

## **“Investing In What Matters Most”**

**November 9, 2008**

Video: “In My Name”

**John Deacon:**

Given the financial turmoil of the past two months, many of us have been questioning where we should be putting our money. If we've invested money in the stock market, it's likely we have 40% less now than we had 2 months ago. If we have no money for the stock market because we can barely make ends meet, this economic crisis has us worried whether we can keep our jobs. For those of us who are Christians, this crisis challenges our notions of where our real security lies. Who are we really relying on to take care of us when we grow old...God or the market?

Are we better to invest in bonds or GICs, stocks or mutual funds? And if we are relying on God to take care of us, what would he have us invest in?

It seems ludicrous to think that Jesus would even talk on this subject since to the best of our understanding there were no stock exchanges in his day. But he did talk about investments - and true to form, the advice he gives runs contrary to the standard advice given by any other financial advisor.

He said we weren't to store up treasure here on earth. Instead we are to store up treasure in heaven by taking care of poor people and advocating on behalf of the refugee and taking into our homes the homeless and the socially alienated. He taught that if we gave ourselves to the work of advancing his kingdom by preaching the good news and setting free the oppressed - there would be no need for us to worry about food or clothing. If we will invest ourselves in those who matter to God - God will take care of us. It sounds presumptuous I know, but I can assure you there are dozens of scriptures that say exactly that - if we take care of the poor, God will take care of us.

I want to emphasize this because in times of economic crisis there is a tendency to pull back from helping others. Governments tend to postpone legislation that would make life easier for those who are poor - ie. welfare reform, increases to the minimum wage, more affordable housing, increased assistance for seniors - until the economy improves. Businesses are less likely to make significant donations to charitable organizations when business is tight. And we are tempted to pull back from caring for others, when we are struggling to make ends meet.

But Jesus advice doesn't change regardless of the economy. He says '**give to anyone who asks**' which I take to mean that the one answer we can't give to anyone is need is 'NO'. It might mean that our response to the person in need is different than what they've asked for, but the one thing we can't do is turn our back on that person.

This church has it enshrined in our DNA that we are to be 'out there' engaged in the needs

of the surrounding community. We have given this imperative a name 'Branch Out' which is far more than a group of people who spend some of their spare time looking after other people. It is the belief that the vitality and growth of this church lies in its being out there...among the people who are really hurting - not as spectators, but as allies and advocates.

This morning you are going to hear the stories of 3 people who are investing themselves in the lives of others - with profound affect. Last time I checked, none of them could walk on water, they are as real and as imperfect as anyone in this room. And considering the complexity of the social issues they are involved in: homelessness, 'at risk' youth and hunger - they'd be the first to question whether what they are doing is having any meaningful impact. But each of them are determined to understand the troubling issues of our time by getting to know the people most adversely affected by those issues. Poverty for them isn't just an issue, it is a someone - someone whose name and personality they get to know, someone whose oppressive living circumstance they begin to understand. The end result for them is a transformation of values, of life priorities, a re-thinking of how the world works and how it might work better.

I urge you not to be passive in your listening. Let's think of this as a brainstorming of sorts, a unique opportunity for our collective imaginations to run wild and think of ways that we can change things for the better. I realize I'm beginning to sound like Obama - but clearly the one who really wants to change the harsh realities of the world around us is Christ - who calls us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

**Video: [Global Hunger](#)**  
**[Mike Whittamore – Global Hunger](#)**

First let me say thanks to all those who purchased pumpkin to help support local food banks in both Markham and Stouffville.

It is unbelievable that in a country such as Canada or a continent such as North America that food banks even exist. North America is the envy of the world for food production. We spend on average 10% of our disposable income on food, the lowest anywhere. Yet the number of food banks continues to grow. The number of breakfast programs continues to grow. And the need to support people from all walks of life through food donations continues to grow.

I am a farmer and have carried out gleaning projects for social agencies from Toronto for many years. Gleaning allows people to come to the farm and pick fresh fruits and vegetables for free once the regular harvest is done. The social agencies then go back to their facilities and teach the people how to cook and preserve the fruits and vegetables. This is where I think one of our societies' problems begins.

