

Harvest Time

Christians of wealth engaging with money as a doorway to spiritual transformation.

At Harvest Time, we believe that one of the most powerful ways we can inspire and encourage each other when it comes to money and faith is by honestly sharing our realities, breakthroughs, struggles and hope.



Holly Book, a former participant in Harvest Time's Atlanta Circle, recently shared some of her money and faith story with me. Holly's candid and open-hearted offering of her journey growing up wealthy, ministering to homeless people in Atlanta, and becoming aware of how God is shifting of the flow of money in her life is powerful.

I would like to share Holly's story with you in two ways. To listen to it, you can go to our website listed at the end of this article and listen through our audio link. I find it very powerful to listen to Holly's voice as she talks about her experiences and thus recommend this version.

If you prefer to read Holly's story, here it is:

Holly's Story

My Background

I grew up in a very wealthy family in Cleveland, Ohio. We had a big house, went to a

country club and experienced all the bells and whistles that go with wealth. After my father died, I had my own money, which was quite substantial, and I struggled with it. Even growing up as a kid I felt guilty. Money was used as a way to keep us in line. The message was "Well, look at all I have done for you," so I thought "Well gosh, I better be good." Money always had negative messages attached to it.

By the time I went off to college, I was struggling with guilt and embarrassment around money. I didn't want to admit to anybody that I had any sort of wealth.

When I saw Harvest Time's advertisement in *Sojourners* I was in my 50's and felt I had moved quite well through a lot of stuff

around money, but what was jumping out at me then was the spiritual piece. I had scarcity issues. I had tons of money, but a lot of emotional scarcity issues. I had some work to do around understanding that it is my wealth; it is my gift. I somehow "got born" into this and it's about claiming it and owning it and then beginning to understand how, from a spiritual perspective, I want the money to move through my life.

In my family, people went to church like it was a social scene. I was baptized in the Episcopal Church on my grandmother's front lawn in front of her big house with the bishop of Ohio because that was the right social thing to do. I was confirmed and we had a big party after that. These faith milestones were just another excuse to have a party for our family and friends. There was no real direction. There certainly wasn't any conversation in our house about God or faith. After my mother died when I was eight, if there was any faith in my father it just went out the window.

Having said that, in my earlier years I always felt like there was something or someone watching over me. I had a few interesting experiences as a child and a really strong sense of something with me, so I think I

always knew, "There's something here, there's something greater than me."

Right before my mother died, I was in my bed one night and I heard a single knock on my door. I said, "Come in!" and nobody came in. I was looking through a book and maybe a minute later, there was another knock. I said, "Come in!" Nobody came in. Another minute later, there was one more knock. I was mad and I said "COME IN!" I jumped out of bed and went to the door and opened it and there was nobody there. It wasn't long after that that my mother died. I had a strong sense that that experience was some sort of spiritual presence in my life.

I had those things happen a lot when I was little. It was a feeling like "I'm not alone," and I was alone so much of the time in my room because I was scared. My dad was an alcoholic, so I would just be in my room by myself



because I was really afraid of his anger. He married again very quickly after my mom died, and it was a disastrous marriage: a lot of fighting, a lot of drinking, a really scary place for a kid to be. So, I think it was a

sense of “It’s okay. You are not alone.” He married again, and then his wife died, and then he married again, so it was sort of like living in a house that was 7.5 on the Richter scale. As a kid, you just never really knew what was going to happen.

Spiritually, there was never any clear guidance in the sense of a prayer life. There wasn’t anyone I looked to for that until I met Bob, my husband. His faith had been very important to him. When I met him, I was 18 and had a real longing to find some kind of spiritual community, something that could begin to help me bring some kind of faith into my life. He was Lutheran and I was okay with that, so we started going to church. I liked being there. I was very open and ready.

In my young adulthood, my faith started to catch fire a little bit. When Bob felt called to go into the ministry, that turned our life upside down, but there was not *one second* that I had a doubt that this was what he was supposed to do. I was in it with him. I was open to it, and it was okay even though it was scary.

My faith journey continued to unfold once he finished seminary and ended up in a parish. I started taking some courses at the

seminary and then I got all mixed up thinking, “Maybe I should be a minister.” I was listening to Bob preach and thinking, “I could do this! I think I could do this better than Bob!” I got into all this weird competitive stuff. As I look back now, I’m glad I went to seminary. It was a wonderful experience. I realized at some point that it was just about my own spiritual growth.

We left the parish and I was a chaplain in palliative care and hospice care for a long time. Bob retired early and we moved to Florida. During that time, my spiritual life was really shifting. One of the things that I realized was that my spirituality was about *doing* for God.

