

## October 2020 Series: *A Wonder-Full Life*

### Brainstorming Summary

September 22, 2020

**Members present:** Lynne Richmond, Barb Gripton, Vicki Zuker, Karen Post, Diane Thompson, Pastor Mary Ivanov, Karen Booth, Carole Koch, Larry Jorgenson, Betty Kinney

**2020 theme:** 20/20 Vision – Seeking God’s Vision for Ourselves, Our Church, Our Community, and Our World

**20/20 Vision theme connection:** Look/Outlook, Direction - How we view money from different angles

Like George Bailey in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, we sometimes need some help in the midst of the discouragement that can come when we face financial struggles. It’s not uncommon for us to have some discomfort and anxiety when it comes to talking about money. We may have struggled with finances over the years and found ourselves discouraged. We may have an uneasiness even approaching the subject now.



We may feel comfortable with our financial situation. Our reactions can be connected to our family history with money - what we saw and what we learned. And certainly, in this moment, in this year when so much has changed, when the economy has taken a hit, money has been on our minds.

When it comes to faith and finances, sometimes we want to separate the two, but they are intimately connected. Money is a tool for mission and ministry. Giving of time, energy, and money blesses others and is a reflection of our partnership with God in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

In this series, we’ll use the beloved film *It’s a Wonderful Life* to consider how we view money, how we can be faithful stewards of all of God’s gifts, and how we can build a wonder-full life with God and each other.

#### Resources:

- “A Wonder-Full Life” worship series - Worship Design Studio
- “Spiritual Economics” - Pastor Mary’s continuing education class
- [Integrating Money and Meaning](#) by Maggie Kulyk and Liz McGeachy. Note: This book has a personal exercise that helps us see how we view money.
- *It’s A Wonderful Life* - 1946 film (<https://vimeo.com/280022699>)
- <https://www.allworship.com/finding-hope-times-hard-lessons-its-wonderful-life/>
- <https://www.godtube.com/news/8-impactful-quotes-from-its-a-wonderful-life.html>

- <https://ronedmondson.com/2017/12/10-life-lessons-from-its-a-wonderful-life.html>
- <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/five-life-lessons-from-its-a-wonderful-life>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/21/health/its-a-wonderful-life-lesson-wisdom-project/index.html>
- <https://theweek.com/articles/454845/7-enduring-lessons-from-wonderful-life>
- <https://www.wsj.com/articles/george-bailey-saw-the-miracle-of-capitalism-11577144861>

#### **Ideas for the series:**

- What’s our congregation “money story?” What’s the culture of money in our congregation?
- What’s your personal and/or family “money story?” What’s the culture of money in your family?
- **Use the reading in worship that includes a male voice reading lines from the film (or film clip) before Scripture** (Jim Post, Dave Lorenz, Jeff Stone, others?) **and show some clips.**
- **STAR WORDS:** GENEROSITY, GIVING
- Visuals: **candle of illumination, silhouettes, pictures from the congregation to show “wonder full life”**
- Social media: Share movie quotes or questions each week. Ask for pictures of a “wonder full life.”

#### **Music ideas:**

- Be Thou My Vision (UMH 451) as a thread through the series
- You Are My Vision
- A Wonder Full Life - Marcia McFee’s song for series

**Scripture ideas:** “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” — John 10:10b

**Visuals:** Angel wings (Clarence Oddbody). Candles/lanterns/moon (to shine a light on our money practices). Treasure. Silhouettes of people. Bread/salt/wine (blessing). Cement blocks (Diane’s story and to represent the role of the Building and Loan Company in Bedford Falls).