Preparing a meal in this day and age is something many in North America would say they simply haven't got time for. As a result fast food, frozen food and prepared food have taken center stage. This has not been good for the family unit. We are missing a golden

opportunity to connect with our family members and teach them basic life skills including:

How to Read a Recipe  
Good Nutrition  
The Value of a Dollar  
The Art of Conversation

Many times we hear people say they can't get their kids to open up. Prepare a meal with them and you will be surprised what you will learn. Let them find a recipe they would like to make. Go to the internet or get a recipe from family or friends. Food always tastes better when you prepare it yourself.

You will also be teaching them the value of good nutrition through the use of fresh product.

Now I love fast food and dining out as much as the next person, but it is expensive. Teach your children that preparing a meal at home saves money and allows them to take that money and do something else with it. Perhaps with the savings, over time your children can reach out to the less fortunate and support a child in a third world country or make a donation to a local charity.

Finally, preparing a meal with your family will help enhance the art of conversation. I call conversation an art because in the wired world that we live in good conversation is hard to come by. But sitting around a table face to face, eating a meal prepared by all that are at the table I guarantee you will stimulate good conversation. And it will be your opportunity to instil in your children the values that you believe they need to make the world a better place.

In closing my message is this:

God has given us the ability to produce a bountiful harvest. Food is meant to do more than sustain life. Good food connects people. Go out today and get connected with your family, your friends but most of all connect with those in need.

**Video: "Living Life Hard" Slam  
Don Hill – Youth At Risk**

Not to long ago the Church put on a symposium on "homelessness in York Region" it was very informative of the growing needs in our community. It gave me some new perspective and clarity on this issue. Previously, I had always known that the needy were there and if I chose to I could get involved to help them, but it was clearly a situation that they were and remained apart from me not seen or considered unless I chose to do so. That day I gained a new perspective and sensitivity to the fact that those in need are all around me everyday. Some of the needs are less glaring than others but no less real. This was driven home for me again when earlier this year I was looking for a place for my eldest son to play basketball. Circumstances led me to call an acquaintance in Scarborough where ultimately both of my sons now play. The last 9 months of this involvement have been a real eye opener as far as understanding issues that many disadvantaged people deal with and how prevalent and pervasive these issues are in our community.

I have had the pleasure to working with two men that operate out of Scarborough though their reach extends virtually around the globe. Both work with youth through athletics. Basketball, volleyball, soccer and track & field are used as tools to work with youngsters to keep them off the street. These two men dedicate endless hours helping young men and women to excel, often believing in them when no one else will. Teaching them to never give up, and believe in themselves even when all seems lost and the opposition seems insurmountable. They in many ways have become fathers to the fatherless.

The first of these is Ken Daniel who has coached basketball for over 20 years. Ken is one of the best basketball minds in the city and is respected accordingly, he knows anyone who's anyone in basketball circles and often brings celebrity friends to visit the kids. Though many kids can't afford to pay his nominal fee, Ken never turns anyone away. Most youth show up on their own. Parents, often single mothers, are not or can not be involved in this part of their lives because they are working. As you can imagine money is always tight and covering expenses is often a challenge. Notwithstanding this, his teams are always competitive. Last year the junior team won the Provincial AA Championship, taking the final game by 50 points. Opposing parents complained the team would have likely won the highest AAA division, where they had defeated a number of the top teams. Unfortunately they had not played enough games to qualify for AAA, as funding was not available. A number of Ken players have gone on to play professionally overseas; some hope to eventually turn pro in the NBA or WNBA. Others have gotten scholarships to attend university getting a good education otherwise unavailable. Unfortunately there are countless others that have had enough talent but have not been able to stay focused on their school work or have found trouble in the streets.

