

July 7, 2013 - The Investor

Continuing on in our Spice series, this is the second-last lesson we have in this series. Next week will be our final one, so we're kind of winding down to the end here.

Some of you may have seen that T.V. show called Shark Tank or maybe you've seen the Canadian version called Dragon's Den. These shows are basically the same thing and what happens is, people come in with what they believe is a brilliant invention and they come and stand before this panel of millionaires and billionaires and they try to convince the millionaires and billionaires that they should invest their money in this brilliant invention that this person has come up with. They come up with all sorts of things that they bring into the show. Just a couple of examples that I pulled off the internet this week. There is one that's called the 'Cord buddy'. You clip it on to your guitar and it helps you learn to play chords on the guitar. Or perhaps, you might invest in 'Throcks'. It's socks, but they come in threes so that when the dryer eats one you still have two left to wear. So you may want to invest in 'throcks'. Some of you will buy into this one, I know. It's a bacon alarm clock, so in the morning it not only wakes you up but there's a fresh piece of bacon right there for you to eat. The final one, it's called "I want to draw a cat for you" and you go on line onto this website and you pay \$10.00 and the artist will draw you a custom cat picture. For only \$10.00 you could do that. Now, these are just a sampling and believe it or not, two of these products were huge successes and two of them were not. And you might be surprised at which two were the good ones and which two were the bad ones. But that's really the job of the investors. They listen to the pitch and discern which products are going to be a success and which products will be a failure.

Now, I've never had anyone invest \$50,000.00 in me, before, but I have had some investors in my life over the course of my years. I remember way back in the '80's, Linda Ashby's son Darren and I we go on this kick and we did this 30 hour famine. I don't really know what inspired us to do it for the first time but we just got a hold of it and we just decided to do this. So it was exactly what it sounds like; you go for 30 hours without eating. Like many of these things go, you try and get people to pledge you for this 30 hour famine. People could pledge you so much per hour that you managed to go without eating or they could just give you a flat pledge for the whole whack of things. So that's what we did and many people, probably a lot of you who are here this morning who were around back in the '80's got hit up by Darren and I to pledge us for this 30 hour famine. There were many people who supported us in that and really we had the easy part, it was the rest of you who made a difference. I remember the first year that we did it, we did this 30 hour famine so we didn't eat for 30 hours and then we thought the brilliant thing to do at the end of 30 hours of not eating...all you can eat buffet! Now, let me tell you, that is a bad idea. If you ever do a 30 hour famine, do not end it with an all you can eat buffet, cause your body is just not prepared to handle that.

A little later on in my life I went down to York College in Nebraska. I remember the summer before I went to York, I had numerous weekly, and to some point, daily conversations with an Admissions Officer named Brad. Brad would keep calling me and calling me and trying to persuade me to come to York and every time he would call me I'd say "Well, I'd really like to go there Brad, but I just can't afford the tuition and I can't afford all the money it's going to take me to get there." So he'd say "Okay! Let me work on that. He'd call me a couple of days later and he'd say "Okay, you're from Canada so we can get you a Foreign Student Scholarship. So we'll give you this much." "Well it's good Brad but it's not enough." So he'd call me back a few days later and say "Well, your dad's a preacher in a foreign country so we can get you a Missionary Scholarship." I'd say "Sure Brad, that's great but it is not enough." At one point, he actually got the Choir Director who had never met me, to give me a scholarship. He had never met me before, didn't know me from Adam but he managed to persuade the Choir Director to give me a Music Scholarship. Based on Brad's opinion, who had never met me either, that I could sing. And so, somehow he managed to get the Choir Director to give me this Music Scholarship. The only catch was, when I arrived at school I would have to go to the Choir Director and audition for the choir. Now, that was quite a nerve-racking experience because I knew going in that I had to at least do well enough to get into the choir, because if I didn't get into the choir I didn't get the scholarship and if I didn't get the scholarship I didn't have the money to be there. So, fairly nervous moment walking in there and he was a guy who could be really intimidating when he wanted to be and so some tense moments there, but I managed to squeak through, got into the choir. But even with the Music Scholarship I told him "That's not quite enough, I still can't handle it." So he called me up one day and I think this was in August and school starts the end of August. He said "Mike, I found this guy, he's a professor at our school, he's an older single guy and his name is Tom Martin. Tom lives on Campus or just off Campus and he's got this tiny little house and he's got this tiny room upstairs, it's an attic really, and he said, 'You know what! If you want this kid who I've never met, this kid who I've never met can come to York and he can sleep in my tiny little attic room.' And so, for the first year that's where I lived at York.