- <https://unsplash.com/collections/4630481/a-wonder-full-life>
- <https://www.pexels.com/collections/a-wonderful-life-x519dn0/>
- <https://www.pinterest.com/worshipstudio/a-wonder-full-life/>
- Lynne’s pins: <https://www.pinterest.com/lynandlid/its-a-wonder-full-life/>

**General discussion points:** 1) The film was not popular **until** after its copyright expired and was played over and over again in the public domain. 2) At one point there is a flashback to 1919 in which the druggist for whom George works has found out that his son died from the flu. 3) How do we think about our lives? Our legacy? Do we wonder what the world would have been like had we not lived? 4) Pastor Mary wishes that people would let loved ones hear the things that would be said at their funeral while they are still alive. 5) Betty’s neighbor used to say, “Bring me flowers while I’m still alive.” 6) Premarital counseling: Pastor Mary

always goes over attitudes about money with couples. 7) God moments are good examples of a wonder-full life. 8) Ask worship leaders to reflect on money and/or what makes a life wonder-full.

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**October 4, 2020: “Looking Back”**

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – LIVESTREAM

**Scripture:** Matthew 22:15-22 (CEB)

“Then the Pharisees met together to find a way to trap Jesus in his words. They sent their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know that you are genuine and that you teach God’s way as it really is. We know that you are not swayed by people’s opinions, because you don’t show favoritism. So tell us what you think: Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’

“Knowing their evil motives, Jesus replied, ‘Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used to pay the tax.’ And they brought him a denarion. ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ he asked. ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said, ‘Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.’ When they heard this they were astonished, and they departed.”

**Synopsis:** Our relationship with money has a history - not only as long as our lives, but also as expansive as our family and culture. If we want to create spiritual practices for how we deal with money, first we look back to see with new eyes how and when our values and fears were initiated. We can practice compassion for ourselves and others and a faith that reminds us of our true worth.

**Felt need:** To understand our personal relationship to money and how it relates to our call as stewards of God’s gifts

**Visuals:** Loaf of bread, bottle of wine, and box of salt (movie – blessing the Martini house).  
Cement block (Diane Thompson’s story and the Martini house).

**Related blessing at the end of each service:**

The blessing is taken from the dialogue in the film, *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Mary and George Bailey speak these words (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNQGmJbriHY> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0MTzF73Jzl>):

“Bread! That this house may never know hunger.

Salt! That life may always have flavor.

And wine! That joy and prosperity may reign forever.”

Then Marcia McFee expands this idea into the message of the day, ending with:

“You have been reminded of these things here in this time together,  
now go and do likewise in the world, for it is “a wonderful life!”

**Media:** “It’s a Wonderful Life” 2021 Re-Release Trailer. Length: 1:54. Cost: Free.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR7p-IB6INM>

**Related info:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion - adapt Communion prayer

**Music:** Suggestions from Marcia McFee – #377 “It Is Well with My Soul”, #87 “What Gift Can I Bring?”

**Children’s Time:** “Wonder-Full” - overflowing water

**Worship Leader:** Brad Hilleary

**Quote from It’s a Wonderful Life:**

*God: “There’s a man down on earth that needs our help.”*

*Clarence, the Angel: “Is he sick?”*

*God: “No, worse, he’s **discouraged.**”*

**Discussion points:** 1) We learn about money from other people. What they model matters, whether it can be a source of worry and something to fight over or something that can be used for good. 2) Diane’s Lutheran upbringing: Her Dad saved ten cents at a time to buy cement blocks for their porch foundation. When she first started receiving an allowance in third grade, she was expected to divide that 25 cents into three separate envelopes for Sunday School, savings, and spending. 3) Karen Booth told her kids that their college funds were their inheritance and were surprised to find as adults that probably wouldn’t be their only inheritance. 4) Different mentalities: Scarcity vs. Abundance. 5) Marriage is easier if both partners have similar views on money, unless of course both are big spenders. Nothing good happens then. 6) Larry’s older neighbor is convinced that her adult children have no business knowing anything about her finances. 7) Money is not a secret in families or church. What is the difference between secret and private? 8) Carole said her parents would rather have talked to her about sex than money and even gave her a book about sex. A book on money would have been a better idea. 9) Schools teach more about sex than money too. 10) As the product of two Depression Era parents, Barb knows that her views were shaped by their experience. Mary said the same thing about being raised on a farm and marrying an immigrant. 10) Pastor Mary had some youth figure out how much a computer would cost if they only made the minimum payments. They were shocked and some said they would never buy anything on that plan. 11) How much money trouble comes from maxing out credit cards? Lynne even received a credit card application for her dog, Lucy. A related problem: Not being willing to wait for anything. “I want it now!” 12) Best skit ever: Saturday Night Live’s “Don’t Buy Stuff You Can’t Afford.” 13) Dave Ramsey has done great work getting people to be more responsible with money.

