

LivingWealth.com – Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Dr. Bell, what is your basic approach?

In our conversations, I listen deeply to you as we first explore your values and desires in life. Together, we assess the assets you have, focusing on where you wish and need to apply your next efforts. During this valuable process together, I educate and teach you so you can be independent, rather than creating a dependency on me. You are given basic tools to navigate in the financial arena, either by becoming competent yourself or by having the right questions with which to choose an investment advisor.

Taking action is where the rubber meets the road. Many people who go to a financial planner never implement the recommendations. I have extensive experience in coaching, language action, and spiritual practices, which enable me to reveal impediments you may experience to taking action as well as designing simple practices you can use to change your attitudes and behavior. Together we design simple practices you can use to change your attitudes and behavior. Perhaps investing in financial instruments such as stocks and bonds may not be in your best interests as a family at this time. We invent and create a plan, which includes the wholeness of your life.

Q. What do you mean by spiritual?

Spirituality is about a larger sense of life. It constitutes the world in a certain way, by addressing questions of meaning and purpose in our lives. What do we value? What is sacred? How do I see myself as part of a bigger wholeness in the world? These answers, always unique to each of us, can include religion, which is oriented around belonging, but not necessarily. Our discussion together may lead us to what is grounding in faith? What does it mean to trust in self, and in others? We talk about cultivating positive moods, and recognizing important unities. Together, you and I build a practice of inventing meaning in life.

Q. Does money have value in and of itself?

Certainly, most people approach money and finance as rational, having to do with numbers and information. They assume money has intrinsic value or at least is backed by something which gives it value. I offer a different view. Money is a token for a promise. Money represents a promise that we can turn it into goods and services in the future. Money only has value if it can be turned into something else that we need or want. If we fear it cannot, it loses value.

Rather than gold bouillon or bank accounts, the value of money is based on expectations, trust, and interpretations we make about value, which are deeply spiritual concepts. For example, during inflation or war people become mistrustful of the government, and financial crises often ensue. On a personal level, the “value” of \$1,000 to one individual can be quite different than to another. This is why we have to consider meaning and purpose in life when we address financial concerns.

Q. What is the relationship of wealth and spirituality?

In America today, most of us assume wealth has to do with money and material objects. The word wealth comes from the Old English, which means "the condition of well-being".

In America, most of us assume value has to do with the price of things. The word value comes from the Latin "valorum" which means "to be worthy."

So, wealth and value are not just financial, they're rooted in the spiritual concerns of well-being and worthiness. Think about your own life: significant moments in your life are not just financial or just spiritual. Think about an illness, or a career change. These bring forth both spiritual and financial considerations.

Q. Dr. Bell, why do you call your approach "Life Investment Strategy?"

I consider your portfolio to be your life. It's your past, your present, and your future. Your finances are one, but only one, important dimension of your life. Look at the "How to" section to download forms to guide you in this process.

Q. Are you a coach?

I don't fit easily in one category. I have an MBA and a Doctorate from the Stanford Graduate School of Business. I am a Certified Spiritual Director, and registered as a Financial Advisor. I have trained in Coaching and the Philosophy of Language with Dr. Fernando Flores. For years I have been leading courses and seminars in the domains of spirituality and finances.

Q. I notice you're not a CFP.

I've chosen to put a different emphasis on my field of work. I am affiliated with an excellent investment firm, Financial Design Associates. FDA designs its clients' portfolios by looking at expected future returns and risk for different asset classes over a ten-year time horizon rather than by looking at past performance. Please find them at www.FinancialDesign.com or email michael_fda@comcast.net. You may also reach them toll-free at: (800) 433-3665. I cannot guarantee results.

Q. Can money buy happiness?

I'm often asked that! In the United States money impacts every arena of our lives, not just investing or paying our bills. We've become accustomed to seeking money for its own sake and assuming that more is better.

We forget to ask, "Why do I want this money? What is it that I really care about?" "What am I giving up in the pursuit of more money?" I encourage people to ask these questions. If you earn more money but aren't home with your kids, is it worth the price? Do you earn money to live or live to earn money?

There are many studies that show that money does not buy happiness. For example, a recent Roper study surveyed 1500 randomly selected people, finding that the percentage of people who say they are happy rises as income does but only until their household income reaches about \$50,000. Surprising? Beyond that, more money did not correlate with more happiness. Instead, marriage, self-esteem, job satisfaction, and health were more important factors. Yet twice as many people reported they worried about money as reported worrying about the things that make them happier.

In addition, although Americans have become richer, happiness levels haven't changed – 35% said they were very happy in 1957 and 34% say they are very happy now, even though the income of that group has grown 2.5 times, adjusted for inflation.

Q. Can't you just tell me where I can invest my money to get the highest return?

Comparing financial returns with spiritual returns can't be done by comparing numbers.

First, we need to understand what return you are talking about. Are you interested in a financial return in terms of dollars and cents or a spiritual return in terms of well-being and satisfaction in your life?

If it's a spiritual return, then we need to look at all the areas of your life, and see where you would like to improve your satisfaction and well-being, and ask what return will be produced if you invest your money in assets that will improve this area. It may be that investing in yourself by taking courses in your occupation, or investing in your family by hiring a part time housekeeper, or investing in your community by donating to the local homeless shelter will produce a high rate of return in terms of well-being.

If it's a financial return, then we need to look at the risk you are willing to take. Remember that the higher the *expected* return, the higher the risk. What about the opportunity costs? What are you willing to give up in terms of time and energy to have a shot at the brass ring?

"It is by spending one's self that one becomes rich." Sarah Bernhardt