Second year, he got moved across Campus to a bigger house (picture) that front section was my room. So for two years, while I was at York, I lived off of Tom Martin. I didn't pay rent, I didn't pay utilities, I didn't pay a thing to Tom. He just decided "I'm going to do this so this kid can come here to York."

A few years later, I grew up, graduated, and was out in B.C. and was working there and one day, after church a couple came up to me, a couple we were friends with, came up to me and they handed me an envelope and they said "This is for you." I said "Okay! Thank you." An then they went on to explain, they said "We've done something. We've booked you into a weekend at a cabin, bed and breakfast. We've done this because we appreciate what you do here at the Church but we want to make sure that you and Michelle have some time to get away and to be together and to strengthen your relationship and build your marriage, and so, we bought this weekend away for you and we want you to have it." They did stuff like that

occasionally and other people have done that for us. Just investing in us and in our relationship and in our marriage.

In each of these cases, I was able to accomplish something and to do something that I probably never would have been able to pull off on my own. In each case, people looked at me and what I was doing and they said “Now that’s something worth investing in. That’s something that’s going to bring some valuable returns in the future.” You’ve probably seen this happen when you think of missionaries that go around the world. In the next five weeks, we’re going to have: Bernard and Alicia; and Travis and Alicia; and Ray and Ellen are all going to be here and speaking for us on different occasions, talking about the mission work that they do. All of which is supported through this congregation. I know for a fact that each one of those families has this kind of ‘army’ of people who are supporting them, who are sending in cheques every month to help support them so they can do the work that they need to do. Maybe if you’ve gone on a mission trip sometime in your life, you’ve had that pleasurable experience of having to sit down and write out all of these letters to all of your family and your friends and everyone you know and say “You know what? I’m going on this trip to this place to do mission work and could you send me some money to help support me on that trip.” Or maybe you’ve had people who have invested in you in other ways. Maybe people who have invested in your education. Maybe people who have invested in you and helped you get to a financial spot where you could purchase a home. Maybe you’ve had people who have just invested in your life when times have gotten tough and it’s hard to make ends meet, someone just kind of shows up and helps you up by investing into your life and into your family.

Heard a story awhile back about someone investing in someone else and when I heard it, I knew this was on the horizon and I thought “You know what? When this week comes up, we’ve got to tell this story.” And so, I decided that better than me telling it, I’d better let you hear it from the horse’s mouth. You’ll understand in a minute why I’m so pleased to be able to say that phrase. But, I’m going to call my dad up and he’s going to tell you this little story that he shared with me awhile back about someone investing in him.

Bob Parker speaks.

I think that there are many investors but most of them are invisible and I think that, that’s because they’re not looking for acknowledgement or any kind of applause. In fact, I think that their genius is in working quietly behind the scenes. I know that we have a number of investors in our congregation.

I haven’t had a lot of ‘investors’ in my life but I have had a few and they are truly some pretty amazing people. So I just want to tell you one of those stories. Really, investors are the reason that I spent most of my life in ministry. When I finished high school, I had a friend in Regina who said “I have a job here working at Goodyear Tire in the warehouse and I think if you came to Regina you could probably get a job because we’re really busy right now.” So I

went to Regina and I interviewed and I got the job, so we're working together in this warehouse rolling tires, getting minimum wage. My friend says to me "You know, ever since you have become a Christian you've really been passionate about God and the Kingdom of God and I think that you should get some training and some education and go into ministry." And I said, "well, there's really two problems with that. First of all, I wasn't exactly a star student in high school and if I'm going to go on to college or university I don't really have a very good transcript." And my friend, who is sometimes quite blunt said "The reason for that is, when you were in high school you were too busy with too many other things and you didn't spend the time and put in the effort to do a better job." Well, I couldn't really argue with that but I said "Well, it doesn't really matter, because not only don't I have a good record but I also don't have any money. I'm working here in a warehouse making minimum wage. My mom is a widow and she's working in a job that makes minimum wage and it's not possible to do this."

