

When is enough, enough?
or
Who cares about the Joneses anyway?
October 4, 2009

Tragic stories happen all the time. I know of a man who graduated High School and College, and then married his High School sweetheart, Ruth. He has two sons, Mark and Andrew. He started a business with \$5,000 that he earned from working as a lifeguard and sprinkler installer. He eventually grew to own some \$170 billion in assets. Out of that great wealth he involved himself as a philanthropist in the areas of higher education and disease. He sounds like a great man. But like I said, this is a tragic story. Greed began to work in this man's life, and he found a way to play on the greed, financial dissatisfaction, and spiritual emptiness of those around him. He knew that people were never satisfied with enough. They craved more than enough. They needed income to keep up with the Joneses (who they privately couldn't stand to associate with), and he knew they wanted that income NOW! So, he obliged them. His investors received great short-term returns on their investments and were happy...for a while. However, as a result of his work, in 2009 the Federal authorities gave him a new identity. He is now known as inmate #61727-054, and he is sentenced to live for the next 150 years some 40 miles northwest of Raleigh in Butner, NC. You may know him better as Bernie Madoff, the man convicted of the largest Ponzi scheme in history.

When is enough, enough? It depends on where the enough is coming from. God will always give you enough of what you need, and He will do it in a grander way than you could ever imagine.

Matthew 6:25-30

"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you.

The issue of excess comes into play when we take matters into our own hands, and we lose perspective. This is a natural result of a refusal to trust in God, and instead choosing to trust in oneself. The basis for this misplaced trust can be anything from fear that God will not come

through on His promises, to pride in one's own wisdom and ability, to simple greed and the inability to delay gratification.

A couple of months ago we began an initiative to try to encourage Sunrisers to pay off debt. A number of people turned in their non-mortgage debt and we totaled it all up. I was amazed by the amount of debt only part of our congregation had taken on – it amounted to more than we owe on the church mortgage – more than \$570,000. (By the way, so far people have reported paying off over \$29350, in debt. Keep up the good work.)

Obviously, I don't know what comprised all of this debt. But I know what mine is made up of. Part of it came from buying what I really didn't need. The purchases came from a desire to satisfy my own wishes without any consultation from God. Why didn't I ask God BEFORE making those purchases? For the same reason you don't – He would probably say, "No."

King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 4:4

Then I observed that most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbors. But this, too, is meaningless—like chasing the wind.

Think about the last thing you purchased, or the last activity you spent money on that would widely be considered an excess or a luxury. Did it vastly improve the quality of your life? As you look deep into your heart, what was your motivation?

The Apostle Paul leads us into riches in mindset in Philippians 4:10-13:

How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Paul learned to be happy with what he already had – whether his circumstances dictated that he had plenty or little. He also knew something that we would do well to heed. He knew that he was a fallen creature who could easily fall into dissatisfaction with his own life as he compared it to the lives of others. So he turned to the Holy Spirit for the strength that he needed to trust in God.

Friends, you and I want to do things like: get out of debt, give more to charitable causes, give more to the church, leave an inheritance to our children. And we can do those things if we will only trust in God for what we have and know that what we don't have, we don't need. So, forget about the Joneses – they'll only get you into trouble.

When is enough, enough? When God says so.