Ken Daniel has spoken of a number of youth in the program. One is a very accomplished player winning awards as a Metro Toronto High School All-star. He commonly misses practice and goes missing for days at a time, Ken expressed that it is very difficult to try to run a team with players like this and sometimes questions whether he should be dismissed from the team, but he knows that if he does he will likely lose him to the gangs, and any opportunity to help him will be lost. He mentions another young man who has tremendous talent but too often seems distracted, he explains that he has recently moved here from Detroit where he witnessed his fathers murder in their home by a burglar. A third youth was recently involved in an altercation outside Mother Teresa High School in which he received multiple stab wounds and was rushed to hospital, he is currently at home recovering. As nice as it is to hear that he will recover from this incident I can't help but wonder how this will affect him going forward.

The next individual I would like to speak of is Ishmael Joseph (affectionately known as Ish). You would be hard pressed to utter this name out loud in Scarborough or other parts of the city and not have someone turn to you and ask; do you know Ish? His skills are so highly regarded he is often asked to train American collegiate and professional athletes such as Vincent Lecavalier. He could make a very good living on staff at a number of American Universities that have offered. But instead he chooses to stay and work with youth in Toronto.

Basketball, volleyball, soccer, track & field and cricket get kids involved. From there Ish takes these skills perfects them and teaches them how to get an education from them.

Though some of the things I have mentioned sound glamorous the name of the game is helping kids stay off the streets, out of trouble and how to be productive members of society. This past summer B-Fitt was chosen to be involved in "Focus on Youth" an Ontario government program to keep kids occupied and off the streets. One of the young men that Ish had been working with had a family member shot in the face. Three days later he died. Ish expressed concern that some of the youth may be drawn into retaliation. I remember the night of the young mans passing, frustration was evident. Ish called the boys together and sat with them around a picnic table at Sir John A MacDonald at 10pm to talk. He was able to impress on these young men the need to focus on the positive things in life and the need to break the cycle violence. Dealing with a number of issues; each time impressing the need for a positive lifestyle. By the time everyone left a difficult situation had been defused.

Both of these men, Ken Daniel and Ish Joseph stand out to me because of their selflessness. They give countless hours of their time to others with little or no reward. Often challenged by a lack of funding they try to find creative ways to deal with a situation or they simply do without. It has often been my opinion that many people they attempt to help use them selfishly, but this does not seem to change their desire to work for change the lives of youth. They continue to give without fanfare or reward, in spite of the fact that few give back. They get their satisfaction from seeing change and transformation in these young people. For this reason I have tried to come along side them and help their efforts, and I can say that they are people I can aspire to be like.

**Video: Homelessness**  
**Carrie Thurman - The Homeless**

It's amazing where you can find yourself when you let Jesus do the driving!  
I was a Thornhill, Ladies Golf Club raised girl with little exposure to homelessness except maybe from the downtown parking lot of the Hummingbird Centre to the theatre.  
How was my first meeting?....Awkward. Confrontational.  
It was scary, it was messy, and it was sad.  
"Me? Spare some change?" I thought, "Sure, but how much? What's he going to do with the money? Am I really helping him or just being a sucker here? And how did he get like this anyway?"  
The crowd in front of the theatre moved me past the beggar and he found a better customer.  
Once inside the building, the living drama outside vanished and the artistic one took over.  
So no- I did not develop a passion for the homeless, growing up.

2 years ago, I went to a Mission Fest as our band and musical mission seemed to be changing gears. I heard a young pastor named Paul Burke say how he thought the Church should be serving the people not the other way 'round. He'd discovered that the people living on the street around Sherbourne and Carlton had no food available to them on Saturday nights, so he rented a church around there and asked others to take turns providing the food. He called the project Cornerstone.

When Paul finished speaking, a lady asked him, "How many souls do you save at your Saturday night "soup kitchen"? He answered, "I don't actually put notches in a stick or

anything. It's not my job to save souls. It's God's job. My job is to feed the hungry, cloth the poor and help the sick and poor in spirit. That's what Jesus asked of *me*." I liked this guy. That Saturday I heard many people speak about their faith, but none seemed as down to earth as Pastor Burke.