So, he really didn't bug me about it a lot but every once in awhile he'd talk to me and say "You need to be thinking about this." Then one day, I think it was in October of the year I graduated from high school, he said, "You know, we need to have a serious talk." And when he said "We need to have a serious talk" I knew something was up. He was married so him and his wife and I sat together and he said "So, here's the deal. We've talked a lot about this and we've thought a lot about this and we think this thing is doable if you want to do it." But he said "Three things need to happen. First of all you need to apply for all the scholarships you can get. I knew I wasn't going to get any academic scholarships, but he said "You apply for all the scholarships you can get. Secondly, you're going to have to work part-time while you go to school cause that's the only way this is going to happen. But we believe that you're capable of doing that." So, get a part time job, and thirdly: "My wife and I have already checked this out and we can get a janitor job in the evening and we will take that job and earn money and we will send it to you so that you can go to school." And I said "Are you kidding? Like you're going to work from 8 to 5 every day and then you're going to go home and have supper and then go and do cleaning for two or three hours, every day, from Monday to Friday, just so I can go to school." And he said "Well, that's not your problem, that's our problem. We've already talked about it and we've already decided what we're going to do but you need to decide what you're going to do." So, I decided, got the scholarship and got the part-time job and the next January I was in school in Lubbock, Texas.

There's another little story that's really neat about that experience as well, in some ways is almost as amazing as the first story. Part way through, I think I was in year two of a four year program, and I had this old car that died a natural death. My friend used to call me about once a month and he'd say "How are things going?" And I said "Things are going great. Works going great. School is going good, everything is going good. The only thing that's not going good is my car and I've talked to a few people who are mechanically inclined and they said 'you know, you'd better just have a funeral because there's not use in trying to resuscitate'. He said "Well, have you looked at any other options?" And I said, you know back in those days, maybe it's still true, that there were always rich kids that came to school,

right? So across the hall from me there was one of those kids and he had this car that was four years old, very low mileage, and his dad was going to buy him a new car for graduation so he was going to sell his old car. I needed \$500.00 and I thought if I could wait until summer, I'll be working full time and I would be able to do this. So, my friend back in Canada said "Well, let me think about that for awhile." I didn't find out the rest of this story for many, many, years later but my friend back in Regina was still working for Goodyear and he didn't have any money. But he and his wife had gone to the bank and had borrowed some money to buy some furniture for their apartment and they had paid off the loan. So he thought "Well, I've got some credit history so I should be able to go to the bank and borrow 500 bucks." Now, just so you get that in context, \$500.00 then was worth about \$4,000.00 now. So anyway, he decided he was going to go to the bank and he was going to borrow \$500.00 and he was going to tell them that he had already had a loan and had paid it off to he should be able to borrow \$500.00 and he's send it to his friend in Texas and he could buy this car.

So, he made an appointment at the bank and at noon hour on his lunch break, he went down to the bank, told them this story, and the guy said "You know, there's no way in the world that that makes good business sense, we're not going to lend you any money." So he left and he was walking down the street back to work and he came across this other financial institution. Didn't know anything about it; didn't know anybody; didn't do any business there, but he thought "Well, what do I have to lose? I've already been turned down once by people who know me so I can get turned down by people who don't know me." So he walked in and it just turned out that it was lunch hour and most of the people were gone for lunch but the Manager was there and he said "Sure, come on in and tell me what you need." So he told him the story. "I've got this friend in Texas I'm helping him go to school, his car died and I want to help him get another car so I want to borrow \$500.00." And to his great surprise, the manager said "I think we can do that." He said "What time do you get off work today?" He said "5 o'clock." He said "Well if you can come in right after five I'll have the paperwork ready and we can get the money for you." I'm going to tell you the rest of that story in a couple of minutes.

Mike speaking again.

