Chapter 1

The Real Truth About Money

You may have heard phrases like 'money is evil', 'money makes you selfish' or 'money is stressful'. These words may even enter your mind and leave your mouth regularly.

But the real truth is that money itself is completely neutral. It is not good or bad. It is the meaning that we (as humans) choose to attach to it.

If money has been a source of anything other than ease for you up until this point in your life, then this concept may take time to sink in or wrap your head around.

At its core, money is a man-made concept, much like time. It is a symbol that represents value, and we, as a collective across the world, decided together over many centuries that money is worth something. This means money is backed by belief. It is upheld by our thoughts alone.

If every human on Earth one day woke up and suddenly chose to stop believing in the concept of money, it would become worthless overnight. It would be just paper, numbers on a screen and coins down the back of a sofa. No more valuable than a stick lying on the road. And yet in modern life, it seems to be one of the most stressful, emotional, divisive and sought-after resources in the world.

People lose sleep due to money worries. Marriages crumble under the weight of financial disagreements – money is consistently cited as one of the leading causes of divorce. The weight of financial stress becomes so overwhelming for some, that it negatively impacts mental health and, in some cases, leads to devastating outcomes. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, employed or retired, single or married. Money touches every single one of us. It infiltrates our daily decisions, long-term dreams, relationships, experiences and even our sense of self-worth.

For many, it holds a power that feels inescapable, like an invisible force dictating what is possible and what's not, directing the path of our lives.

Let’s zoom out and remember that money was invented.

Money started with bartering, where people traded skills, goods and services. It then evolved into commodity money, where societies began swapping objects that had intrinsic value such as shells, cattle and grains. These items were accepted as a form of money because they were either rare or valuable.

Personally, I wish I had experienced living in times when pretty shells from the ocean could be used to trade. That sounds fun to me.

After that, we entered the age of metal coins, made from silver or gold – durable, portable and hard to fake. The perfect combination for trading! Paper money entered the chat in the 7th century, a game-changing alternative because it was much lighter and easier to carry than pouches full of heavy metal coins.

Could you imagine having to lug around your life savings in gold coins in your pocket? Not only would you be a very easy target for being robbed, but you would also probably spend half of your day with your trousers around your ankles.

For centuries, currencies were backed by gold, but during the Great Depression and World Wars, countries abandoned this system in an attempt to have more control over their economies.

Fast forward to the invention of 'fiat money' – money that has no intrinsic value, but is backed by government trust. This means money only holds value *because* we collectively agree that it does. Today's paper money and coins are fiat. They're not technically 'worth' anything on their own, but we accept them as legal tender.

And now, in the 2020s, we rarely use cash at all – everything is digital. We are witnessing the (seemingly unavoidable) rise of a cashless society because most money now only exists as numbers on a screen – invisible wealth stored in data on giant servers.

As you can see, money has evolved exponentially over centuries and across nations, but one thing has remained the same: Money is a tool, and its power comes from our collective belief in it.

WEALTH IS NOW SILENT

This digital evolution has fundamentally changed something about money in today's world, and it affects us all without us realising: **Financial wealth is now invisible.**

For most of human history, wealth was visible. If your neighbour had ten goats in their garden and you had only two, everyone would know who was 'wealthier'. When money was gold coins or livestock or land, you could literally see prosperity with your eyes. The rich had bigger herds and more land, so there was no way of hiding who was at the top of the financial hierarchy.

But as time went on and money became more abstract, financial wealth became both invisible and undetectable.

Nowadays the 'wealthiest' person in the room (or the person with the most money) might look completely ordinary. They might not be wearing branded clothes with logos, they might not be driving the flashiest cars and they might not be covered in diamonds. Instead, their financial wealth lives in their investment portfolios, retirement accounts and other assets – all things you cannot see because you do not carry them around with you.

Meanwhile, the person walking down the road who *looks* rich – they're draped in designer clothes, wearing a pricey watch, smelling of expensive perfume and looking all boujee – might not be financially wealthy at all. You have no real idea or true image of what their actual financial situation is. It is all smoke and mirrors.

