

How Much Is Enough?

On Sunday, we talked about what role money and stuff should play in a well-balanced, genuinely happy life.

1. Warm up questions:
 - a. When you were a kid, what was your most prized possession?
 - b. What was the first car you owned? How did you feel about that car?
2. Possessions – and the money to buy them – can be a real blessing in life, especially when we’re talking about things we genuinely need. In our culture, though, the goal is not just to get what you need; it’s to accumulate as much as you possibly can. The unspoken assumption is that lots of money and stuff is critical to experiencing peak happiness. As Alan Alda once said, “It isn’t necessary to be rich and famous to be happy. It’s only necessary to be rich.”
 - a. Jeff said that, at some point along the way, the balance in his life tipped from having a few necessary things that blessed him to having so much stuff that life feels cluttered and burdened. He spoke of a basement, garage, and closets overflowing with stuff too valuable to get rid of, but too insignificant to live with. How ‘bout you? Does your life feel simple and balanced, or cluttered with too much stuff?
 - b. When you were growing up what kind of relationship to money and things did your family model for you? And how has your family’s modeling affected you?
3. In John 10:10, Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it abundantly.” Jesus was not a grumpy killjoy; his mission was not to make our lives miserable. Instead, he came to help us find life – the most abundant life possible. That’s why Jesus had a lot to say about the role that money and stuff should play in life if we want to experience peak happiness. Read Luke 12:1, 13-21, 32-34.
 - a. In verse 15, Jesus says, “Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” What was he trying to say? What do you think he meant?
 - b. Look at verse 19. Is it wrong to want to “relax, eat, drink, and be merry”?
 - c. Look at verse 18. Was it wrong for the rich man to expand his barns?
 - d. Is it wrong to be rich?
 - e. As you see it, what did the rich man do wrong in this parable? What was his big mistake?

4. Jeff suggested that the rich man's big mistake was not that he wanted to "relax, eat, drink, and be merry," but precisely the opposite. Instead of enjoying life in the present, the rich man was deferring enjoyment, so he could invest all his energy in wealth accumulation. Apparently the rich man thought peak happiness requires lots of success, money, and stuff. As a result, he ended up wasting his life in hot pursuit of the wrong thing.
 - a. Do you want to earn more money? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you think you'd be happier if you earned more money? Why or why not?
 - c. How would you describe your current work/life balance? Do you feel you're achieving a good balance? Why or why not?
 - d. Brother Andrew was a Catholic saint, renowned for his prayers of healing. Jeff described the monastic room that Brother Andrew lived in – a metal bed, a wooden desk, a chair, bare floors, bare walls, and a window. That simple room was Brother Andrew's home for most of his life. Could you see yourself living like that? How might it affect you?
5. In verse 32, Jesus says, "Sell your possessions, and give alms." Jeff noted that Jesus doesn't insist that we sell "all" our possessions. At a minimum, though, he clearly wants us to rid ourselves of enough stuff to enable us to live as simply as possible.
 - a. Why? What are the benefits? Why is it important to live a materially simple life?
 - b. Do you feel like you're "traveling light" through life? If not, what holds you back? What makes it hard to live simply?
6. We live in a culture that has taught us to take pride in the stuff we own and to impress people with the beauty of our possessions. Jesus challenges us to flip that paradigm – to take pride in how simply we live and to impress people with beauty of our soul and the quality of our life. That way of living is illustrated by the story Jeff told about the Mexican peasant, Pota-lamo, who refused to sell all his onions to a tourist because his primary goal was not to make lots of money, but to enjoy the sights, sounds, and people in the marketplace. Living like Pota-lamo takes great intercultural courage.
 - a. How do you think your family and friends would react if you deliberately began living a much simpler lifestyle? Would they support you?
 - b. If you were going to live a simpler lifestyle, what would be some initial steps you might take toward that goal? If you took those steps, do you think you'd be more (or less) happy?