**October 11, 2020: “Looking In”**

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - LIVESTREAM

**Scripture:** Matthew 6: 19-24 (CEB)

“Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how terrible that darkness will be! No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

**Synopsis:** We live an “incarnational” faith—faith that is lived out in our actions in the world. How do we use God’s gifts, including time, energy, and money, to make meaning and support God’s mission and vision in the world? When we approach daily living with attention and intention, it is a “wonder-full” life.

**Felt need:** To align our faith in Christ with our actions, especially in how we use money, and examine our motivation for giving

**Visuals:** Angel wings. Treasure. Venn diagrams (money in relation to spiritual life).

**Media:**

**Related info:**

**Activity:**

**Hands-on item:** Pay-It-Forward type card (You are loved. LHUMC)

**Music:** Suggestions from Marcia McFee - #400 “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”, “10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)”, #399 “Take My Life”

**Children’s Time:** “I Wonder...” - asking “Why?”

**Worship Leader:** Jim Post

**Quote from It’s a Wonderful Life:**

*“You’ve been given a great gift, George: a chance to see what the world would be like without you. ... Strange, isn’t it? **Each man’s life touches so many other lives**, and when he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”*

— The angel Clarence Oddbody (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGk7ghlZE8>)

**Discussion points:** 1) Jim Post story: Don’t make change in the offering plate. Opposite situation: Willow Creek uses velvet offering bags to that you drop money in or take money out. 2) Pay it forward. 3) Vicki just read about a young man who gave both of his parents COVID and then died. He was suicidal. Wear a mask for the sake of those around you. 4) Reasons for giving are both personal and spiritual. Why do we sometimes try to separate money from our spiritual life like they reside in separate boxes? 5) Throwing money at problems: Some problems are solved with money (positive), but sometimes it lets us off the hook so that we don’t have to become personally involved (negative). 6) Giving time vs. giving money: Some people don’t have money to give, but for most of us that is not an issue. We can give both. 7) Lynne’s attitude on giving changed for the better when she started “serious church” (LHUMC). Her family was content with simple pleasures, i.e. a Sunday afternoon car ride, sharing a bag of caramel corn, and driving on the ‘cloverleaf.’ 8) Diane: Money you give away always comes back to you as a blessing (not repayment). 9)

Larry had trouble with the idea of Pony Express/pressured giving. As a young married man with one child and \$6,000 income, a \$2-3/week donation was all they could afford. Fifty years later, he found himself having to ask others to give. 10) Carole's son answers scam calls with, "Muskegon Police. Fraud Division." 11) Diane has had more time for reflection and personal connections during the pandemic. She has gained as much from reaching out as they people she has contacted. 12) Vicki is motivated by our mission statement, "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." 13) Stewardship is about more than money. It's making good use of our time, talents, and energy too. 14) Lynne has appreciated that LHUMC is open about the budget. It engenders trust. 15) Incarnate means "in the flesh." Sarah Carnes (maybe?) describes it as being "deep in your meat."

