

# INTEGRITY

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Rejoicing in the  
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**What's in**  
**Your Hand?**

By  
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 Johnson



In 1998, we were living in Lochaber, just outside of Antigonish, Nova Scotia where we were pastoring a small country church. (Me — a city girl!) Our children were still young so I decided to stay home to raise the kids.

Feeling that we didn't have enough, I asked God what I could do. What do I

have to contribute? What was He calling me to do?

It was then that my husband, Kevin, preached a sermon titled "What's in Your Hand?" This sermon spoke to my heart and propelled me into the art world.

Allow me to share a few points of the sermon.

### *An Insignificant Stick*

In Exodus 4, God asks Moses to deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh. Moses asks, "How will I do this? How will they believe me?" God asks, "What is that in your hand?" Moses replies, "A shepherd's staff."

It's an important tool for shepherding, but otherwise insignificant. It's just a stick. Still, God used the "insignificant" to do the "incredible." Moses not only delivered the Israelites from oppression with this rod; he also separated the Red Sea so that a million people could walk through on dry ground.

*"Don't be afraid, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'"*

### *A Widow's Last Supper*

In the case of Elijah, the Lord told him to stay at this widow's home. The Lord told Elijah that he has commanded a widow to supply you with food. Elijah arrives at the said home and finds that the widow is about to prepare her last meal of bread that she will share with her son and then they are going to die. They ask Elijah, "How can we help you?" Elijah asks, "What is in your hand?"

The widow responds, "I don't have any bread, only a handful of flour and a little oil in a jug." Elijah says, "Don't be afraid, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'"

The widow did as Elijah had commanded, "and there was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah" (1 Kings 17:16).

### *The Jar of Unlimited Oil*

In 2 Kings 4:1-9, a prophet's widow asks Elisha for help, since her creditors were coming to take away her two sons as slaves.

Elisha asks, "What's in your hand?" She responds that she has nothing except a little oil. She is instructed to go out to her neighbors and to ask for as many empty jars as she could get. Then she does as she is instructed closing the door behind herself and her sons. This was a family event. They begin to pour oil into all the jars. When all the jars were filled, the oil stopped flowing — a miraculous event. Out of obedience, and trusting God and the man of God, a widow is released from debt and even has excess to live on.

### *Don't Hide Your Gift*

The last Scripture reference was about the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). This passage has always spoken to me, since as an artist, I am a holder of the talents. It reminds me that I am accountable before God for the gifts He has given me. *What is in your hand?* This was the haunting question God asked of me. This is the question He asks of you.

The three servants were given different amounts of money (talents). Two of the servants doubled their investment. One hid it in the ground.

I remember as a child of eight playing outside our home under the tree where the tire swing hung. There I found a special spot to bury my money. It wasn't much, maybe 50 cents. I remember thinking about it when it rained, hoping it was still safe and that no one had found it. No one knew that I had buried it. A week or so later, when I brought it out from the hiding place, there was no celebration, no huge accomplishment, no great risk taken. It was just a couple coins back in my hands again.

The third servant, I'm sure felt the same. He thought he had done well, lost nothing and returned to the Master what was entrusted for good keeping. What harm was there in this?

The master's response seemed surprisingly harsh. He ordered that the little that the third servant had be taken away from him. How could this be fair? What about having mercy, understanding, compassion — isn't this what God is truly like?

The message is strong and clear. If we hide the gift, what good is it to us? To others? To the Master?



wisdom offered by business leaders because it seemed “unspiritual” to us. I believe a more accurate word would be “unfamiliar,” and that scares us.

Mutual respect and understanding is needed. Business leaders need to take time to read good material on how leading the church is different than leading a business. For example, things move slower because we’re dealing with volunteers, not paid employees. Our goal is the unity and growth of the whole church and we do not want to sacrifice anyone for the sake of expediting a decision. Decisions must be “family-oriented” not bottom-line driven. The church’s mission is first and foremost about making disciples. Such understanding can help business leaders work productively with their pastor and provide them with a helpful leadership perspective on the church.

Likewise, pastors would do well to gain an understanding of business disciplines such as how to read a financial statement and make a budget (this really helps in a board meeting), human resource practices, strategic planning, marketing (dare I say this is part of evangelism?), and organizational behavior. That way we can appreciate and receive help from our business leaders without feeling threatened or accusing that their insights are “unspiritual.” Such attitudes are birthed from ignorance.

Here’s the rub. I found myself with an increasing desire to understand how business principles would benefit the church while ministering in a church or denominational culture that was often closed towards what could be learned from the business community.

### *Why didn’t they teach me this in Bible college or seminary?*

As the years passed, I found myself in leadership roles that required me to understand how to read multi-million dollar financial statements, advise on human resource issues and develop organizational strategies. I was out of my comfort zone in a huge way.

I began to gasp for air! I needed to learn new concepts, skills and knowledge. My previous training was inadequate. That is not a negative comment on where I trained. Like any early training, it’s not until you get on the job that the depth and breadth of learning takes place.

So, I had to wrestle with how I was going to fill the gaps in my learning. Because of my interests and aptitude, an MBA seemed like the perfect fit.

Why would business leaders be attracted to the church when we eagerly accept their money yet frustrate them by shunning their ideas?

I believe that if church leaders and business leaders would actually find cooperative ways to work together, we could achieve greater things for God’s Kingdom.

Pastors, get interested in your business leaders. Spend time getting to know what drives them. Pray for them. Disciple them. Those with a heart to follow Christ are dying for an opportunity to use their skills and even their money for a great cause.

Business leaders, please be patient with us. Pray for us. Encourage us. We need you but we often don’t realize it. You scare us. In your world, you are aggressive and bold. In the church world, we are told to be humble and gentle. But if you will walk with us as a friend, we can learn much from you. **fi**

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I began my art career in 1999 with the launch of four pen and ink drawings titled “Portraits of Antigonish.” They were juried and entered two art exhibits that same year — first a group show at the Gathering of the Arts, and the second was a group show of local artists at The St FX Art Gallery. My last drawing of the four was completed at St Margaret’s Hospital after delivering Sarah, our youngest of five children. I was committed to what God was calling me to do. In my hand, I had a talent that could not be hidden. And today I give God the honor and the glory. I have accomplished more than my wildest dreams.

What is it that God has given you? What’s in your hand? Don’t look at the

impossibilities; rather give God the little you have and see what He will do with it.

When my head says it is impossible, I encourage myself with Proverbs 3:5,6 and remember that God works outside of the realm of my limitations. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.” **fi**

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