That practice was good and fine but it was blocking my personal relationship with God, which for me comes through Christ. When I left the chaplaincy, I thought, “Wow, I need to stop everything I’m doing right now and pay attention to a more personal relationship with God.” I was moving from the big “doing” thing and getting more into my heart.

Then our lives took us here to Atlanta.

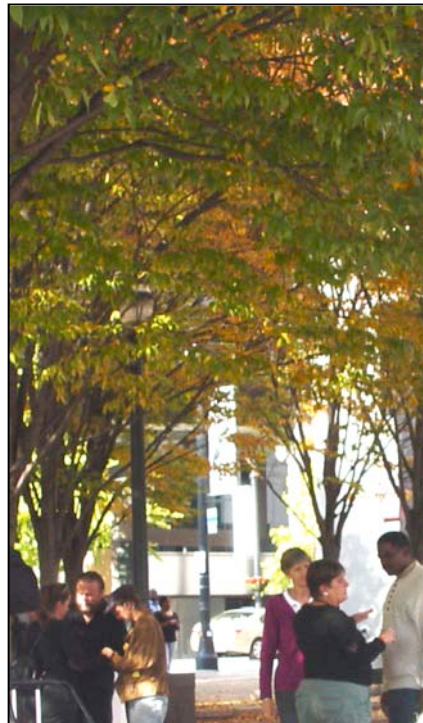
Church of the Common Ground

The ministry that I started with Bob is called Church of the Common Ground. It is a

spiritual community for the homeless modeled from a ministry called Ecclesia that was started up in Boston in the early 90's. What everything grows out of is our belief that our journey is about relationships with people who live on the margins, particularly the homeless. While many organizations ask "How can we fix this? How can we get this problem to go away?" Ecclesia is modeled from a different way. People need to know that they are loved and that they are valued by God and by other people. As you know, homeless people feel invisible most of the time. They don't feel valued.

Most have stories that would break your heart, so you know they come from some really difficult places.

We loved the Ecclesia ministry up in Boston and felt led to start something like it. We started by putting on a knapsack and hitting the park with granola bars and oranges and saying, "Hey, how are ya doing?" and being a *consistent* presence. We would go out three times a week because much of what people do (and we've done it as well) is to go out at Thanksgiving or Christmas and



hand out a blanket or bring a sandwich. We are called, as Christians, to be charitable and there are places for that type of charity, but it doesn't do much to build a relationship.

What this community has done is provide a place where people can build relationships. Hopefully through that, it has empowered some of our people who have really struggled, to get clean, even if it's for six days, to find an apartment, to do a little bit of work, and, at the end of the day, to feel loved and a little bit better about themselves. We don't measure how many people have apartments or how many people have jobs now. It isn't about that. That is why sometimes it's hard to explain and why a person really needs to come into it to see the reality of what it is about.

We've felt really blessed by the generosity of the people who live on the margins. I was so scared before of people who had nothing because I had so much. I thought, "Well maybe I could write a check, but I don't want to see them. I don't want to get

into a conversation because I feel bad because they're going to judge me." That's the irony. I'm judging that they're going to judge me because I have so much and they have so little; and of course, the complete opposite is true. I have never been in a population where I have seen such generosity. Not generosity of things (if they had things they would give them to us) but generosity of spirit.

The other thing that we've seen in this community and are so thankful for is the depth of their faith. People who have nothing have said to us time and time again, "This is where I feel God in my life. I never felt so close to God until I ended up out on the street." Now mind you, we have a population here with deep Southern Baptist roots, so boy do they know their Bible. There are strong spiritual roots for them, this feeling that "God is in my life, God will provide, it's all going to be okay." Talk about staying in the day and in the moment!

Fixing, Helping, and Serving

I feel very blessed in that all the winding around in my life and the moves and the growth have brought me to a place where I'm not doing this because I feel guilty. The

money flowed through me to fund this ministry because I'm at a place in my life where I really want to understand what it means to serve, and not to fix and help.

I spent my entire young life trying to fix my family. If I could get my dad, for example, to stop drinking and help everybody stop fighting and fix it, then I could be safe. It's a survival issue on a deep level, especially as a kid. If I take that into my adult life, and into a ministry like this, if I try to fix all these wonderful people that have come into my life, I can't sustain that. First of all, it's not my job and that's the big thing I get in to: getting confused about what is *my* calling and what is *God's* job in all of this.

The biggest story that I try to remember is my dad, who, as an alcoholic and a wealthy man, would never equate himself with our friends here at Church of the Common Ground because he had a roof over his head and he was a successful businessman. It was very hard for him to believe that he had a problem. When he went to rehab for the third time and the treatment still didn't work, I said something to him about wanting to heal. He said to me, "You know Holly, I don't think I want to heal." It was like this huge burden was lifted from my years of thinking I had to get him to stop.