The next day, Sunday, John came up to me and said, "There's a program called Cornerstone that feeds the homeless downtown; TOB would like to participate in it, but we need someone to head it up.....are you interested?" I was very interested now - not in the homeless.... not yet, but in where the Lord was apparently leading me. I said yes, and asked our band, The Family Fold, to do the worship.

Worship music's often called praise music 'cause we sing God's praises. But when you consider the plight of the homeless..... It's hard to sing "All powerful" when He doesn't give you the power to break your addiction, or overcome your depression or just face the day. Who can sing praises when you've lost your family, your health, your mind, and all hope. That's why *we* sing songs like, "Why me Lord?"

For some, it can seem like, if there is a God, He doesn't care about me. *That's* where *we* come in! We get the privilege of being the loving hands of Jesus! 500 people come through the doors of Cornerstone every Saturday night, each one with a big hole in their hearts that we get to fill with kindness. It's so exciting!

Remember that most of the time these people are loners. They stakeout their spot on the street and speak to others only to beg or to curse their lot. But on Saturday nights they're *forced* to sit at long tables close to strangers because they're *hungry*. Surely they're anxious, but you smile at them- and you ask them how it's going- and would a cup of coffee warm them up? And don't the sweetest faces look back at you and answer in the most polite manner they can remember! Holding the cup up to you so you don't have to reach-even though they're ashamed that they can't keep their hand from shaking!

Most people that help out at Cornerstone, *Thank* me for the experience! "Everyone should do this" they say.

When we first started doing this, the bands began at 5:00 in the sanctuary which is when the doors opened to the dining room. But I noticed that they lined up across the back of the sanctuary at 4:00 and waited. So I asked the band to start 1 hour earlier and after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sat. When the doors opened to the dining room, no one came in..... They were all sitting in church listening to songs that spoke to them about the love and hope of Jesus.

Finally, I want to tell you what a rich experience it was last Saturday when Paul Penelton and I brought 8 junior highs downtown to help. I told them to think of these people as their grandfathers and they jumped right in. Some PWF members helped as well. The youth were amazed and shared their experiences with their classmates the next Sunday. The most common remark was how much they realized these people were just like them!"

I spoke myself to a young man who's father had just passed away. He told me many things about his past and how life was on the street. As he went on in great detail, I began to

question my role, “What do you want me to say Lord, he’s doing all the talking?” I thought here was an opportunity to say something profoundly helpful.... The answer came from the young man’s own mouth...”You have no idea,” he said, “What it means to me that you would take 15 minutes out of your better-life-than-mine, to listen to my bullshit!” Thankyou. For real.

That evening I also learned that Dec. 20 may be Cornerstone's last supper. Ironically, the pastor’s spouse doesn’t want poor people hanging around the church anymore. The very least we could do as a church, is to pray that these people find a new place to dine.

Song: Danny & Family

## Blaise Pascal

John asked me to wrap us up this morning, and not with a song, if you can believe it. He asked if I’d share my thoughts on the topic of this morning, *Investing in What Matters Most*... When I started to think about what I would share, my first thought was, well it seems to me it’s all been said well enough: by John and the other speakers this morning, by Ken, by Matt and Paul and the PWF team. To be honest, I wasn’t sure what I could add.

Then it occurred to me that I might approach this issue from the perspective of **worship** since I am the Worship Leader here at TOB.

So I want to start by telling you about something that happened about a year and a half ago... Various circumstances in my life and observations had led me to become extremely disillusioned with the church, and consequently my job here at TOB. I was really wrestling with questions about “Christianity” here in Western culture, and whether or not it was in line with God’s heart and His purpose in this world.

It was about this time that a young woman at this church handed me a book one morning after a service, called “Irresistable Revolution,” by **Shane Claiborne**. She said, *I think God wants you to read this book*. Inside, I rolled my eyes (if you can do that), thinking to myself “God, you know how little time I have in my life for book...” But I took the book, thanked her and said I’d do my best to read it.

It was this very book that God used to get my attention in a new way. It was as though I had been sleeping and this book woke me up to God’s heart for the poor & for the suffering and the injustice in this world. That book was quickly followed by another and then another... like I was colliding with these books... And all of them pointed me toward the same question...