Isn't that a cool story? I'm sure some of you have stories like that in your life, as well. It's always wonderful when someone chooses to invest in us like that, although I've noticed, at least in my own life, that there's kind of somewhat of a natural resistance to that which is kind of ironic. If you want to know the principle I'm talking about, just think about probably it wasn't that long ago when you went out to dinner with someone and they brought that little folder to the table with the check and you both went to grab for it. Have any of you had this pseudo argument when the check comes? "No, no, let me get it!" "Please let me get it." "No! you got it last time." "No really." "Okay! Okay! You didn't have to do that but I'm getting it next time." Have you ever had that conversation with someone? Part of that is just being polite, right? But it seems like there's something in it that makes us resistant to

receiving sometimes and it might be because there is something a little bit humbling in acknowledging that we need assistance. Of acknowledging that we could use a little help from someone else.

In my life I've learned several realities and here's one of them that I've learned very, very well. There's the reality that there will always be something that's more expensive than I can afford. As much as I earn and as much as I say I've learned that there's always going to be something that costs more than I can afford. And I've also learned and this is probably even more important, that there will always be things that I would like to do and accomplish that require resources that I simply don't have, on my own. And because of those two realities, I have learned that I should actually feel privileged, rather than guilty, if someone chooses to invest in me.

I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking "But didn't Jesus say "It's more blessed to give, than receive." Yes! He did say that. But if it is truly more blessed to give than receive, then who am I to rob you of receiving that blessing by refusing your gift, right? I mean, it's kind of selfish of me not to allow you to invest in me on some level, right? And I'm kind of joking there but in some ways I'm not because, really, what would be better than for me to graciously accept your gift and your investment in me and for me to make the most of that investment in me and then for me to go out and turn around and when I have opportunity, go ahead and invest that in someone else.

Leonard Sweet reminds us that Jesus was actually a very good receiver. He says "Jesus was a good receiver. He was never the host of any designated meal, although he did feed 5,000 surprise guests. But Jesus never made up the list of invites. He was always the guest. Always on the invitation list. He participated fully in the goodness of being. We need to learn how to receive; how to be on the receiving end because you see when one person invests into another, it reminds us of a much greater truth about life."

The truth is, that God is a giver, and we are receivers. So when we give to someone else, our giving is an imitation of the heart of God. When we participate in a project like this and put your change in a canister over there; when we send support to missionaries around the world; when we bring in canned foods and all that stuff for our food blitzes; when we give in a thousand other ways throughout the year; when we give, we are an imitation of the heart of God. And then, on the flip side, when we receive our receiving is a reflection of our relationship with God. When we receive something from another person, it is a reminder to us, of our non-self-sufficiency. It is a reminder that there are things that are beyond our reach, on our own. It is a reminder of our ultimate dependence on Him.

Dave read for us earlier, a story out of Acts, Chapter 16, 11-15, about a lady named Lydia. Lydia lived in a city named Philippi, and she was a seller of purple garments. Those were actually fairly expensive garments to make because of the dye and the process you had to go through for that, and so by selling those purple garments she gained some wealth to her. So

when Paul and some companions come and they find Lydia sitting by the lake, immediately, she tells Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke, these four guys, she says “I want you guys to come and stay with me.” And she put them up in her house for their whole stay while they were in Philippi. Took care of them; fed them; and all these things. She actually hosted the church in Philippi for years and years to come. When Paul and Silas were in prison and they got free from that and the City officials told them “Okay, you can stay free but you’ve got to get out of town”; before they left town, they stopped by Lydia’s house for one more visit. That’s how influential she was to their life. You see Lydia was Paul’s ‘investor’ and she was also a significant investor in the church. But she is actually not the only investor example in the New Testament. I’m going to tell you one more that might even surprise you.

Did you know that Jesus had investors? Reading out of Luke, Chapter 8:

“Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.”

Now, I had always known that there was a group of women who travelled around Judea with Jesus and the disciples and even followed him to Jerusalem. This group of women was there at the foot of the cross; this group of women was there on resurrection day; and I knew that they were there but I never realized that many of them were being Jesus’ investors. That many of those women were the ones who were supporting Jesus and his ministry as he went around Israel teaching the good news. At which point something painfully obvious hits me....If Paul had investors; and if Jesus had investors; then maybe, just maybe, there will be times in my life when, in order to accomplish that which God has planned for me, I may have to accept help from a few investors of my own.