When I come into this community, it helps me to remember that it's between them and God, and this is between me and God. It's about trying to slow down, be quiet, and be peaceful enough to get some clarity around my relationship with God and how God wants me to be in this.

Helping is a little harder for me, because I think there are ways that we do help and support each other, but even in this ministry, what happens with the fixing and the helping is it sets up an inequality because the money is coming from me who has a lot "up here" to you "down here" who doesn't have any. It sets up a very unhealthy dynamic between me and the people who ask me for things, and of course it also enables people in unhealthy ways.

For me, service is being available without strings attached or any judgments, and really understanding on a very, very deep level that part of service is not changing somebody else's life.

An interesting example of this comes from Eddie, who you would have seen in the park today doing one of the readings. We've known him for a long time. He runs our kitchen, and is just a wonderful guy. And he's an addict. He was with us a long time

and had some clean time. He was living in a shelter, which is a rough place to live, and I remember thinking that he had proven himself. Instead of paying him for helping us out so much, we decided we would put him in a room and pay for it. We sort of forgot to ask Eddie if that was a good idea; we just thought it was because we were going to "help" Eddie.

He went along for the ride. I took him to this room and got it all set up. It lasted a week. He disappeared from us for a month and started using again. When I had a chance to talk to him about it afterwards, he said, "Holly, I was so lonely. I was there by myself. That was my home, at the shelter. I knew all those people. I just couldn't handle the new place." I realized in that moment that with my best intentions I had tried to help him to fix his life instead of being present with him.

It doesn't mean that there isn't room for that. It's just not who we are in this ministry. I have spent my life doing trying to fix and help my dad, my sibling, whoever and I'm tired. For me, it became really clear that my money, my wealth could flow through me in a really healthy way in this ministry.

Learning to Discern How to Use the Gift of Money

When I began to get into a faith community, things shifted from “I’ve got this money, I feel guilty about it, so I should do good things with it and that will make me feel better about myself,” to “This is a gift from God, and my work in all of this is to discern how to use this gift in healthy ways.” The more deeply I felt God’s love, the more the need to do things with this money in an unhealthy way started to go away. It became about “Pay attention; what is God calling me to do with this?”

The connection between faith and money was a struggle. Historically, ministers aren’t supposed to have money. They’re supposed to be poor and people are supposed to leave potatoes on the porch! So when we went into a parish, we kept secret that we were rich. We were living a double life. How do you do this with integrity and use what you have with integrity so that you’re not just opening up a can of peas for dinner and really struggling when you have all this money, but also respect this community that you’re coming into?

The irony of this was that we ended up in this parish in rural Ontario where my father had stock in a company in a town nearby that he’d made tons of money from, and a lot of people in the parish worked in the company. So I had to have this dance all the time of “We’d like to do things here because we have this money, but we don’t want to be flashy or ostentatious about it.”

For example, my dad ran an amusement park and we wanted to take our youth group there, and we could get free tickets but I didn’t want anybody to know we could get free tickets. We would have car washes to raise money and I would never tell them that we didn’t need to do that. There was all of this dancing around because Bob was a minister and we’re not supposed to have money, and so we struggled with that.

We lived in this place of having a big secret and trying to live with that with integrity, but when we left that parish in Ontario, there was a bit of freedom. It was an internal freedom. That was when we spent those three or four years in Florida. Bob was very happy. I didn’t know what we were supposed to do, so I would just be in Florida in this little homogenous golf community, thinking, “What am I doing here? I don’t know what’s next, but alright,

I'm going to spend some time recharging my batteries. Bob can coach football, and I will just wait."

There was some good spiritual stuff that went on for me there. I was tired when we came out of that other parish, we both were, so there was a nice shift of renewal, continuing to look at the idea of "What is service?" honoring that balance in my life, and it was God leading us.

By the time we got to Atlanta, God had readied me to fund this ministry, no strings attached. There has never been a sense of "This is my money and I don't like how this is happening." It's freely given.

If my daughter says "Mom, I need such-and-such, I need the money for this," I try to feel God in the midst of that and step back instead of jumping in with a yes or no. I am able to feel physically whether something is right or not, and able to say "You know sweetie, I just can't do that for you." I try really hard when making those decisions about how money flows through me to listen to the physical response in my body, which to me is the Holy Spirit sort of "acting" in me.

I measure a lot of decisions in my life by whether it feels right and whether it goes

with other things. Does it go with sustainability, work with our environment, does it feel right in terms of my values, and in terms of the "When is enough, enough?" thing? I want to change the way the currency is. And I think I am doing that to some degree.

I don't like where most of my money is invested, and I haven't had the guts to do much about that so far. That's probably my next piece, to pay attention to how God is in that with me and leading me. I don't have a lot of control over a lot of my money, but I do have control over some of it. There are things that I could be doing to have it flow through me differently.



