

What is the hidden treasure we look for?

Jesus' parables are short, simple stories he shared to teach and illuminate how we as Christians can go through the day in our work environment seeking to walk with Christ and let the Holy Spirit guide our work decisions amidst the pressures and challenges faced in the work environment.

What is the hidden treasure we look for? How can we know when we find the true hidden treasure we are meant to find?



The 2023 BELIEVES season, focused on “Living Our Faith According to Jesus’s Parables,” continued on Tuesday, March 14th from 7:30-8:30 AM with a focus on the [Parable of the Hidden Treasure \(Matthew 13:44\)](#), and the question – “What is the hidden treasure we look for?”

Philip Wilson, Founder and CEO of [Ecofiltro](#), shared his personal insights and reflections on the parable-inspired topic as the invited speaker for the session.

“I’ve never been asked to discuss a parable before,” Wilson opened by saying.

Born in Guatemala – though his family had been living in Australia as a result of his dad’s work in the oil business – Wilson grew up in New Orleans, but always came back to Guatemala for Christmas.

“I’ve been an entrepreneur since 25,” Wilson, who went to business school at Wharton, remarked. “I was the traditional entrepreneur up to age 40, but then had trouble getting up in the morning. I was ‘drifting.’”

Wilson and his wife, who is from Guatemala, have four kids. Around 2000, they realized they wanted to be closer to their parents, so they moved to Guatemala around that time and have been there ever since.

“I began working in my mom’s foundation in Guatemala,” he said. “My mom’s foundation did two things well – it focused on clean water and had great technology.”

Wilson went on to describe the technology.

“It’s essentially a filter that looks like a flowerpot. You pour contaminated water in, and it drips down to filter two liters/hour.

What was it that sparked Wilson’s mom to begin the foundation focused on clean water?

“Mom was the type of person who would just find people,” he told everyone.

Then he added, “This table I am sitting at – Mother Teresa sat at this table twice. After the earthquake in 1976, mom brought Mother Teresa to Guatemala. She was one of the first people I told I was getting married.”

Wilson gave an illustration of how his mother would find people through telling an anecdote tied to Mother Teresa.

“Mom would call CEOs of airlines to get companion flights for Mother Teresa so she could open up her missions,” he said.

Aside from his mother’s willingness to find people who would wind up having an impact on him, Wilson also noted his mother was the person who recommended Victor Frankl’s book “Man’s Search for Meaning” to him.

“I’d recommend this to all of you, if you’ve never read it.”

Once Wilson got involved in working in the foundation, he came to believe that often NGOs measure intentions more than results, and that he was drawn to turn to his entrepreneurial underpinnings to help the efforts flourish.

“Entrepreneurship is all about getting to know your customer,” he stated. “I would get to know the families here in Guatemala, rural families included. They would have things like TVs but were spending \$13 a month on firewood to boil water. With the \$.”

This led Wilson to understand how to price their standard water filter at \$35 each – an investment that eliminated the need for a poorer family to buy firewood to boil water, which resulted in a great savings for them – and helped further shape the underlying reason they don’t give away the filters.

“When you give something for free, people don’t value it. Letting them pay lets them be dignified.”

What has evolved over the years since making this shift from a \$250,000 foundation to a scalable social enterprise?

“We were providing 2,000 water filters per year back then, and now we provide 2,000 per day,” he mentioned. “We serve 550,000 rural families with our standard water filter, and 350,000 urban families with higher-end water filters which we use to bring the price point down for the standard water filter.”

Having spoken about the work of Ecofiltro for a while, Wilson shifted his thoughts back specifically to the words in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure to illuminate his thoughts and reflections.

“I read the parable 100 times, and kept getting drawn back to five words: Found, Buy, Hidden, Field, and Joy.”

The importance of the word “found,” Wilson said, is that you have to seek, but it’s not without cost. the significance of the word “buy” is that it requires sacrifice; and the importance of “hidden” is that you have to keep seeking.

And how about the word “field?”

“I came to see that my life as an entrepreneur is the ‘field’ for me,” he commented. “It led me to the treasure. I used to compartmentalize my life, but now I am bringing God in all day.”

Lastly, Wilson touched on the word “joy.”

“It’s not happiness. There is a more profound meaning that ‘joy’ gives – the peacefulness of heart that God pays with.”

So, what is the hidden treasure in the end?

Wilson stated succinctly, “The hidden treasure is not earned, and it’s not a birth right. The hidden treasure is that I found Jesus.”

Having found the hidden treasure, Wilson has been able to reflect to see how he’s evolved in the journey to find it.

“Entrepreneurship is humanizing,” he said, noting that he wasn’t living out his faith before. “People weren’t at the center for me, but then they became more of a focus. I had been about increasing my net worth, but then had to give it all away when working at the foundation.”

The keys to do this?

“Surrender. Faith is essential.”

Thinking back on the “joy” in this, Wilson quoted St. Augustine.

“I believe it was St. Augustine who said, ‘Our heart is restless until it rests in You,’” he remarked. “For me all of this was like hearing from God, ‘You don’t have to seek anymore, You found Jesus.’”

When asked how he knew he found the true hidden treasure we’re meant to find, Wilson told of an observation from his wife.

“Superficially, my wife used to tell everyone I became like a kid again,” said Wilson, who shared he is up early in the morning now all the time. “I’m out and joyful in what I am doing.”

In terms of seeing how this has impacted his business and team, he had several things to mention.

“For one, we would donate filters to rural schools to build relationships and trust,” Wilson pointed out. “When we’d go back, we’d hear from families, ‘My kids’ lives are changed. They never get sick anymore.’ Hearing this made me feel I’m the wealthiest man in the world.”

Then he restated that through this journey, even in the company they would focus to put people at the center.

This happens through things like aligning on Ecofiltro’s noble purpose, having self-managed teams, and putting employee profit sharing in place.

“Our noble purpose – saving lives with clean water – is what inspires people,” Wilson said. “With our self-managed teams, people are also motivated, and it tells them, ‘I believe in you and your capacity.’”

As for the profit-sharing, 25% of all profits go to employees each month, and the other 75% goes back into the company.

“The goal is to reach one million families in rural Guatemala by 2025,” he stated. “We’re about halfway there. We’re a \$10 million organization now, but I think through serving it’ll be \$100 million in 10 years.”

What is the greatest barrier Wilson sees others struggle with in the business world to find the hidden treasure?

“Lots of greenwashing goes on,” he answered. “Young people want business to serve others. Some social enterprises aren’t really doing it authentically. People know it.”

At Ecofiltro, one thing he feels they have done well in this area is their approach to engage during natural disasters.

“When we have a natural disaster, demand for our product goes up 10x. We sell at half price to those helping others.”

Beyond all this, the true hidden treasure is sought consistently with the employees.

He and his team have put in place an induction program for all team members to go through to understand Ecofiltro’s purpose, values, and underpinnings.

He also said, they now start and end things with prayer.

“I like my team to know God guides me. My grandfather used to always say, ‘God guides me.’”

Sometimes this means Wilson has led the prayer with his teams, but now with the standard set, different groups lead, and each has a different prayer leader.

“After a year, it got embedded from doing it at the weekly team meetings all the time,” he recalled. “We started with non-spiritual elements around serving and then deepened more and more into prayer.”

Wilson, who now works an hour a month on Ecofiltro as he pursues other endeavors, began to close by commenting that he believes his contribution to humanity is this model that lives without the founder.

Then he added, “‘Seek God’s kingdom and the joy that comes out will be worth the sacrifice. I wish I could put into words the difference between the past and now of the joy.’”