Your automatic thought might be: '*Oh wow, they must be so wealthy. Look at all these nice things they have. I bet they are doing so well and making a lot of money!*' But really, what you are looking at is how much someone has spent, not how much they have saved or invested.

You can no longer judge someone's financial position based on how they look or what they have. It is easy to fake financial wealth. Don't get it twisted – that person you see in a designer outfit may well have a high annual salary and a well-paid job and invest wisely, creating financial returns that fund a lifestyle they can genuinely afford. Or for all you know, they could be drowning in debt, funding their lifestyle through credit cards and keeping up appearances while financially unravelling behind the scenes without a trace.

The conversation about social media and the rise of fake wealth highlights this point exactly. Your social media feed could be full of individuals with large followings flashing the cash and flying all around the world, displaying the latest gadgets and clothing. It can be easy to make assumptions about how much money they make and have.

But it only shows one small part of the picture – you could say less of a picture and more of an illusion. Cornell University research[1] by Brook Erin Duffy showed that '*most successful Instagram influencers either came from family wealth or went into debt creating the illusion*,' highlighting there is no way to actually tell just by looking at someone.

The digital age has caused wealth to become imperceptible, and social media has only amplified this, making it easier than ever to look rich instead of being rich.

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[1]Cornell University research (https://sociallifemagazine.com/the-archive/if-i-was-a-rich-girl/).

And it can have a detrimental impact on your own finances. Credit Karma research[2] found that '*Gen Z and millennials collectively spend £400 monthly imitating Instagram stars. Furthermore, seven in ten go into debt as a result*'.

This is where it gets dangerous. When your brain fills in the gaps with assumptions, you fall into the comparison trap and start measuring your progress against an illusion of wealth. It fuels anxiety, urgency and can create a feeling of 'being behind' – even if you are objectively doing well.

Raise your hand if you have ever been personally victimised by the 'online comparison trap'. I know I certainly have! Running my business has kept me constantly online, and I've definitely noticed how easily that can spiral into comparison if I'm not intentional with my phone usage.

It can push you to spend money before you are ready, take financial shortcuts, chase a lifestyle that from the outside looks successful and make choices that do not align with you and your values or goals. Over time, this disconnect between what looks like wealth vs. what actually is wealth can erode your confidence, clarity, commitment and long-term security. This is rather insidious if you are not aware of it.

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[2]Credit Karma research (https://www.creditkarma.com/about/commentary/gen-z-and-millennials-financially-irresponsible-era-is-over-as-many-adopt-no-buy-financial-trend).

In a world where wealth is now silent, learning to find your own version of wealth is absolutely key to long-term fulfilment.

Personally, I have come to realise that I care far more about how safe, fulfilled and financially secure I feel on the inside than how my life appears on the outside. *Feeling* wealthy matters more to me than *looking* wealthy ever could.

And I really hope by the end of this book, you will feel the same way too.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MONEY AND WEALTH

Money and wealth are two very different things, yet we often use the terms interchangeably – and that's where people can get confused.

Money is tangible. It's the asset you can hold, count and exchange for value. It pays your bills, funds your holidays and sits in your bank account as numbers on a screen. Money is practical, measurable and finite.

To me personally, money means freedom. It gives you options and choices. It operates as something that can open doors and create possibilities. Money is what you HAVE.

But wealth is so much greater than that.

Wealth is expansive, fulfilling and connected to all areas of your life – not just money or finances. It's bigger and broader than just financial wealth because *true wealth* cannot be measured by a bank balance alone.

Wealth is your peace of mind – the ability to sleep soundly at night without anxiety gnawing at you. It is your zest for life, your vitality and physical well-being, the energy you wake up with each morning and the life force that flows through you. You can find it in your relationships – the people who love you, support you and challenge you to grow. It is found in all areas of your health. It shows up in the quality of your daily choices and habits, your routines, your connection to yourself and your greater purpose, and the small moments that compound into a life well-lived.

