



**“9 Steps to Living  
Abundantly”**  
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OMG – It’s Stewardship month. I don’t know about you – but I get a fair amount of angst when it comes to knowing it’s Stewardship time and as minister I’m going to need to talk about how our discipleship includes how we use our money.

I never fully understood that until last weekend when I was attending the Alberta Conference education sessions on Stewardship. Several presenters presented a fact: Most of us – don’t like to talk about money, sex or politics and we’ve been taught and raised not to talk about those things.

A light bulb went on for me. We’ve been taught not to talk about these things and yet – especially – with money and sex – they’re areas we can get into trouble with – because we’re not talking about them – in healthy and honest ways.

A light bulb – Paul was struck by the brilliance of Christ’s light because he had been involved in such darkness. Sometimes because we don’t talk about money and sex in honest and healthy ways – it’s easy to step into ways of darkness. The disciples on the road to Emmaus – they realized opportunities of light was right before them and they hadn’t seen it.

I remember reading a survey – an American one. It found that most preachers didn’t preach about sex but most of the people in the pews wish they would. I realized that as a preacher I don’t preach on sex and I know I should. So I apologize to you in that and know in the future – I will be.

I’d like to tell you a story about honesty and money.

It’s about a well-loved woman in a community. She was a bubbly, friendly woman who worked with children.

Then, one day, it was discovered that money was missing from a special fund. It was the fund that parents and children had worked hard at building up to fund special events and buy equipment. People were angry. They felt betrayed.

The woman herself was incredibly ashamed. She was charged criminally. Went to court. She was placed under house arrest and some people in the community thought it wasn’t enough to teach her a lesson. She hit rock bottom. And facing rock bottom she had to face what she had kept hidden.

Her spending addiction. Her need to keep buying things to somehow fill a void in her life. When she felt worthless or sad, she would buy things – pretty things, junky things. It didn’t matter. But when she needed more money this fund was accessible to her. First she took a bit. Then paid it back. Then she took a bit more and figured out how she could hide it in the books. No one noticed. Why would such a friendly woman do such a thing? So she carried on taking a bit more, a bit more and a bit more – until thousands of dollars were gone.

When you think of it, those men walking the road to Emmaus. They were blind – like this woman was. They were caught up in a lot of grief of the past. They shuffled along the road, a bit unconsciously – not recognizing that Christ was before them. So this woman was walking through her life unconsciously. Maybe one time, buying a pretty thing had made her happy. So she continued to buy anytime she could – so she could be happy, fulfilled. Rather than taking a conscious look at her life. What were the reasons for her low self worth? What was her pain? How might she reach out to the Risen Christ who was there beside her waiting for her to take full advantage of the full, conscious life God offers us.

So with eyes wide open – let's look at 9 steps to living abundantly. I learned about these last weekend. I have a sheet to hand out. Now I'm not going to go through all of these. But I'm giving you this sheet, so that as I'm talking or maybe at home, you might want to jot down what each of these means for yourself.

### • **Being totally financially honest**

It's key in being a good steward of what God has given to us. How much debt does our household have, really? How much money am I really spending?

- There's a Canadian TV Show called "Until Debt to us Part" where a financial advisor goes in to a home and helps a couple with their finances. The first thing the advisor does is add up how much money they owe. How much money they are bringing in and how much money they are spending? Always it seems a great awakening to the couple that they're spending out much more than they're taking in. A light bulb goes on. They see consciously the life that they are leading.
- I was introduced to Oprah's website this week – by Linda Thomson, Murril, Sandy Hall. On there is some really good practical financial help included Oprah's Debt Diet.
- One step is "Find your Latte Factor. "If you put just \$10 a day towards your debt rather than spending it on fancy cups of coffee, cigarettes, bottled water or fast food, in one year you could put \$3600 towards your debt!" It's quite marvelous – exercise is how much do you spend a day on these small luxuries.

### • **Go for quality, not quantity**

I looked at this step and realized we have four cars at our home right now. Two in the garage, two in the driveway. None of these cars has the year 2000 any where near their manufacture date. I own one of those four cars. I think you know who owns the other three. So on this subject, I can say -- 'do what I preach, not necessarily what my household does.'.....

We can collect things – we know that. I remember when I was starting out living on my own – needing to stock my kitchen – a friend's mother said – be conscious of purchasing things that have more than one purpose. Special pots, special fry pans are great but they cost extra money and take up storage space.

### • **Give away 10% or more.**

Yes, it really does say 10 per cent. Now we all know that there are churches that demand their members give 10 per cent of their income.

Now we're United Church – we don't tell anyone to do anything. But we suggest it. 10 per cent or more. It's suggested because we know, God truly loves a cheerful giver as Scripture says. In fact, we know giving makes for cheerful people. When we live with the spirit of generosity, our lives are fuller. We know we're fulfilling the purpose God intended for us.

And we love cheerful givers – look at how popular shows like Extreme Home Makeover is or the more recent one, Oprah's Big Give away. Oprah's Big Give away has been the top show in its time slot for four weeks running.

• **Say everyday what you are grateful for**

Happy people know they've much to be grateful for. Start at a younger age. Our home curriculum for those three years and younger suggested starting at an early age – at supper – what things are we thankful for. Joy caught onto that very quickly.

- **eliminate jealousy, envy and resentment from your life.**
- **practice forgiveness**
- **practice receiving from others**
- **work with diligence**
- **believe that there is enough in the world.**

We often think there isn't enough in the world. And yet, we know deep down, it's because all that we have isn't being shared. We know that some try to take more than their share. We experience this when we try to read what we actually owe on our VISA statement and there's obviously been some intent to not make it readable. When I was growing up, one of the reasons stated for there not being enough was that those poor people off in those countries were having too many children. And we know that's not true anymore. We know there's enough to be shared. We know too that we are called to share what we have.

Because, God calls us into conscious living.