

Money is 20th Century! ^{Part II}

I was talking to 2 young men yesterday (both in their early 20s – just starting their careers) and causally made the statement that “Money is 20th Century.” Both were intrigued, but it was clear, just by their expressions, that one was skeptical and the other interested – the first, by his “tells,” withdrawing while the latter wanting to pursue the conversation further.

Life has it priorities. Clearly, air, water, food, clothing, shelter . . . topping the list of physical needs. Why, then, are we seemingly unconcerned about our most vital needs (let’s take the first three: air, water and food) when they are so critical and we cannot live very long without them? Logically, shouldn’t we be anxious (maybe even obsessed) with them?

Logically, yes, but practically no because our concern is tempered by their abundance – proper concern (as opposed to unreasonable worry and phobias) is a function of both necessity and scarcity. Air, although clearly the most immediate and critical physical need, is of no concern to most people (except those with breathing problems) because, while vital and immediately necessary, it is free and unlimited. Platinum, gold and silver on the other hand, are scarce yet not necessary so it is a lack about which normal people do not fret. Money, in First-World countries, while not quite as assured and plentiful as air, water, food, clothing and shelter has become just about as certain and abundant so that any continued obsession with, and undue sacrifice for, it is no longer normal and reasonable.

Money still has value, and is necessary, in 21st Century America. But because it has become so plentiful, wisdom says we should turn our attention to more pressing matters – issues that, through devoting thought and time to, will increase our true standard of living more than the time spent on making more money! The necessities of life are generally fully and fairly easily met. The common and deafening cries of “More!” “More!” “More!” “Bigger!” “Bigger!” “Bigger!” “Bigger!” “Better!” “Better!” “Better!” are having and taking a great toil on relationships and the physical and spiritual well-being of MANY. America is awash with money. The reality is that we are far more in danger of being washed away by it than encountering a shortage!

The main point I was trying to make to these two young men was that it doesn't make good sense in 21st Century America to hoard water or food, even as vital and important as they are. In the same way does it make sense to obsess on and hoard money or work like the devil to make more that can only buy trinkets or outright junk? The cost of making a little more money (in ***time*** that could be better spent on more satisfying pursuits) is not wise when all it can buy are these trinkets and junk.

A real-life and practical example is the Two Income Household phenomenon – increasingly common and “normal,” but relatively unheard of until after WWII. Some couple did both work out of the house in the 40s and 50s, but it was rare. For even then, when people had much less, they did not see the wisdom of both spouses working outside the house. What they could buy with the extra “bucks” was seldom considered equal to the cost and toil it took on a family and marriage when both spouses worked outside the house and then came home to all the non-job responsibilities. “We both HAVE to work . . .” is not, for the vast majority of people who choose it, a well thought-out and planned decision. The reason we know this is that most that think it through and properly plan do NOT choose this route – they “sacrifice” the incremental “toys” and investments (hoarding) they could otherwise have for a much greater standard of living – a standard many more couples would choose IF they planned more and gave life more thought! Yes, with both taking home a paycheck, they can buy more and bigger, but the irony is that they have less time and energy to enjoy these “things;” the result being that far from a blessing, these things are too often a burden and curse!

Isn't money plentiful enough so that we should take care, but not be obsessed, with it to detriment of other far more important areas and issues of life? Money is one of many potentially good things that vie for our time – we have to control it so it doesn't control us!

Evaluating any individual or couple, there is a “natural” level of income (based on their educational level and emphasis and talents) they can and will achieve with relative ease – to have more requires “pressing” and sacrifices that are seldom worth the costs. Take doctors as an example: the stereotypical doctor works far too much, often to the point of having no family life and significantly shortening their careers in destroying their own health. They work way beyond the point of fulfilling any reasonable physical needs. Though book smart, they are like the squirrel looking at the

“bumper crop” (my finger had a Freudian slip and, at first, wrote “bumper crap”) and thinking – “I had better work more! Look at this easy money – how can I NOT work more!” So they work, work, work (no, not for a noble cause – we don’t have a shortage of doctors – if one doctor won’t treat a person we can find another doctor all too willing), to buy mansions, fancy cars and other toys they don’t have time for. Or, even funnier, doctors are notorious for “recycling” huge sums of money in bad marriages and “investments;” if you want to find easy “marks” for foolish investments and scams just look for a pool of doctors!

We are fortunate in this place and era of few pressing needs only to the extent we are responsible with this freedom. The vagabond because he can panhandle for food, housing and clothing so easily becomes a bum. How many people spend much of their time and money on illicit drugs? And like Scrooge, many with thought no greater than a squirrel have hoarded money beyond any reasonable need. Some mistakes can be corrected – finding we have foolishly wasted years on mindless pursuits cannot be remedied – time, once spent, is gone.

On the Other Hand

A person may look around, agree that money is plentiful, say “What the heck . . . since it is so plentiful I will just borrow to buy what I want . . .” and fall into the even greater error of using debt to fund their “wants.” Money, because it is so plentiful, has lost much of its power; paradoxically, however, the lure of, slavery to and burden of debt is greater today than ever!

Institutions and many individuals have so much money that they “throw” money at people so they can charge them interest and accumulate even greater piles of it! Borrowing (allowing a couple, for example, to purchase a home within their means – not, in contrast, sacrificing to buy what will, in the end, be a burden and possibly destructive to their marriage and children) can be wise. But to fall prey to the foolishness of “I want it and I want it now!” is becoming all too common and “normal.”

I talked with a couple just last week suffering for meddling with the “fire” of borrowing – and they are getting burned very badly!

Rather than even one of them working outside the home, they have gone through a large nest egg (an inheritance of course – one they did not work

for) and toward the bottom of the stash had the bright idea to borrow against their remaining funds to purchase 4 condominiums and “flip them” for a quick and easy profit! They told me the condominiums were increasing in value a couple of thousand dollars a month – it was just too enticing to ignore! So with the crowd (many who lost big in the dot-com bust a few years ago – those that seemingly are at the tail end of every bubble – buying high and selling low) they took the plunge into the empty pool of real estate. The end result is that they will lose everything except what they can fit into one of the condominiums (and a storage unit) and hope they can continue to make payments on it so they are not on the street with their many “things.” This is probably the greatest tragedy about money today – going into debt in an effort to make more with the theoretical upside potential (what they could buy with more money even IF they, in fact, make more) being very small while the downside likelihood being real and devastating!

More money seldom fulfills any pressing need
while more debt often results in causing great pain and needs!

Money is 20th Century. 21st Century should be about considering how to best spend our 24 hours a day, 52 weeks a year and all the years of our short lives so that when we look back we will have more than a junkyard of things and a hoard of money to show for it! The opportunity to get into the 21st Century is before us all – we can choose to look forward, take advantage of the great blessings and graces surrounding us and seize this great blessing OR doggedly cling to and look back at what drove the last, and worst, part of the 20th Century.

Life, its success or failure, is very personal. We win or lose based on our thinking, goals and steps, wise or foolish. Many try to entice us into wanting and craving “More!” “Better!” “Bigger!” not to destroy us, but this can be the effect! Life is personal, so in the wise and inspiring words of Joshua we will all, like it or not:

“ . . . choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Jos 24:15

Money is 20th Century; necessary, but the “shine” is off, the lure should largely be past, other, more important, and satisfying possibilities are

before us. Life is personal. We would be wise to heed the simple, profound, sobering, timely, yet undeniable, truth that:

“Those [ALL] who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” Jonah 2:8