You can have a lot of money without having true wealth. You can be financially wealthy on paper and rich in assets and still feel empty inside, exhausted every day or disconnected from yourself and the world. And conversely, you can experience wealth even if your bank account isn't overflowing with money. True wealth can be achieved through meaningful work, deep relationships, good health and a sense of purpose.

In 2025, I went through one of the toughest financial years of my life, and yet paradoxically, I ended the year feeling the most wealthy I've ever felt: I was happy, healthy and peaceful. I did not feel this way *because* of having less money but in spite of it.

Money (or financial wealth) is what you HAVE. True wealth is what you CREATE.

Money can and does absolutely play a role in building your wealth, but it is not the whole picture. It is not the only indicator of how wealthy you feel. Money is a tool that can support your wealth – buying you time, experiences, security and freedom – but it cannot replace the other pillars of a truly wealthy life.

ARE YOU HAPPIER WITH MORE MONEY?

The burning, age-old question that crosses everyone's mind! A question I am often asked and one I love to answer.

> 'The more money you have, the happier you'll be, right?'

There is a common assumption that more money automatically equals more happiness, but the argument is so much deeper than simply comparing how much money you have with how happy you feel.

The answer is not as black and white as: *Yes, it makes you happy*, or *no, it does not*.

First of all, across the world, there are extremely sad rich people and very happy poor people – highlighting that money cannot be the only factor in happiness.

From my own experience of travelling to many different countries and experiencing different cultures, I have seen with my own eyes and felt the truth of this sentiment.

However, this holds true beyond just anecdotes and personal experiences. Many studies from around the globe comparing wealth and happiness have resulted in similar findings.

Despite being one of the wealthiest nations, the United States ranks third globally for the burden of mental and behavioural disorders, according to the World Health Organization. And the United Kingdom currently ranks only 23rd in global happiness rankings despite being one of the world's wealthiest countries.

On the flip side, research tells an equally compelling story about happiness in middle- and lower-income communities. In 2025, Harvard's Global Flourishing Study surveyed 22 countries across the globe and found something remarkable. A nation that ranks low on the wealth scale is Indonesia, yet it has the highest 'flourishing' score, while Japan had the lowest despite being a very wealthy nation.

Researchers of this study wrote: '*Most of the countries that reported high overall composite flourishing may not have been rich in economic terms, but they tended to be rich in friendships, marriages, and community involvement*'.

This pattern holds true when we look at what actually predicts happiness across cultures.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development, which followed participants for 85 years, found that those who maintained warm relationships lived longer and happier lives, while those who were isolated often died earlier.

In the World Value Survey, which included 120,000 respondents from 74 nations, researchers found that closeness to community was the best predictor of happiness, even after taking into account income. Social connections, it turns out, matter as much as – if not more than – money when it comes to life satisfaction.

Therapists who work with the ultra-wealthy report that clients struggle with profound isolation and trust issues, never certain if people like them for who they are or what they have. Their relationships often become transactional, defined by what they can provide rather than who they are. Basically, they have so much personal wealth and could do absolutely anything they desired in life because money is no object. Yet, they struggle to connect with people, and their relationships often feel empty and one-sided.

Think about *The Wolf of Wall Street*, a film based on the true story of a man named Jordan Belfort, a man making millions of dollars a month in his twenties who could indulge in the things many people dream of: mansions, yachts, private jets and everything money could buy. And yet, he was completely empty inside, filling the void with drugs, sex and increasingly reckless behaviour because the money itself satisfied nothing.

In the end, despite all his wealth, he loses everything that actually matters: his family, his freedom and his physical health.

Material possessions and a never-ending flow of money cannot protect you from the consequences of aimlessly chasing money without values or purpose.

He is a perfect example of how money does not automatically make you happy, especially when you make money the goal instead of understanding what you actually want money *for*.

It also highlights the importance of beautiful relationships over money.

For me personally, I know I would rather be sitting on a sofa, laughing and connecting with my best friends in a rented house and enjoying a home-cooked meal than partying on a yacht in the Bahamas alone because I have no friends to invite.

Don't get me wrong, I love laughing at my own jokes, but the richness of true connection is priceless.

