

I'm just trying to get ahead...

Isn't that what we're all trying to do? Just get ahead? It's such a big part of the American dream, part of the American psyche like motherhood, apple pie, hotdogs and baseball. You work hard and you get ahead.

Only tell me, please, ahead of *what*? Ahead of the person in the next cubicle? Ahead of that neighbor down the street? Ahead of where I am now? Ahead of...what?

And how will I know when I've arrived, when I'm finally ahead? There will always be someone in the next cubicle, some neighbor down the street, to get ahead of. I can always get ahead of where I am now.

Maybe I'm supposed to be trying to get ahead to something. Ahead to a higher paying job? A bigger house? A fancier car? But no matter how far I go, won't there always be higher paying jobs to get? Bigger houses and fancier cars to buy?

There was a time when I thought getting ahead meant getting ahead of my parents. That seemed to be their dream for me, anyway, that I have opportunities that they didn't have, that I have a "better" life than they. But that can't be it.

They had one car and did just fine. I've got three. (Well, I *am* trying to sell *one* of them.) I grew up in a house with one bathroom. My kids, on the other hand, each have their own bathroom. My parents didn't have a microwave, cell phones, cable TV, Internet, and a host of other things I have that seem so basic to my life.

So I'm clearly ahead of my parents, at least materially. And that, I think, is where the problem is. When we talk about getting ahead in life, we're talking about *material* gains. If we really believed in heaven, though, wouldn't our emphasis be on *spiritual* gains?

I've come to the conclusion that I don't *really* believe in heaven. I *want* to believe, and I

hope heaven exists and that I will get there one day. But if I really and truly, without a doubt, believed in heaven, believed that there's an after-life, a chance to be with God and Jesus forever, I wouldn't give the slightest thought to getting *ahead*. I'd be trying to get *behind*.

Instead of going to the golden arches for lunch because *I* deserve a break today, I'd be taking *you* someplace because *you* deserve a break today. Instead of using that more expensive brand of hair color because *I'm* worth it, I'd offer it to *you*, because *you're* worth it. (Well, okay, so I don't really have enough hair to worry about coloring it and you have beautiful hair that doesn't need coloring, but you know what I mean.)

And maybe instead of sleeping in on Sunday morning because I had a great but late time the night before, I'd get up early, thank God for the wonderful time I had, and pick someone up for church who might not otherwise have gone. Then during the following week I'd look up all the people in the bulletin and let them know I'm thinking of them and their particular joys, sorrows and prayers.

When you want to get better at something, you practice it. So maybe that's what I need to do—practice getting *behind*. Not in paying my bills, of course (after all, I am the Budget Guy), but isn't putting others first a big part of what Jesus meant when he commanded us to love our neighbors? And *that* would *really* be getting ahead!

I'm here to help you improve your financial life. It's free and confidential. Just call the Budget Guy, Allen Gunter, at 292-4035, or send an email to BudgetGuy@shpc.org.

For a wonderful look at what the Bible says about money, check out the Crown Financial Ministries Small Study Groups - call Margaret Fetty at 288-9034 for more information.