

There is a cure for absence

Only a few writers make use of the English language as well as John Updike, and especially when he decides to describe people and places. Listen to him explain what he sees as the problem of having too much money.

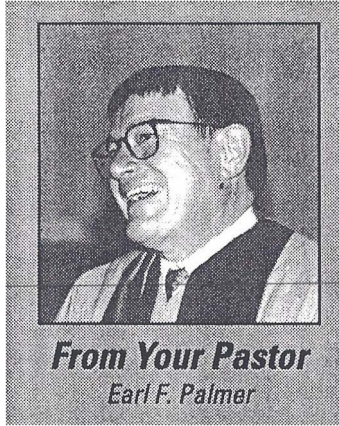
“The superrich make lousy neighbors – they buy a house and tear it down and build another, twice as big, and leave. They’re never there. The essence of the superrich is absence. They’re always demonstrating they can afford to be somewhere else. Don’t let them in. Their money is a kind of poverty.” (Quoted from *The American Scholar*.)

Wealth in money is not very different from wealth in talent, in culture, in spiritual

giftedness, in ministry skills. I believe that each kind of wealth is a blessing and should be understood that way, but each kind of wealth needs to find its peaceful and faithful equilibrium.

Wealth of any kind is power to make things happen and create motion and, therefore, when it is not in balance it will always work against peace and faithfulness, and may even produce a kind of absence. The question is – how do I find a healthy balance and the right equilibrium?

The word for equilibrium in the Bible is congruence, which means that we live our



daily and weekly life under the healthy grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. St. Paul puts it this way: “Only live your daily life congruent with the Gospel...” (Phil 1:27) He is describing a human life and story lived under the grace of Jesus Christ in the focused rhythm of seven days. Every blessing needs this balancing rhythm; even such blessings as ministries we share in our intention to serve God will inevitably lead to burn-out

if they lack the balance of grace. This is also true of the careless use of money, which leads to its own kind of lonely absence, which Updike is describing.

When giftedness ingredients have come into our lives, whether they are spiritual gifts or personal career skills or financial prosperity, and they are stewarded under the liberating guidance of the gospel of Jesus Christ they become presence experiences,

both for us and for those around us. This stewarding takes time and faithfulness on our part, and its very first positive result is the defeat of absence.

All families, children and youth need regular relationship experiences in order to build healthy traditions and discipleship priorities. But how can this happen if a family is not itself regular and steady in neighborhood friendship building, in church attendance and family quantity of time together. Friendships thrive on adventures into the unfamiliar, but they also thrive on regularity and steadiness; the secret is equilibrium.

The cure for absence is presence. Presence means we decide to be here, really here, and be here faithfully. Jesus Christ is the Lord of every space and of every time, yet one of the main marks of his life and ministry was his steady faithfulness to 12 ordinary friends. Marks gospel tells us Jesus chose disciples “to be with him” (Mark 3:14)

Jesus still trains his disciples the same way.