



9.28.25...A Disciple's Lifestyle

Gracious God, enter into our conversation today, inspire us to keep growing as your followers—growing in creativity and taking the initiative, not out of fear or to save our own bacon as the saying goes, but out of our growing love for You and others. Amen.

Jesus doesn't just want us to sit on couches, on the sidelines of life, working our remotes. He invites us into a life that's vibrant, creative, and full of purpose.

It's not just about showing up on Sunday or avoiding sin. It's a daily invitation in to a new way of living. We all know what it's like to feel drained and like a couch potato... but God can meet us in those moments with fresh ideas and little nudges of hope.

And some of those nudges are for creativity and taking the initiative. Marked by wise stewardship—for God's glory and for our neighbor's good.

That's what we'll explore today. What creativity and action look like—in our lives, in our church, and in our community.

When you think of solving a big public health challenge, what picture comes to mind?

For me, I think of scientists in lab coats in sophisticated laboratories.

I sure didn't picture this—

Almost a year ago, in Connecticut, a 5th grader named No Yo La Show Kun Bee noticed her classmates missing school with allergies and other health issues. Now I am pretty sure as a 5<sup>th</sup> grader I would have shrugged that off.

But No Yo La cared and then she got creative. For her science homework, she designed a simple air filter with a box fan and four furnace filters. Cost? About \$60.

The EPA tested it and found it removed over 99% of airborne viruses. Suddenly that got the attention of the whole state, and they approved \$11.5 million dollars to put her filters in all the schools across Connecticut.

Cleaner air. Fewer sick days. Healthier classrooms.

Isn't that beautiful? One little girl, one small act of creativity, became a gift of health and healing for thousands.

She reminds us that God doesn't wait for us to grow up before stirring holy ideas in us. The Spirit can plant seeds of creativity in anyone, at any age.

In the spring of 2021, after many LONG months of heavy COVID restrictions, my two churches—Dent UMC and Vergas UMC—came back to worship in person.

But people were drained. Empty. I described it as, “our fun buckets were empty.”

I turned to one of my favorite hobbies—kayaking. Paddling is not only fun—it provides bilateral stimulation, something that actually helps with trauma recovery. And after two years of pandemic, we'd all been traumatized.

So, I put out what I thought was a long-shot invitation: “Let's go kayaking!”

And you know what? People showed up.

We paddled and floated, soaking up sunshine and silence, soaked up God in nature. Slowly we started talking again.

As the sunlight danced on the water and we paddled side by side, it wasn't just recreation—it was re-creation. God was gently renewing us.

Covid stole from us, but God met us on the water in ways that restored our souls.

Sometimes creativity looks like a fifth-grader's 60 buck invention. Sometimes it looks like a simple invitation to kayak.

Every day we are touched by the creativity and generosity of others, often without even noticing it.

A hospital wing, once only a dream of a donor, now saves lives.

Medicines and prosthetics are the fruit of years of research.

Even a song or a painting can carry us through grief.

Community gardens, food banks, and public parks are all signs that when imagination and generosity come together, life flourishes.

And of course, we are here today because of the creativity and initiative of John Wesley more than 250 years ago. His imagination for methodical discipleship, for doing good, for singing hymns, for field preaching—his work continues to shape us.

And yes, we know, creativity can also be twisted.

Advertising designed to stir discontent. Algorithms that keep us scrolling and shopping.

And yes, even listening in on our conversations—one time I mentioned “air filter,” and suddenly my Facebook was flooded with ads for them.

I was probably No Yo La's age when I first learned that products are intentionally designed to wear out. It's called “planned obsolescence”.

Products like refrigerators, cars, and phones don't last as long as they could. Forcing us to spend money to replace them. These are all ways agency and creativity are harnessed for mere profit rather than for life-giving purposes.

Consumerism whispers, “You are what you own,” pulling us away from God's heart.

But God whispers something completely different, “You are my Beloved child.” And that word of love is stronger than all the shouts of this world.

So, creativity—it can be used to bless or to exploit. The question is: how will we use ours?

Thankfully, scripture calls us to something higher and better and truly life-giving.