You know that “ah-ha” moment? When the high-beams somehow get turned on and you see something for what it is? It was as though God was leading me to ANSWER a question that I had perhaps never really considered: **What if Jesus REALLY meant what he said?**

In the scripture **Matthew 25:31-46**, Jesus said that we would stand before Him and He would say that He KNOWS us, or that He does NOT KNOW us... that it was dependent on whether or not we had fed the hungry, clothed the naked and provided a place in our home for those who had none... Jesus said that if we do these things, it's like we're doing them for Him.

In the book of **Luke, chapter 3, verse 11**, it says "If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any." At that point I counted around 12 coats in my closet...

You see, up till that point, I had come to believe that I was simply responsible for my own personal life as a Christian. That God had given me gifts like singing and I was simply to use these gifts to the best of my ability for Him. And that one day Christ would come and we'd all get to live happily ever after... I knew what the Bible said – that I was to do my best to love God and others and maybe somehow be part of *seeking and saving the lost*. Of course I gave my 10% every month... I tried to be kind to people, and if I happened to have a loonie on me and there was a homeless person asking for it I would give it to them. I would try to have a "quiet time" every now and then... but to be honest, my Christian walk was pretty much about me and my family.

God had somehow brought me to a profoundly different place last year... He had somehow said to me in a way that I could really hear Him: **For I so loved the world, that you are called to do the same ...&... to you, whom much has been given, much is required.**

If we worship Jesus Christ then we are called to live like Jesus Christ. Matthew 25 says that our worship will be measured by how we have lived.

What if we are too comfortable with all our stuff around us? What if we are preoccupied with our own inner spiritual life, with our dreams, with our busyness? What if we are content, you know, with a few problems here and there, and missing God's call? - - A call not just for a few Mother Teresa-types, but to all of us.

One of the issues I really struggled with regarding the Christian faith, is if it's enough to feel drawn to the heart of God without **our lives demonstrating the heart of God**. When someone asked Mahatma Gandhi if he was a Christian, Gandhi said, "go ask the poor people, they will tell you who the Christians are..." This can be said of our neighbors, whether the ones next door or our global neighbors... It can be said of the people at our work place or school... It can be said of corrupt companies that exploit workers in the name of profit... DO THEY KNOW WHO THE CHRISTIANS ARE? If they don't, that's a problem. We are to be the light of the world. We are to BE the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever we are. We are to stand up for those who have no voice. We are to love sacrificially. We are to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this world... Are we doing that?

Worship is not just about singing songs. Worship is what we do with our lives. We worship God or don't worship God with every decision we make, with every word we speak, with everything we do...

I sincerely believe that we need to wake up and see that God is calling us to live on less so that others can live. That God is calling us away from the **comfortable** and towards the

**uncomfortable.** That we are to abandon the illusion of safety, and take-up sacrifice... That we are not supposed to be living like this. We are supposed to be living like the One who said "follow me... and do as I do."

So, where are my illusions now? I'm not sure. But I know that for the first time in my life, and in Matt's life, a journey has begun toward Jesus in a way we never imagined. So far, the things we have experienced, the things God has brought our way... they are not comfortable. They are not easy. We have more questions than ever, not less. We make more mistakes now than ever, not less. We have more struggles now than ever before, not less. But the journey is good. I am very grateful that God has shaken me up. I am grateful that He is patient with me, and that He can use even broken people like me to be agents of change.

I am convinced this inner stirring, this re-shaping and re-defining of my life's priorities is happening not to just a few of us, but to many...that the heart of this community - The Olive Branch - longs to make a real impact on the lives of those most hurting in our world. Let's not miss our moment. Let's talk about global hunger and homelessness and youth at risk as though they really are our problems to solve. Let's give our best thinking and our best creativity and our best worship and our best energies to the very people Jesus himself calls blessed: 'the poor, the suffering, the oppressed, the hungry, the imprisoned and the elderly'. And then let's go out and do it as though our Christianity depended on it. For as you know - it does!