Happiness and Your Income

There is a study often quoted in personal finance circles that you may have heard of: '*Happiness plateaus at an income of $75,000 a year*'.

This research originated from a 2010 study by Nobel Prize-winning researchers Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton, who surveyed over 450,000 Americans and found that emotional well-being increased with income, but only up to about $75,000. After inflation, this amount is approximately a $100,000 salary in today's economy. In the United Kingdom, converted into pounds sterling, this salary is approximately £75,000.

Beyond that specific income point, they found that more money didn't make people happier.

Suddenly this finding became absolute gospel with people citing it in TED talks, self-help books and countless articles about the pursuit of wealth. If you scroll back on my social media far enough, I've probably quoted it too!

But this study did not show the full picture.

In 2021, researcher Matthew Killingsworth challenged this finding with a new study showing that happiness *doesn't* plateau at $75,000. In fact, for most people, happiness continues to rise with income, even well beyond earning six figures.

So, you might read this and think: '*HA Laura, I knew it! People ARE happier with more money*', but there is more to it.

These two researchers then decided to team up for a new study to figure out whose study was correct. In 2023, Kahneman and Killingsworth published a joint study and their results showed something interesting.

For the unhappiest people, the income vs. happiness plateau is real. Those who were already deeply unhappy – those dealing with grief, clinical depression, chronic stress or existential dissatisfaction – money only helps up to a certain point. Earning a $100,000 salary was where the positive effect of income comes to a halt.

Basically, it says: Money cannot 'fix' what is already 'broken' inside.

If you're already rich and you're miserable, more money won't make you any less miserable. It might buy some temporary relief, distraction or comfort, but money itself won't solve the root issue.

However, if you're generally content, optimistic and emotionally healthy, then more money will likely add to your quality of life.

It makes sense that when your overall wellbeing situation is in a good place, more money can absolutely enhance your life.

This is why the conversation around chasing money vs. finding your wealth is key.

If you're chasing money to find happiness, fill a void, prove your worth or escape your problems. . . more money won't save you because you're already viewing everything in life through a negative lens.

Researcher Matthew Killingsworth said: '*For very poor people, money clearly helps a lot. But if you* *have a decent income and you're still miserable, the source of your misery probably isn't something money can fix*'.

This is something I have experienced for myself.

In my mid-to-late twenties, I was financially at my wealthiest (on paper). My pension pot was growing; my savings were flourishing with over £25,000 and counting; I had just begun my investment journey; I had no outstanding debt; and my stable job was providing me with £40,000 a year plus commission on top. I was miles ahead of the average 20-something-year-old in terms of money.

The freedom and independence of living with two of my best friends, Fran and Beth, was euphoric. Our little duplex flat in Bermondsey was home to endless laughs and many fun traditions. To me, living with your friends feels like a rite of passage. I remember our mornings consisting of '*landing meetings*' where all three of us would stand in the doorways of our bedrooms to share the gossip from the day before and dance to girly pop songs.

But over time, once I had settled into my new home and everything became familiar, my money continued to grow, but my sense of purpose decreased. I really began to struggle with my mental and physical health.

The longer I stayed in my full-time job, the more disconnected I felt.

Every night, sleep was a struggle. Insomnia drained my health. Chronic shoulder pain consumed me. I was crying constantly and felt completely lost . . . Cue the quarter life crisis!

Many people would envy my position – a lot of money, an extremely supportive employer who let me work from home (long before it was normalised by COVID), a high salary and a position in a company that offered the potential for significant growth.

My old boss, who is still a very good friend of mine, Kieron, is one of the reasons I run my business today. He saw something in me when I was 18 years old applying to work for him, whilst all my other friends were working part-time jobs and studying for their degrees. I learnt so much about growing a business working under his wing: from making money, sales and pitching, data and analytics, managing people. . . the list goes on.

But after nearly nine years at the company (by the time I quit), all the stuff that sounded amazing on paper was not enough on its own.

My purpose was non-existent. After ditching my dream of becoming an actress a few years prior, I was now in career limbo, with no idea where to head next. I received regular promotions and pay rises; my sales bonuses would fly in every month, but they had no lasting impact on my happiness. Instead, I found myself constantly questioning and doubting everything about myself and my life.