Of course, the flip side of that is true as well. There might, quite possibly, be someone out there who God is counting on me investing in, so they can accomplish what He has purposed for them to do.

You know one of the myths that financial guru’s will decry is; that you have to be rich to be an investor. That’s not true! Whatever wealth you have now, invest what you can now and later if you have more, invest that later. To be a spiritual investor, the same holds true. We don’t have to be filthy rich to start investing in other people.

Tom Martin was not, by any stretch, a rich guy but he had a spare room he could give away rent free. In the story that dad told earlier, these young kids in their 20’s working minimum wage, they were just starting out in life they were not, by any means, wealthy. How many people have chipped in their 5, 10, 20, bucks to support people like Ray or Bernard, or Travis,

doing mission work around the world. You see, to be an investor, all you need to do is be able to see the potential for what God can accomplish in another person. Sometimes that's potential that even, that other person hasn't yet recognized in themselves. And sometimes the results and the pay-offs of our investment are not quickly observable. Sometimes they are not immediately visible. Sometimes we don't know the results of our investment till many years down the road but, the investor knows that their investment will be worth it and will bring a return many times what was put in, partly because of the quality of the person they are investing in but even more importantly, they know it will be worth it because they're not just investing in the person but they are investing, ultimately, in what God can do through that person.

Those that supported that first 30 hour famine; those who put money into supporting that and the dollars they put in did go and do some benefit to famine stricken areas of the world at that time, but even greater than that, those first few projects and those people who invested in those products, kind of sparked an awareness of the role the church can play in addressing the needs of others. That awareness has kind of grown and blossomed over the years until the point where a month ago, this congregation re-invested \$15,000.00 in the lives of inner city people; in the lives of recovering addicts; in the lives of school kids in India who didn't have access to real education. The mission work that dad and Ray do over in India that we hear about from time-to-time. The work that they're doing over there now is a direct result of the fact that, back in the 60's and 70's, some people invested in these two young college kids and sent them over there to do mission work and preach the gospel.

As he mentioned, I cut my dad off a little bit earlier and I told him "You can tell your story, but only up to here cause I want to save the ending for later." So, I'll let him finish that off now.

So, this is a Paul Harvey story 'The Rest of the Story'. I can't promise you that it will always turn out this way but...we're back at 5 o'clock and my friend finishes work a few minutes early and he goes back to this place where this guy said he'd give him the money. He's a little bit apprehensive wondering if it's actually going to happen. He walks in and the manager says "Come in and sit down." Papers were on the table for him to sign and the cheque was already made out. Then the guy said "You have a few minutes to talk?" And my friend said "Yeah! I've got time." He said "Have you ever thought about getting a different job?" And It really know how my friend responded to that, except at the end to say "Why do you ask?" And he said "Well, this is the way I've got it figured. Anybody who would do what you are doing for your friend down in Texas going to school, is a guy that I want to have working for me." And he offered him a job that day. And so, he quit his job at Goodyear and a month later started his new job and it turned out that it was a life-changing experience for him because he had a highly successful career with that organization.

Mike again.

Now, of course, investing in people can take on many forms that are non-monetary. You can invest your time and your energy and your knowledge. We've examined stuff like that in previous weeks. We've talked about 'The Encourager; The Mentor; and the 'True Friends; and other things but, there are, as uncomfortable as it is for us to talk about, there are times in our cash/driven world, where investment occasionally requires an investment that comes with a dollar sign. The impact of your investment in someone else, or their investment in you, can bring about a return that, over the course of times, is many times over that which was invested. In Luke, Chapter 6:38, Jesus instructs his followers:

“Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

And I wondered for a minute this week, I wondered what would happen if I actually put that to the test. I imagined what God might be able to accomplish in me if I allowed others to invest in my life. Just imagine what we might be able to accomplish. What might be possible if we started to invest in other people's dreams. If we invested in the unlimited potential of our teenagers; if we started to invest in families; in marriages; in kids. If we invested in the development of the future leaders of our church. If we started to invest in the lives of our friends and our neighbours and our co-workers. Looking back in five or ten years, will we look at today's opportunities and think “Uh! If only.” Or, will we look back and rejoice at how our very little became so very much simply because God was in it.