual practice I'm talking about: We want to be honest and engaged with our money but also spontaneous and trusting; involved but fluid; living in the present moment but not in denial about the future. Balance is possible in relationship to this thing we call money, but it's not easy to attain.*

*In fact, working on these issues is like” – and I love this metaphor – “holding a knife by the blade. Money will bring out some of the best and the worst in us, but this is of course what makes... [this matter of our response to money] such a rich and important spiritual practice.” (Kulyk and McGeachy, p. 73, quoted by Marcia McFee in materials for this worship series.)*

## CONCLUSION

In response to a question a group of Pharisees asked Jesus who intended to trap him into saying something self-incriminating, Jesus responded brilliantly, if for no other reason than the fact that his answer put the struggle right back on them.

I don't believe Jesus was trying to be evasive or flippant or arrogant in His response to the Pharisees. I think he was genuinely concerned for the *soul-health* of his questioners. And his answer to them, challenges us, as well.

Because, like the Pharisees, we have to wrestle with what money means to us, too, and where we find our security and our peace when looking at the future. We have to wrestle with the difference between “self-worth” and “net worth”.

But Jesus calls us to wrestle with these things in the light of his love and grace, not in the darkness of fear and discouragement.

Like George Bailey, the main character in *It's a Wonderful Life*, we can end up discouraged when wrestling with these things. But, the Gospel – the

Good News – is that the central reference point for us as Christians is that God looks at us with compassion, love, and grace in our wrestlings, not with condemnation and judgment.

So, don't be afraid to “look back” in your life in the coming week and think about where your attitudes toward money come from. And then invite the Lord to shine the light of His love upon you and (1) affirm those places that are aligned with God's righteousness in these matters and (2) bring healing, transformation, and peace where there is room for growth.

May it be so. Amen.

## Prayer Concerns for the Week

Our prayer concerns can be found on the second page of the 11 AM Worship Order:

- ✓ Go to the Church's webpage, [www.fumcgj.org](http://www.fumcgj.org),
- ✓ Click on the “Worship” tab along the menu bar at the top of the homepage
- ✓ Then click on the link labeled “Order of Worship”.

Please pray for:

- Tana & Roger Foote and extended family upon the death of Tana's brother, Dick Mantlo, two weeks ago now.
- For Frank Wagner and family upon the death of his wife, Mary, whose service we held here last week.
- For our District Churches (1 every week) – This week: Price UMC in Price, UT led by Tongan pastor, Rev. Mele Moa.