



## Mark's New Year's 2023 "Sermon" 😊

The following question came up over coffee with a client recently, and he suggested I write about it. So, here you go...

### Could it be that wealth is a curse??

Maybe you don't think it is (or want to call it) a curse. So, let's ask it differently... Could it be that wealth DISTRACTS us from something more valuable (more WORTH-while) than WEALTH? Might there be a "lottery" worth more than *MegaMillions*? Remember, that when Mark preaches with a pointy finger, he's got three fingers pointing back at him. We're all on a journey with this "stuff." We're all at different places on our journey. But, just as those who walk *The Camino* (<https://caminoways.com/camino-de-santiago>) share stories and encouragement, let's offer our individual and collective stories that may encourage (en-COURAGE) our fellow travelers.

As I read, watch, and even contemplate different stories throughout history, the stories fall into one of two categories. They are either stories of INSPIRATION or they are stories that are CAUTIONARY TALES. Examples of the former might be the stories of Joan of Arc, Gandhi, the Buddha, Jesus, St Francis, and Mother Teresa. When I think about people like Midas (do I really want EVERYTHING to turn to gold, including my daughter?), Howard Hughes or even the *Emperor without clothes*, the notion of cautionary tales comes to mind. We can be drawn in or ATTRACTED to a good story whichever category it may fall into. Having said that, none of us ASPIRE to a life whose "worth" is none other than a cautionary tale. Today, many youth might aspire to become the next Tiger Woods or Justin Bieber (pick your own role model/"hero"). As their lives play out, are their stories inspirational or cautionary tales? Might they start as one and become the other, or vice versa? How does the story end?...

Billed as the *Most Watched Show on Television*, many of us (Lyn and me included) have been captivated by *Yellowstone*. Wouldn't it be "cool" to have the EMPIRE (the biggest private cattle ranch in America) of a John Dutton? Or to be as brazen as his daughter Beth... Yes, how about Beth? Isn't she a real *piece of work*? What is the TRUE COST of John Dutton's empire? Contrast *Yellowstone* with a recent Mark Wahlberg film, *Father Stu*. Wahlberg (*Father Stu*) shows a story of REDEMPTION... shows us the *way of suffering*... or, as a client once said to me, *Mark, sometimes we have to make ourselves small*... To which (if any) of these characters do I aspire to model my life after? Is my journey's "destination" one of these? I believe we *make a deal* when we settle for being simply INFATUATED (attracted to *all that glitters*...) rather than pursuing (even "panting" after... being "thirsty" for) what can ultimately SATISFY. We are made for something MORE... something that is bigger than just ME... We are (each and every one of us) made for MAKING what Steve Jobs labeled **A DENT IN THE UNIVERSE**. Science now tells us, among other things, two things that are quite profound:

- We are hardwired for GENEROSITY.
- SELF-TRANSCENDENCE is fulfilling! On top of Maslow's original hierarchy of needs (<https://www.thecareerproject.org/blog/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs/>) (which had SELF-ACTUALIZATION at the top), near the end of his life he realized that self-actualization left him empty... So, he added SELF-TRANSCENDENCE – the idea that fulfillment comes from something more than self. It comes from giving ourselves to something bigger/more than self...

Speaking of "dents," Mother Teresa famously said,

***If you want to change the world,  
go home and love your family.***

So, what OCCUPIES my ATTENTION? We say PAY attention. Our attention has a "COST" associated with it. And, so often, my attention gets "PRE-OCCUPIED" with things that draw that attention (we call those DISTRACTIONS; (think dis-attractions... my attention (or my FOCUS) gets drawn away from the main thing, the true thing (I daresay TRUE LIFE) away from what I REALLY want. What are those distractions? What trips me up on my way to what I really want; from the life that I deeply desire? Might it be: FEAR, another vacation, my kids "safety," some sort of addiction (substance or other), the next business deal, money (even trying to be "diligent" with how I spend money), some sort of religious duty or dogma, the list goes on and on... What we focus on we move toward, and we might even say we become like what we focus on. I've asked (you AND myself) the question, *What am I marinating in?* What I marinate in will transform me into something else. Is that something else what I REALLY WANT?

### Are my DISTRACTIONS DECEITFUL?

Do they promise something they can't deliver? In that vein, do these distractions (I'll call them *lesser things*) ROB me of the life I really want; the life I deeply desire? You and I have the *authority* to arrest these thieves... So, let's call the distractions what they are in the end – THIEVES... and arrest them – put a stop to them. In French, the verb to stop is **arreter**. It is the same word as to arrest. Interesting...

In the spirit of vulnerability, I remember times in the past when I wondered what it would be like to fly first class... Well, even though my wife is awfully good at finding deals on airline tickets, first class still costs a lot. We've splurged and flown first class a handful of times. To think of going back to always flying coach... Why is it so difficult to *climb down the ladder*? Maybe down is really up... What if??? Lyn recently said to me, *There's nothing MORE I want*. Cool! Does that mean we've "made it"? OR, does this trigger contemplation of my friend Bud's question (one I've shared with you before), **When does ENOUGH become TOO MUCH?** Might I already have too much? And if the answer is yes, am I willing to "de-accumulate," willing to give some of my STUFF away?

***Be wary of wealth, Mark.***

***Contentment doesn't come with***

***“a little bit more.”***

***Contentment comes with gratitude***

***for all I already have, AND,***

***I believe, from being generous***

***with what I have.***

Every once in a while, try, like St Francis, to DISRESPECT money. The legend (and maybe it is just that, a legend... Even so, the idea, in my opinion, causes me to PAUSE and PONDER the point of the story) is told of someone giving him bills (paper money) and how St Francis used it as toilet paper. Maybe once in a while I need to do something that gives money “the finger,” in order to distance myself from the powerful hold wealth can have on me.

***What is your definition of TRUE WEALTH?***

What is mine? Is my eye on the “right prize”?

***Does my life point to anything beyond me?***

“Someone” or “something(s)” fight to keep us from the life we deeply, truly long for... Don't let “them” hold you in “prison.” There is another way to live, not in that prison, not looking over your shoulder fearfully.

***Live FREE... to be who you were***

***MADE to BE...***

***Not defined simply by what you are***

***PAID to DO.***

I want that to be a sort of New Year's resolution...

Who is that true you? Yes, we can be inspired by others; even imitate others, but what would it be to live free; free to be the true you? There is another way to live than what we so often settle for... It was Oscar Wilde who said,

***Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.***