

Thrive

Creating a Thriving Spiritual Life Week Six

Abundance and Divine Resource

This week we'll talk about a formidable block – money and means. Money is money. Means is a broader action or system by which a good result is brought about. It might include money but it doesn't have to. We'll look at both. But behind the money and means, we will look at our own ideas around God, creative abundance, and a sense of luxury. Yes, luxury, but not as you might think. And we'll introduce to a tool called “counting” a block-busting tool for clarity and right use of money and means.

The Creator's Abundance

Jesus is quoted as saying, “You cannot serve both God and Mammon.” Mammon is a word associated with a Syrian deity, a god of riches. Mammon is also associated with profit, gluttony, excessive wealth, greed, unjust worldly gain, and “that in which one trusts.” So on one hand we have this notion that God does not get involved with money at all. God is good, too good for money, and money is bad - it's evil, period. On the other hand, you have mega-church pastors preaching the prosperity gospel: “If you really believe in God you'll be rich! Look at me!”

But that does not mean God and money are opposites, and never the twain shall meet. If we serve money, we become enslaved to it. If we serve God/Source, money is a tool, to be used for good. So we do not trust money, we trust God who supplies our needs. Consider the lilies of the fields, they neither toil nor spin, but are more elegantly attired than Solomon in all his glory (Matt. 6:28). Lilies are created to be lilies, living into and out of their “liliness.” They are gorgeous in a simple, elegant way. But if they tried to be roses, or orchids, they'd go against their nature, and damage their own beauty. This is what we do, when we try to be like Mom and Dad, family, church, our friends, and culture wants us to be. There are abundant means and resources for being who our creative souls were made to be. Listening to the siren song of everybody else's “more; this is what you should be like,” we become deaf to the still small voice waiting in our creative soul to whisper, “*You* are enough.”

Would God spring for those things that enable us to become who we really are? We usually think, no. We cling to our financial concerns as a way to avoid our creative soul's voice and our spiritual growth. “Nobody's going to pay me to be move into my creative soul's path!” Julia Cameron says, “We are awfully sure about that. Most of us harbor a secret belief that work has to be work and not play, and that anything we

really want to do – write, go back to school, change positions at work, etc. – must be considered frivolous and be placed a distant second. This is not true.”

We are operating out of the toxic old idea that God’s will for us and our will are at opposite ends of the table. When the deeper truth is that God’s desire for us arise in us, there in our creative soul, waiting to be recognized and given room to grow. I would recommend Philip Sheldrake’s book, *Befriending Our Desires*.

I will ask you to do this week what Julia Cameron suggests in her book. “This week, in your morning pages, write about the god you do believe in and god you would like to believe in. For some of us this means, ‘What if God’s a woman and she’s on my side?’ [I would add, what if God is feminine and masculine? What other words would serve as descriptors for the One who is beyond description? How have I limited God by my ideas about God?] For others, it is a god of energy. For still others, a collective of higher forces moving us toward our highest good. If you are still dealing with a god consciousness that has remained unexamined since childhood, you are probably dealing with a toxic god. What would a nontoxic god think of your creative goals? Might such a god really exist? If so, would money or your job or your lover remain your higher power?”

What we are naturally talented and good at, we often discount because it comes so easily to us. We think virtue involves great struggle and suffering. So we don’t take our natural talents, and the abundance within them, seriously.

Looking at the work of creation, it is pretty clear that the Creator did not know when to stop!! There is not one pink flower, or even fifty pink flowers, but hundreds. Snowflakes are the ultimate exercise in sheer creative glee. No two alike. This Creator looks suspiciously like someone who just might send us support for the flowering of our own creative souls.

Those who expect divine help, tend to receive it. If you’re looking for it, you’ll find it. Ask, and you shall receive, knock and the door will be opened, seek and you’ll find. A very creative soul said those words. But such words sound like flim-flam, a hoax, a snake-oil salesman. God has a job for us? God has fulfilling work for us? God holds abundance and dignity, a million possibilities, the keys to every door? Naw!

“And so when it comes time for us to choose between a cherished dream and lousy current drudgery, we often choose to ignore the dream and blame our continued misery on God. We act like it’s God’s fault we didn’t take that position when it was offered, the chance to take lessons from a great guitar player, take a class with a respected author. In truth, we, not God, have decided not to go. We have tried to be sensible – as though we have any proof at all that God is sensible – rather than see if the universe might not have supported some healthy extravagance.” Creativity is not and never has been sensible, it always stretches beyond it to create something fresh, unexpected, which often appears to us as not sensible.

So what would it look like to play with the possibility of abundance and resources in the direction of your creative soul’s desires? Remember, we tend to be the cheapskates, not God! Look for God’s generosity, and you will find it. “What we really want to do is what we are really meant to do.” Even though the thought of that

really happening might scare you to death! “When we do what we are meant to do, money and means come to us, doors open for us, we feel useful, and the work we do begins to feel like play to us.”

Luxury

For those of us who have become creatively anorexic – yearning to live out of our creative soul yet refusing to feed that hunger in ourselves – a little authentic luxury can go a long way. *Authentic* luxury. Because creativity is born in expansion, in a belief in sufficient supply, it is important that we give to ourselves gifts of time, self-care, and luxury. The luxury I’m talking about has nothing to do with penthouse views, designer clothes, fast sports cars, or \$200 bottles of wine. It has more to do with savoring and enjoyment. It shows up in many ways. Time with friends, time with family, time to ourselves with no agendas of accomplishment. Buying a used camel hair sport jacket at a thrift store because it fits just right, conjures up old movies, and it feels so soft. An online subscription to a magazine that speaks to your creative soul. Snapping off a twig to which a chrysalis had attached, taping it on the branch outside the kitchen window, because it captured a woman’s sense that she was going through a dark time, but would come through it with butterfly wings.