That brings us to one of the strangest parables Jesus ever told—the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16.

I wish someone had warned me. Because when I looked at commentaries, almost every one of them began with, “Pastors usually avoid this text.” And now I know why!

But here’s the heart of it: Jesus tells of a dishonest manager who’s about to be fired. He knows he’s in trouble. So, he acts quickly, creatively, even shrewdly, to secure his future.

And Jesus commends him—not for his dishonesty, but for his creative initiative.

Here are three key takeaways from the parable not to preach about:

1. **Be clever and creative.** The manager in verses 4 through 7 used ingenuity to navigate a difficult situation. As followers of Christ, we are called to be just as creative in using our resources to serve God and others.
2. **Take the initiative.** The manager didn’t wait for someone else to act. In verse 5, he made strategic moves to shape his future. Likewise, we are called to act intentionally and proactively with the time, gifts, and resources God entrusts to us.
3. **Remember we are stewards and accountable.** Everything we have—our lives, our talents, our money—is ultimately God’s. In verse 1 and verses 10 through 13, we are reminded we will give an account of how we manage what He has entrusted to us. Our choices matter now AND for eternity.

In light of our parable, let’s consider together a few more ways people have been good stewards. How they have used their concern and creativity, taking the initiative to alleviate pain and distress in the lives of other people.

And I invite you to be open to what you have concerns about. What concerns you and listen for what gets stirred up by God’s Spirit.

I’ve heard of churches creating a community garden to nourish neighbors in a food desert. Or creating a clothing store or a food pantry within their church.

How churches repurpose old buildings into shelters or repurpose rooms in their church for greater ministry impact.

I have heard of older church members acting as mentors. They share not only professional expertise to open doors for youth but also companionship and words of wisdom in living life.

God’s gifts—time, money, influence, and ideas—are meant to be deployed imaginatively and faithfully, reflecting God’s care for the whole world. There are many projects and events BUMC has done over the years that are praiseworthy.

We’ve already seen how creativity and initiative bless others through ministries like Teacher Appreciation Meals at Northwinds, Meals and Missions, and our Christmas Dinner.

But the Spirit is still stirring new ideas among us...

And now, we face a new challenge together that requires us to pull together, take action and find creative solutions. Some people in our congregation cannot hear our worship service.

Therefore, we're calling a meeting—Sunday, October 19th, after fellowship time—to explore solutions. This meeting is an opportunity to address hearing issues and talk about what we can do.

Everyone who shares this concern is welcome and Gloria Farwick will guide the meeting, Amy and I will be there too.

We'll need creativity, problem-solving skills, and willing hearts to find solutions.

What other new ideas does God have for us?

I am not as naïve as I used to be. I know there may be differing opinions on creativity and its relationship to faith and wealth.

Some of you may have been discouraged from pursuing creative professions because they, “don't pay much”. Some of us may have been taught that creativity is more in the realm of children, something young people are supposed to do.

But we all have some creative spark. Are you creative in cooking, gardening, building, organizing, music, writing? How might you use those gifts to bless others?

Could God be inviting us into a season to dream new dreams?

Friends, creativity can be used to exploit, or it can be used to bless. And here's the good news: God has placed a spark of creativity in every single one of us.

Maybe it shows up in leading, teaching, planning. Maybe in organizing, building, or simply noticing when someone is hurting.

The world doesn't need more cynicism—it needs more holy imagination. More of us willing to ask, “What might God do through me?”

John Wesley once reminded us that everything we have is only on loan from God. Our money, our gifts, our time—all entrusted for a season. And what a joy to use them not for ourselves alone, but to bless the world for Christ's sake.

Let's go from here ready to listen for the Spirit's nudge. Ready to let our concern and creativity link arms. Ready to take initiative—not to save our own bacon, but to bless our neighbors and our community. Amen.

### **Time of Reflection:**

As we close, I invite you to reflect:

1. Again, where are you already using your creativity, skills, or resources to bless others? How might God be calling you to use them more intentionally?
2. When you look at the “fruit” of your efforts, is it mostly for yourself—or does it bless others? What small shift could you make to align more with God's kingdom purposes?