I would like to have the courage to make changes about where the money is, in terms of investments, so that I'm making choices that impact people in a really healthy and positive way. I long for the strength and courage to make different choices about investments and how my money works in the world.

Another longing for me is to be able to pray for the grace to take away the fear of not having enough. I think I'm better in that place in my life, but that still kicks in for me. That's connected to the investment thing, because to change my investments significantly decreases my income, which makes me scared.

So those are all connected: to let go of the fear, having courage, and a longing to live in peace and harmony with money.

I'm moving toward that place. I had times in my life when I would have conversations about money with my family where I literally felt sick. It would bring up so much stuff for me. I'm at a *way* clearer place around that, and spending time with Harvest Time has helped.

The next piece for me is differentiating myself from my husband, my children, my family, and from all of the messages that were there around money. As with anything, this is *my* relationship with money and *my* relationship with God, and I'm putting everybody else's issues and all that other stuff to the side so that I can really get some clarity about what this means in my life.

From Fear to Trust

The fear that I have had around losing the money or the wealth that I've had, which is really the deeper fear of scarcity and not surviving, was blocking a fuller relationship with God because I was relying on the money instead of relying on God. I'm not a person to spend a lot of money, but it's sort of like this safety net thing. If I get dropped, something will catch me. Instead of having it be the arms of God, it was a whole bunch of green dollar bills.

I can't take all the credit for all these phobias; these were planted in a family where there was a lot of dysfunction and wrong messages about money. Not to mention our society, which hammers away all these messages all the time: money will make you happy and keep you safe.

Every time my relationship deepens with God and the flow is better, the currency flowing through me changes from needing money to needing the love of God and my faith is what gives me safety. Some days I'm good at that and some days I am not. My dad's messages around money have really blocked me, but it continues to get freer and freer and freer, and that's a good thing.

The story of the rich man, the one where Jesus asks him to give everything away always struck me in my heart because I was taking it very literally, and I was struggling with “What does God want me to do with my money?” When I read that passage, it was like, “Oh yikes.” All that did was reinforce my guilt because I’m thinking I should be giving it away.

Harvest Time helps me with that by honoring that this is my journey with this gift of money that I've been given, and there is no right or wrong way. At the end of the day it's about trusting God in all of this for me. I'm very hopeful that the next stage will enlighten me further.

I have used my money in really unhealthy ways, because I wanted people to love me. I had people who would come into my life, who were good friends who needed something. It would turn from that to “Can you help me with money?” and I would help them. The relationship always ended. It never worked, because that currency was not flowing through me from a healthy place. It wasn't coming from a grounded place starting first with God and deeply believing that God loves me. It was instead "You gotta do something Holly, to get people to love you back," because that was

the message in my family. I was not able to say “I love you, and I'm sorry you're struggling but I just can't do that for you.” I couldn't do that before, but now I can do that.

The power that money has in my life is huge, and in our North-American culture, (this is one of the reasons why it's hard to inherit wealth). We see what money can do for you, what it can buy. Many people don't see the other part. They would never imagine that someone like myself with all of this money would ever be feeling like this. It would be really hard to get, and I get that.

Having money has at times been incredible for me, primarily to get therapy for growing up in such a crazy family, but also for my daughter's accident, so there are huge blessings. Money's power in my life, how it has controlled me, how I've allowed it to manipulate me, and used it to manipulate other people - is big, and it's still there.

Moments of Grace

The conversation I described with my daughter was a big grace moment. There was an honesty that was



coming from me. It was a grace moment with God because God was saying to me “Holly, it’s okay, you don’t have to save her with your money.”

On one level, it was like “Let’s see this as an opportunity to change our scripts,” but on a deeper lever, it was “Holly, I’m with her just as much as I’m with you. Put her in my hands. You don’t need to use your money as a tool to save her.” I’ve used my money to keep my kids from suffering, not necessarily physically, but to try to manipulate their lives so that they don’t have to experience certain things. That is a way of using money *not* in a good way, and

the other side of it is to be able to say, “I’m not going to do that anymore.”

That moment with my daughter was not only about a boundary. It was a God moment: God saying “I got it covered, I’m holding her, and you don’t have to use that kind of currency to protect her and keep her safe.” It was like I could feel breath whooshing through my body and I had a sense of God giving me permission to shift how I’ve done money with her. I’ve described how I’ve done that in an unhealthy way, and the other part is seeing the grace and going, “Wow, this feels really good.”



Note: This fall we are beginning to send out more interviews and articles over the internet. If you are open to receiving them in this way, we would greatly appreciate having your updated email address. You can either go to our website below and fill in the box to sign up for our email newsletters with your information or you can email or call Rose with it.

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