

Are We There Yet?

If you're a parent, you've heard *that* question more than once! Sometimes even when you've only gone two blocks. Trying to explain the relationship between time and distance to young kids is tough. You try things like "It will take us as long as two Barney shows" or "It's as long to the beach as it is to Grandma's house." You think they've got it, they say they've got it, and ten minutes later, it's "Are we there yet?" or "Now how much longer?"

My wife and I finally gave up and simply started answering the questions with "Two more miles." Didn't matter how much further we had to go, it was always "Two more miles." Actually I lie. To keep it from getting boring, we'd change it up from time-to-time and answer with "Two more hours" or "Two more days" or something like that. No matter what it was, it was always two of them. Don't know why that was...maybe because we got two, er, too tired of the questions?

In any event, the kids finally gave up asking. But the question has been coming up a lot lately, just not from kids. "Are we there yet? Are we through this economic downturn? How much longer until things start getting better? When will we get back to the way we were before?"

Newspapers and magazines, Internet blogs and talking heads on television all have the answer. Well, maybe not *the* answer. Seems like it depends on who's doing the answering and what day of the week it is. But I have the answer – two more miles!

Because, of course, things will never be the way they were. Oh sure, the economy will get better, things will improve, and we'll forget about the pain. But who knows what it will be like getting a mortgage five years from now, or what new fees the banks and credit card companies will find to charge us?

But there's one thing that I guarantee will be the same tomorrow as it was yesterday and is today – the basic rules for how to best manage your money. In fact, I have it from the highest authority that the best practices for managing your

money won't change. That's right, *Thee* highest authority – it's all right there in the Bible.

Talking about money in church seems to largely be a "no-no" and yet there are well over 2,300 verses of Scripture that deal with how we handle money and possessions. Many of Jesus' parables also provide us with guidance. Do you know what one of the most common financial "rules" found in Scripture is?

Don't do debt!

Just think. If we had all just listened to God's advice, the economy wouldn't be in the mess it's in today. Instead of avoiding debt, we built an economy that needed ever more debt to fuel its growth.

I've written about this and other financial teachings in the Bible before, and you can find those articles in the Budget Guy archives on the SHPC website at members.shpc.org/finance/budget_guy/bg_archive.php. In particular, look for:

- ❖ *Some Excerpts From the All-Time Best-Selling Personal Finance Book* (July 2005)
- ❖ *The Heart of Any Good Financial Plan – The Bible* (August 2005)
- ❖ *The Forgotten Servant* (April 2006)

The debt rule is so obvious and simple – just don't spend more than you make – and it makes so much sense. So why do we have so much trouble with it? Because we have a tough time separating our needs from our wants.

I guess we have Adam and Eve to thank for that. They didn't *need* to chew on that apple. Shoot, they didn't *need* anything! But they *wanted* something more than they had. And when you want something bad enough, it's easy to convince yourself that it's something that you really need. Something that you've earned and are entitled to.

From the very beginning God knew that one of our greatest challenges would be how we handle one of his most powerful gifts to us. Depending on how we use them, our money and possessions can draw us away from Him or bring us closer. It

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all depends on how well you distinguish between your needs and wants.

For a look at how you can make that tough call, head back to the Budget Guy archives and read:

- ❖ *Needs vs. Wants: Three Tests for Telling the Difference* (April 2007)

And here are a couple of easy ways to begin to really start making a distinction between your needs and your wants:

- ❖ *Enough is Enough Already!* (June 2007)
- ❖ *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* (June 2008)

When it comes to debt, the worst kind to have is credit card debt. It's not just the high interest rates, it's the nature of the purchases that caused the debt. If you look back over your credit card statements, you'll probably find quite a few "cheeseburger loans":

- ❖ *Cheeseburger Loans* (September 2005)

And if that doesn't get you thinking long and hard about getting rid of your credit card debt, take a look at the strangle hold it has on your future paychecks!

- ❖ *Here's My Wallet – Help Yourself!* (October 2004)

The hardest part of getting out of debt is making the commitment to do it. The mechanics are actually pretty easy. The first step, of course, is to find a little extra money to add to your payments each month. I know, times are tough and there never seems to be enough. But guess what? It doesn't take much to begin to make a real dent. Look at what just a few pennies can do:

- ❖ *I Admit it, I'm a Penny Picker!* (November 2003)

So if all you can find is \$10 a month, go with it. In a couple of months, maybe you can make it

\$11 or \$12. Every extra dollar will reduce the amount you're wasting on finance charges and get you closer to being debt-free. Here are some very specific ideas for getting rid of credit card debt:

- ❖ *Had Enough Yet?* (March 2006)
- ❖ *It's Really All About the Tree...* (November 2004)
- ❖ *Set 'Em Up and Knock 'Em Down* (December 2004)
- ❖ *How About a Game of Freeze Tag?* (November 2006)

By the way...if you're tempted by those ads for debt relief services, be very careful:

- ❖ *Got Debt? Try Milk!* (May 2008)

There are a lot of scams out there, and you could end up in even worse shape! Some are even making it sound like there are special bail-out programs.

When it comes to money, the Bible talks about a lot more than just needs versus wants and debt. Things like saving and investing, co-signing loans, etc. But if you can get your needs and wants figured out and eliminate your credit card debt, the rest will be easy.

And guess what? You *can* get there from here. It won't continue to feel like being debt-free is always two more miles away. You'll wake up one morning and ask yourself "Am I there yet?" And the answer will be a loud and proud "YES!"

Want a little help with some aspect of your financial life? **Call the Budget Guy**, Allen Gunter, at 301-1246 or send an email to BudgetGuy@SHPC.org. I will help you in any way I can, and it's free and completely confidential. **If you'd like to learn how to get out of debt and build financial security in a small group setting**, ask Roger Wade (301-4921; rcwactuary@austin.rr.com) about the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University program at SHPC.