**October 18, 2020: "Looking Out"**

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - LIVESTREAM

**Scripture:** I Timothy 6:17-19 (CEB)

"Tell people who are rich at this time not to become egotistical and not to place their hope on their finances, which are uncertain. Instead, they need to hope in God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation *for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.*"

**Synopsis:** Do we reap love and generosity or bitterness and resentment? Do our attitudes and actions, especially around money, align with God's vision? Are we impacting the world with hope - or at least moving in that direction? No matter how incremental or seemingly simple, when we focus on God's vision, we live with a sense of wholeheartedness and wonder that energizes us, others around us, and the world. We "truly live."

**Felt need:** To examine the impact we have on the world around us through our giving

**Visuals:** Pictures from the congregation depicting people of all ages and the impact of giving on the whole world. Ideas: kids learning, family gatherings, serving others (MAP, Family Promise, etc.), cards showing caring (especially from Lynne Richmond and Jan Justus), COVID stones, hospital volunteer work (even it is the ministry of presence – like Larry's experiences)

**Related info:**

**Activity:** Noisy offering

**Music:** Suggestion from Marcia McFee - #2172 "We Are Called"

**Children's Time:** "Wow Wonder!" - use STAR WORD

**Worship leader:** Diane Thompson

**Social justice issue:** Chris Beaudoin (recorded)

We need to be careful if we use the quote from Peter Bailey to Mr. Poster. Not having family or children should not be connected to being stingy.

**Quote from It's a Wonderful Life:**

*“Mr. Potter, what makes you such a hard-skulled character? You have no family, no children. You can't begin to spend all the money you've got.”*

— Peter Bailey to Mr. Potter

*“Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you're talking about ... they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn't think so. **People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped, frustrated old man, they're cattle. Well, in my book, he died a much richer man than you'll ever be.**”*

— George Bailey Jr. to Mr. Potter (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rczQBihLXrk>)

**Discussion points:** 1) Scripture says that the love of money is evil, not money itself. 2) Mr. Potter and George Bailey are polar opposites in their attitude toward money. Potter is a tyrant who seeks power over others. Bailey has a good relationship with people in his family and community - all while taking on the role of a martyr – resentful, self-sacrificing, long-suffering – until he is changed at the end of the movie.

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**October 25, 2020: “Looking with Gratitude” 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - LIVESTREAM**

**Scripture:** Acts 4: 32-35

“The community of believers was one in heart and mind. None of them would say, ‘This is mine!’ about any of their possessions, but held everything in common. The apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and an abundance of grace was at work among them all. There were no needy persons among them. Those who owned properties or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds from the sales, and place them in the care and under the authority of the apostles. Then it was distributed to anyone who was in need.”

**Synopsis:** At the heart of our relationship to money is living and giving with gratitude—whether we give money, time, or energy for the sake of others. As a result of aligning our money practices with God’s vision for ourselves and our impact on the world, we find hope and the possibility that gratitude can overcome fear in the act of sharing.

**Felt need:** To overcome our fears of giving and move toward generosity and gratitude

**Visuals:** Copy of Tom Sawyer. Angel wings. Bell ringing. Ledger.

**Media:**

**Related info:**

**Activity:** Faith Commitment cards – also on November 1

**Music:** Suggestions from Marcia McFee - #384 “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”, “Who You Say I Am” (Hillsong), #383 “This Is a Day of New Beginnings”, “No Longer Slaves” (Bethel Music)

**Children’s Time:** “Extra Helping”

**Worship leader:** Rose Emmons

**Quote from It's a Wonderful Life:**

*"A toast ... to my big brother George. **The richest man in town!**"*

— Harry Bailey

*"You see, George, **you really had a wonderful life.**"*

— Clarence Oddbody

*"Dear George, **remember no man is a failure who has friends.** Thanks for the wings. Love, Clarence." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3sXVxqDbFk>)*

**Discussion points:** 1) This reading from Acts is about social holiness. The rules need to be transparent. You have to trust others to live in the manner described here. 2) Money fears are often related to whether we have a scarcity or abundance mentality (Is the glass half empty or half full?).