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Monday Manna

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IS IT TRUE THAT MONEY CAN BUY HAPPINESS?

By Jim Mathis

When I recently heard about a person winning the phenomenal amount of one billion dollars in a lottery, I wondered, “How long will that person be happy?” Will the overwhelming reality of how to manage their new life cause happiness, or will it impose heavy weight of responsibility and profound change?

Generally, people having limited financial resources think money can bring happiness. However, many people have discovered that having plenty of money might find some parts of their lives easier, but the experience of greater happiness does not always come with an increased bank balance.

Research have shown that once the basic necessities of life are covered, there is an optimum financial level where happiness peaks. Below that ideal level of monetary resources, having a little more would relieve stress and provide a bit more contentment. Income levels above the amount, however, do not guarantee increased happiness. In fact, they often have an opposite effect.

Buying and possessing things – like more clothes, bigger houses, or a collection of luxury automobiles – does not bring happiness, studies have shown. They may actually add to a person’s stress – unwanted responsibility, maintenance costs, even worries over losing them or protecting them from damage. In many cases, we can say that “less is more.” The Old Testament writer said it well: *“As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?”* (Ecclesiastes 5:11).

What money can buy is the ability to choose. It enables us to identify what really brings us happiness, along with the hope of actually obtaining it. For many people, among the best uses for money are travel and shared experiences. Taking a vacation, planning a trip, and getting away from the everyday routine can have very positive effects on our state of mind. Also, having opportunities to spend time with the people we love most, doing things that make memories that last a lifetime, can bring much happiness.

Money can also “buy” time: Paying people to do time-consuming tasks we do not enjoy or do well can bring happiness, freeing us from having to perform those responsibilities. For example, having somebody mow the lawn or hiring a lawn service can buy time and

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therefore increase happiness by allowing people to devote their hours to doing things they enjoy more. We would be wise to spend our money to buy time: time with friends; time to enjoy hobbies, and time to do all the things we really want to do.

In one of His sermon's, Jesus Christ warned, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21).

Writing to his protégé, Timothy, the apostle Paul also pointed to another source of wealth that cannot be measured by a bank account or investment portfolio: *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share...so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life"* (1 Timothy 6:17-19). There is much wisdom in this statement.

© 2021. Jim Mathis is a writer, photographer and small business owner in Overland Park, Kansas. His latest book is *The Camel and the Needle, A Christian Looks at Wealth and Money*. He formerly was an executive director of CBMC in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A.

Reflection/Discussion Question

1. In your opinion, can money buy happiness? If so, in what ways? What are some things that cannot be acquired with money?
2. Most of us, to one extent or another, are attracted to material things – clothes, cars, new technological devices like TVs, computers, and smartphones. What problems might result from the pursuit of such things excessively?
3. What is your reaction to the idea of using money to “buy” time? Does that make sense for you? Why or why not?
4. How can being generous and willing to share from one's financial and material resources bring happiness and fulfillment?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 11:24-28, 15:16, 18:11, 23:4-5, 28:22; Matthew 6:24-34; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

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