

Enduring Investments -- Family, Career, and Westwood A Stewardship Moment

This moment was presented at the worship service on February 15, and is re-printed here.

My wife Suzanne and I have had very difficult decisions about how we will spend our time and money. Who doesn't anguish over this? But I'll tell you our story.

Suzanne and I found Westwood in our own backyard about 3 years ago, when Suzanne was pregnant with our first child, Cayden. We were looking for the proverbial "African-village" that we could raise our family amongst community. Suzanne and I had made a decision not to delay having a family together, not to wait as originally planned to first pay the mortgage off in full or to establish at least one of us with a stable income and career. To make matters more intense and difficult, I was making a 90 degree career turn that would take me back to school ("as if you haven't had enough formal education", people would say!). I had recently received acupuncture, and the experience not only had a profound impact on me at many levels, but also, as a scientist directed my curiosity. I left my academic job at the University to enroll fulltime in the acupuncture program at Grant MacEwan.

I knew life could be a habit of putting off one's dreams. When I was 20, I fell off a cliff. It didn't take long after that for me to start living as if it really mattered, as if I could see there wasn't a lot of time to waste.

So Suzanne left her academic job at the University to be home with Cayden as a full-time Mom – this was an important priority. We chose to have another child, Teryn our little baby, all in addition to my other two children who are with us, Gabriel and Josephine – it has made for a busy home with lots of responsibilities.

There has been very little income during these last years. We have been spending much more than we are earning, and have chosen to liquidate the vast majority of our retirement savings to invest in our hopes and dreams. We have acted under that belief that through investing in ourselves this way, things will work out somehow and be worth it.

But this created a lot of tension and soul searching between us.

Funnily enough, I defined many years ago "true retirement", as the time when your activities are no longer guided by the money you earn. Well here I am now, not getting paid a penny to initiate and run a very significant acupuncture research project in Edmonton that has consumed my time these last months. It has been one of the most rewarding endeavours of my work life. I guess this means that I have truly retired!

One of the easier decisions for us has been to contribute generously to Westwood. Although we are still borrowing from the last of our retirement savings, and have a very busy life with all our children, and are trying to balance starting a brand new business and me doing research and teaching, we find ourselves with time and money to give to Westwood.

To us Westwood is not only our extended family, but it is a place where we feel we can be accepted and share and learn about life with others of all ages. I have met people I consider my friends here. To me, it is a place to learn and practice with others in aligning our thoughts, our words and our actions. It is a place where, as Ghandi put it, we can BE the change we want to see in the world.

Our family really, really appreciates the Sunday services, upstairs and down. Suzanne wholeheartedly enjoys doing the newsletter. I am involved in the Children's Education and Stewardship committees. I find these commitments do not take away from time in my life, but

quite to the contrary, they GIVE me time! They give me the opportunity to be the person I would like to be. Somehow spaces open up in my life when I live it this way -- there is time for important things.

On the money side, even though we have had negative income, we easily found “unessential extras” in our spending patterns to give up to rationalize donating. In reality though, I don’t think of having to give things up anymore in order to donate to Westwood. Giving to the congregation brings prosperity of spirit that nourishes my family in enduring and sustainable ways.

Westwood helps me to see my cup running over -- it affects everything I do in life.

Gord Grant