If more money equalled happiness, I *should* have been the happiest at that point in my life. Yet, my personal experience from this turbulent time in my life reflects how income is only one small contender in the game of life.

Comparing Two Clients

If you're still thinking, '*Sorry Laura, but if someone has more money than me, then obviously they're going to be happier. I know I would be happier with more money. . .*' – let me share a real-life example.

I had two very different one-to-one financial coaching clients:

One was a 54-year-old venture capitalist earning £250,000 per year. The other was a 23-year-old on a £27,000 salary working a 9–5 job.

The first came to me stressed, riddled with anxiety and suffering sleepless nights about money. With expensive overheads, pressure to maintain and escalate his lifestyle crept in and his high income no longer felt exciting – it was an insomnia-inducing burden.

The younger client saved over £10,000 and came eager to learn about investing. She felt excited, hopeful and energised by her financial goals. Her relationship with money was positive: Calm, aware that regardless of her current income, she had the power to build her dream life. Her wealth grew slowly but sustainably, one intentional choice at a time.

A stark contrast between the two.

As you can see, it's not about how much you make, and it's not always about how much you keep. It is more about how you think and feel about what you have and therefore what that means about you and your life. That's the difference.

So yes, of course, more money can be wonderful for many reasons. I say this without shame. I plan to be financially wealthy, and I am always open to making more. More money is useful: You have *more* stability, freedom, experiences, options, security and choices.

But money is just one part of the wealth equation – it's not the *reason* you're happier.

You can still experience happiness (and a range of other positive and enjoyable emotions) at this very moment without having a lot of money.

One of my favourite phrases is: '*Everywhere you go, there you are*'. You can never run away from yourself. Your own inner world accompanies you everywhere. Yes, you can travel to far-away countries where the sun shines brighter and things feel lighter. . . where problems seem to melt away. But your problems haven't gone anywhere.

You're simply looking at your problems in a more light-hearted, detached way. When you look in the mirror, whether it's in your home in the United Kingdom or in a villa mirror in Bali. . . it's still the same *you* staring back (but maybe with a more tanned face than before!).

You can apply this to money. **More money won't just automatically rid you of all your problems.** And, with the same mindset, more money just creates new, different problems.

So, instead, you must change the way you're choosing to look at it.

The expectation that money will provide you with all the lasting happiness you need actually creates problems for yourself. You are setting yourself up for disappointment.

It reminds me of a scene from the movie *Bridesmaids* (2011), when Annie is being kicked out of first class:

The flight attendant:	'*You have 3 seconds to get back to your seat ma'am*'.
Annie:	'*You're setting me up for a loss*'.

In conclusion, more money does not make you happier. When you focus on creating your own wealth – nurturing your inner world, improving your health, strengthening relationships, finding your purpose, connecting with community and making time for rest and fun – you create a better foundation for happiness to thrive. And from this place, when money does come, you actually have the capacity to enjoy it. Sounds like a win-win to me!

CAN MONEY BUY YOU TIME?

Money, on its own, will never make you whole. The research is clear, but what money can do is buy you 'time': time to rest, reflect, ask the bigger questions, grieve, breathe and be.

Time itself is finite. Once a minute, hour, day has passed. . . you cannot get it back.

Money cannot buy you back the time already spent in survival mode, the seasons sacrificed to work stress or the moments lost to living life on autopilot. . . that time is gone and no amount of wealth can reclaim it.

What lies ahead is still yours to shape, though.

Financial wealth *can* buy you time and space from here on out. It can buy you the breathing room that being in survival mode doesn't allow for, and the stillness in which something so much deeper can emerge. Growth, creativity and self-discovery are available to all of us, but they thrive with a foundation of safety.

Money itself does not provide you with that growth, but it can create ideal conditions and capacity to ask: *'Who am I, really? Who do I want to become? What do I need to process right now? What mark am I leaving on the world?'*

Once I had a 1:1 client in her thirties who'd been through a rough few years – a series of unfortunate events had followed her around like a bad smell. Every day she felt exhausted, heavy and disconnected from herself.