All too often, when our creativity is blocked, we blame it on lack of money, but this is *never* an authentic block. The actual block is our feeling of constriction, our sense of powerlessness, our sense that we have to keep working at life instead of playing along with life. The expression and expansion of our creative souls requires us to empower ourselves with choice. At the most basic level, this means choosing self-care.

Julia Cameron tells the story of buying a horse for the first time in over a decade, something she’d done as a child. On hearing the news, a good friend of hers, a world famous artist who at fifty had already been singled out for lifetime achievement awards, but was suffering the throes of artistic anorexia, cautioned her, “Well, I hope you don’t expect to get to ride it much or even see it much. As you get older, you do less and less of the things you enjoy. Life becomes more and more about doing what you must...” His response to her reminded Julia of the vulnerability of all creatives to the shaming, “I should be working” side of themselves that discourages creative pleasures.

In order to thrive as creative souls, we need to be available to the universal flow. When we put a stopper on our capacity for joy by anorectically declining the small gifts of life, we turn aside the larger gifts as well. We see this with our emotions. If we shut off one emotion – anger, grief, fear – we shut off all our emotions. We become numb. If we shut off what gives us delight, joy, inspiration, we become shut down.

What gives us true joy? That is the question to ask concerning luxury, and for each of us the answer is very different. Julia Cameron gives an example.

“For Alan, music is the great luxury. A musician when he was younger, he had long denied himself the right to play. Like most blocked creatives, he suffered from a deadly duo: artistic anorexia and prideful perfectionism. There were no practice shots for this player. He wanted to be at the top, and if he couldn’t be there he wouldn’t be anywhere near his beloved music. Stuck and stymied, Alan described his block this way: ‘I try to play and I hear myself, and what I can do is so far away from what I want to do that I cringe.’ (And then quit.) Working on his creative recovery, Alan began by allowing himself the luxury of buying a new recording a week. He stopped making

music work and started making it fun again. Alan began exploring. He bought gospel, country and western, Indian drum music. A month of this and he impulsively bought a set of practice sticks at the music store. He let them lie and let them lie and... Three months later, Alan was drumming on the handlebars of his exercise bike while rock and roll blasted through his earplugs. Two months later, he cleared a space in the attic and acquired a secondhand drum kit. "I thought my wife and daughter would be embarrassed by how bad I was," he explains. Catching himself in he blaming, he cops, "Actually, I was the one who was embarrassed, but now I'm just having fun with it and actually sounding a little better to myself. For an old guy, I'd say my chops are coming back."

For many blocked creative souls, it takes a little work to even *imagine* ourselves having luxury, *authentic* luxury. Luxury is a learned practice for most of us. Blocked creative souls are often the Cinderellas of the world. Focused on others at the expense of ourselves, we may even be threatened by the idea of spoiling ourselves for once.

Bringing our creative soul to life requires the luxury of time, which we carve out for ourselves – even if it's fifteen minutes for morning pages and a ten-minute mini-bath after work. Bringing our creative soul to life requires the luxury of space for ourselves, even if all we manage to carve out is one special bookshelf and a windowsill that is ours. Remember that this creative soul of ours is a youngster and youngsters like things that are "mine." My chair, my book, my time to play guitar, my time to meditate, my time to study for grad school.

This might seem silly. But creativity lives in paradox: serious creativity is born from serious play.

Counting

For this week you will discover how you spend your money. Buy a small pocket notepad, or create a document on your laptop or ipad, and write down every nickel you spend. It doesn't matter what it's for, how tiny the purchase, how petty the amount. Write it all down. Each day, date a page and count – what you bought, what you spent, where your money went, whether it was for groceries, lunch in a diner, an Uber ride, or a loan to your cheap-skate sister. Be meticulous. Be thorough. And be *nonjudgmental*. This is an exercise in self-observation – *not* self-flagellation. You may want to continue this practice for a full month or longer. It will teach you what you value in terms of your spending. Often our spending differs from our real values. We fritter away cash on things we don't cherish and deny ourselves those things we do. For many of us, counting is a necessary prelude to learning creative luxury.

Money Madness, an Exercise

Complete the following phrases.

1. People with money are...
2. Money makes people...
3. I'd have more money if...
4. My dad thought money was...
5. My mom always thought money would...
6. In my family, money caused...
7. Money equals...
8. If I had money, I'd...

9. If I could afford it, I'd...
10. If I had some money, I'd...
11. I'm afraid that if I had money I would...
12. Money is...
13. Money causes...
14. Having money is not...
15. In order to have more money, I'd need to...
16. When I have money, I usually...
17. I think money...
18. If I weren't so cheap I'd...
19. People think money...
20. Being broke tells me...

Weekly Tasks: These tasks explore the presence or lack of abundance in your life.

- 1 Natural Abundance: Find five pretty or interesting rocks. Carry one with you in your pocket, finger it during meetings or Zoom meetings. Let them be small, constant reminders of our creative consciousness.
- 2 Clearing: Throw out or give away five ratty pieces of clothing you don't need anymore.
- 3 Communication: Send five postcards, letters, or emails to five friends who you would *love* to hear from.
- 4 Clearing: Any new changes in your home environment? How do those feel? If not, make some.
- 5 Acceptance: Any new flow in your life? Practice saying yes to freebies.
- 6 Abundance: Any changes in your financial situation or your perspective on it? Any new – even crazy – ideas about what you would love to do? Pull images around this and add to your image file.

Check In:

1. How many days this week did you do your Morning Pages? Have you used them yet to think about creative luxury for yourself? How was the experience for you?
2. Did you do your artist date this week? Have you considered taking two? Remember, they don't need to be extravagant, just something simple that you love. What did you do and how did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your soul recovery? Describe them.