

How Much Is Enough?

1. Warm up: What's one of the most extravagant things you've ever done for yourself?
2. On Sunday we resumed our sermon series called "By Their Fruits You Will Know Them: 8 Core Characteristics of Authentic Followers of Jesus" by exploring how we, as followers of Jesus, should relate to money and material possessions. We don't normally think of having a "relationship" with money, but we all do. Money is woven into the very fabric of our lives. So, if you were to pick a word that best captures your current relationship with money and material possessions, what would be the word – and why?
3. Jeff began Sunday's sermon with a story (about his new Pit Bull dog) that reminded us how powerfully our culture shapes how we think about life. Most of us have had the privilege of living our entire lives in the most prosperous country in the history of the world. As a result, the way we think about money and material possessions has been molded and shaped by history's foremost consumer culture.
 - a. When you hear that almost half of the world's 8.3 billion people survive on less than \$2,500 per year. If you make \$34,000 per year, you're earning more than 99% of the people in the world, which puts you in the top 1% of wealth in the world. Do you feel wealthy? Why or why not?
 - b. Our material good fortune is not just a product of where we were born, but also when we were born. As 21st century humans, we have access to goods and services that even kings and queens of the past would envy. Brainstorm some of the benefits we have that kings and queens of the past couldn't imagine.
 - c. If you live to be 80, it's estimated that over the course of your lifetime you will be exposed to 146 million different advertisements – all of which are trying to tell you that you'll be happier if you buy what they're selling. How do you think that impacts us and how we think about life and money?
 - d. When you were a kid, what's a consumer good that you were desperate for your parents to get for you? As an adult, what's something you have desperately wanted to be able to afford that you finally got or are still waiting on?
 - e. A study of hundreds of people asked each their current income level, then asked what income level they would need to live comfortably. The vast majority, regardless of income level, said they would need to earn just a little bit more to live comfortably. What explains that? What's going on in our brain?
4. We've cut our teeth in a culture that teaches that: "More is always better. You'll be happier when you have more." But then along comes Jesus challenging us to embrace a fundamentally different mindset. Read Luke 12:13-21, as printed on p. 3.

- a. In verse 15, Jesus said, “Your life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” What do you think he meant? Put it in your own words.
 - b. Jeff described how he has lived in both small, humble houses and in large, fancy ones. Looking back on those experiences, he now realizes that living in a large house, though nice, didn’t result in any net increase in his happiness. He was just as happy in the small house as in the large one. How about your own experience? Have you found that having nicer things increases your net happiness?
5. If true happiness doesn’t come from having more money and material possessions, then where does it come from? Jesus tells us. He said, “I have come that [you] may have life and may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10. He also said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” John 14:6. In other words, we find true life – abundant life – when we follow in the way of Jesus, *i.e.*, when we live and practice the values Jesus came to teach.
- a. One of the high values Jesus taught was the importance of relationships and loving well. He said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” John 15:12. Tell us about a beautiful relationship in your life and how that relationship affected your happiness. If you could turn back the clock and trade that relationship for \$100 million. Would you? Why or why not?
 - b. Another high value Jesus taught was the importance of generosity. He said, “Give and it will be given unto you.” Luke 6:38. We actually find life, he said, by losing ourselves. Luke 9:24. Tell us about a time when you did something really generous. How did that make you feel? Suppose you could turn back the clock and trade that experience for a Mercedes. Would you? Why or why not?
6. But there’s something else we must add to the equation if we want to achieve what the Bible calls *shalom*, *i.e.*, the highest happiness possible in life. Isaiah 26:3 says, “Thou will keep in perfect *shalom* the one whose mind is stayed on Thee.” In other words, our greatest felt need is satisfied, and our greatest happiness found, when our spirit connects, and stays connected, to the Great Spirit, God our Creator.
- a. Psalm 84:10 says, “Better is a day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere.” What do you think that means?
 - b. Tell us about a time in your life when you’ve experienced the beauty of God’s presence in and around you in a way you wouldn’t trade for all the world. How would you describe what that experience of God’s presence felt like?
 - c. The most important premise of Sunday’s sermon was that to fully actualize and achieve ultimate happiness, we must live in close personal relationship with God. That kind of relationship with God, coupled with basic food, shelter, and clothing, positions us to experience the greatest happiness and satisfaction in life. Do you

buy that? Why or why not? Suppose somebody asked you, “Well, how do I form that kind of relationship with God?” What would you tell them?

- d. Based on all the foregoing, Jeff suggested a seventh core characteristic of authentic followers of Jesus. **Authentic followers of Jesus learn to love God and spiritual life so deeply that money and material things become secondary and incidental to them.** Learning to live in the way of Jesus is a process, and we’re all at different places on our spiritual growth curve. Do you feel you’re at a place in life where you can say that money and material things have become secondary and incidental to you? Explain your answer.

Luke 12:13-21

13 [As Jesus was teaching,] someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’¹⁴ But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’

¹⁵ And he said to the people, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’

¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” ¹⁸ Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” ²⁰ But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.’