During our work together, she made a choice that scared her but felt right: to take a short unpaid sabbatical from work using the money she saved up. She rested, read, meditated, tried new hobbies and listened to her body. She did things that lit her soul up or soothed her.

And after a few weeks she felt like a new person. Not just because she had rested from work, but because she had given herself the space to process everything that had happened. Even though nothing had changed about her past, she could look at everything from a more relaxed point of view, assess her role and emotional reactions and identify what was or wasn't in her control.

By the end, the money had gone but returning to work felt easier than expected. Her fresh perspective, renewed energy and clarity about what she wanted were all achieved through letting money provide time and space.

Money does not hand you growth, but it can create the conditions in which internal growth becomes possible. And that personal growth helps you create your true wealth, in all areas.

Similar to confidence: The universe doesn't hand you confidence on a plate. Instead, it provides opportunities for you to make a new choice that builds confidence – the moment someone asks for your opinion in a meeting, an invitation to share your story publicly or eye contact with a hot stranger in a coffee shop.

I am a big believer in going up to people and giving out your number, instead of watching them walk out without ever finding out their name. What's the worst that could happen?

Confidence grows with action; the universe simply creates the chance for you to try. And money is the same. It cannot buy you back time, but it can allow you to use your time differently.

However, having a lot of money doesn't automatically mean you're taking those opportunities.

I once went on a date with a very wealthy guy – he made his financial status very clear to me. One thing I noticed was his inability to control his own emotional reactions. Cue the ick! As a 'successful' man in his thirties, I was kind of grossed out by his behaviour: rude to our waitress, very close-minded and irritated during a discussion about children, and nasty about his ex-girlfriend (immediate red flag!).

All I could think was: '*You might have financial wealth, but you do not have emotional wealth*'.

Emotional intelligence – true self-awareness, the ability to recognise and regulate your emotions and reactions, to treat people with dignity and empathy and to look inwards instead of constantly projecting outwards – is worth infinitely more than anything sitting in your bank account.

Money can aid the process and open the door to self-actualisation, but you still have to choose to walk through it.

MOVING FORWARD

Throughout this book, you will identify what *your* version of wealth is and feel confident in your ability to create it in your life. Not society's version of wealth or your parents' version. Not what Instagram tells you wealth should be. But to find *your* wealth. Because once you're clear on what wealth means to you and how to create it, everything changes.

The impact on your life of finding your wealth will be greater than any bank balance or income can offer you.

Your financial decisions become easier, your stress instantly decreases and your sense of purpose feels clearer and stronger. And suddenly, money stops being the end goal. It stops being your source of anxiety and worry, the reason you wake up in the morning or the obstacle to living your happiest, healthiest and wealthiest life.

Money becomes the vehicle to something far more meaningful.

The meaning you assign to money is one of the greatest predictors of your financial success and your peace of mind. So, if you are wondering, '*Well, how do I actually choose the meaning I give it? How do I rewrite this blueprint? How do I actually improve my relationship with money?*'

You do it by changing your relationship to your thoughts about money (or as I like to call it – your money mindset).

Think of your money mindset like building a house from scratch.

You can fill that house with beautiful artwork and furniture, paint the walls in stunning colours and design every room to perfection. But imagine you build that house on unstable ground. You choose to build it on a pile of mud. . . it doesn't matter how beautiful or well-thought-out the interior is – eventually, the foundation will give way, the structure will become unsafe and no amount of redecorating will fix it.

Your money mindset is that foundation.

The interior represents financial knowledge you accumulate or any practical financial tools such as budgets and spreadsheets, savings accounts or cash flow models. You can have all the knowledge and tools in the world. . . but if your foundation is built on restrictive thinking: '*I'll never have enough*', or '*Money is too hard for me to make or understand*', or an identity that makes you believe you are not worthy or capable of having and growing money, your thoughts will sabotage every financial effort you make. And you will never find peace of mind with your money.

So the question isn't just *what* you are building. Nor is it about the contents inside of the house. . . The important question is what foundation are you building on?