

The quickest and easiest— guaranteed to succeed!— way to save money: Be content

Message for Sunday, January 26, 2014
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Philippians 4:11-12;
Hebrews 13:5

Children's Message: Ask for an adult volunteer from the congregation, someone who likes chocolate. Tell that person to leave the room for a minute.

Say to the children, "Right now, *Name* looks pretty happy, wouldn't you say? I'm going to give *Name* some chocolate, and that is going to make him/her unhappy. Watch how I do it." Have someone fetch the person.

"Here, have a piece of chocolate. On this paper I have written a number from 1 to 10. If you guess the number correctly, you get to have the rest of the chocolate bar. If you are within one of the number, you get another piece of chocolate." [The number is 10, so there is only a slight chance of getting it right.]

Afterwards: when you came to church today, were you hungry? Were you thinking about chocolate? Who put those thoughts into your mind? (I did!) Do you wish you had guessed right, and got some more chocolate? Would you be happy if I gave you the rest of the chocolate bar right now, even though you guessed wrong?

Well, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to keep it. You can go and sit down now. Thank-you for being part of this.

[To the children:] See! Before this started, he was happy; he wasn't thinking about chocolate. I gave him chocolate, but I made him unhappy! Why? *Because I created in him the desire for more.*

That's how advertising works. They show you a picture of someone having fun with a new game or toy or doll, and now you want it, too. 60 seconds ago you were happy; now you're unhappy. The message they give you is, "If you buy this (or get your parents to buy it for you), then you'll be happy again."

Don't get tricked by those people who are trying to make you unhappy, just so you'll buy their product.

Let's listen to what God teaches us in the Bible:

Hebrews 13:5, New International Version:

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

The Bible tells us: *be content with what you have*. "Be content." That means saying, "I have enough. I'm happy with what I have. I am content."

When you see an advertisement, in a magazine or on TV or in a catalogue, remember this: their goal is to make you unhappy with what you have, so that you want more. Being content is when you say, "I don't need that. I'm happy with what I have."

Message: "The quickest and easiest—guaranteed to succeed!—way to save money: Be content"

Sixty years ago, the size of the average house in Canada was 800 square feet. Thirty years ago, the average house in Canada was 1,100 square feet. Now in 2014, the average house in Canada is 1,900 square feet. The average house being built today is 2,400 square feet.

At the same time, the average family in Canada has shrunk from four people to three people. That means that in new homes, the average individual occupies a space which, sixty years ago, would have housed an entire family.

Of course, with all the extra space in the house, you have to fill it with something. So homes have more furniture, more bathrooms, more and bigger televisions, more *stuff*.

As if that were not enough, the self-storage industry has boomed in the past decade, and shows no sign of slowing down. So now people can rent space to store their things they don't have room for and don't need.

Think about this: Houses are bigger, families are smaller, yet we need even more room to store our stuff? Do you see what's going on here? We don't possess our belongings. They possess us. They dominate our lives.

Materialism is the core of our culture. It runs the economy. Our society depends upon it. To get more stuff, we need more money; and to get more money, we push ourselves. People work long hours; family time is sacrificed because people need to pay the bills for all their stuff.

The apostle Paul was right on target when he wrote these inspired words:

1 Timothy 6:9-10, New Living Translation:
People who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that

plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

Not knowing when to say “Enough” causes so many heartaches.

Two friends meet in the street. The one man looked rather forlorn and down in the mouth. The other man asked, “Hey, how come you look like the whole world caved in?”

The sad fellow said, “Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me ten thousand dollars.”

“I’m sorry to hear about the death, but a bit of good luck for you, eh?”

“Hold on, I’m just getting started. Two weeks ago, a cousin I never knew kicked the bucket and left me twenty thousand, free and clear.”

“Well, you can’t be disappointed with that!”

“Yep. But, last week my grandfather passed away. I inherited almost one hundred thousand dollars.”

“Incredible... so how come you look so glum?”

“Well, this week...nothing!”

This is the problem of not knowing contentment. People always want more. They don’t how to say, “I have enough. I’m happy with what I have.”

Back to that passage in 1 Timothy 6. In the preceding verse 8, Paul writes:

So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

A monk found a precious stone, a precious jewel. A short time later, the monk met a traveller, who said he was hungry and asked the monk if he would share some of his provisions. When the monk opened his bag, the traveller saw the precious stone and, on an impulse, asked the monk if he could have it. Amazingly, the monk gave the traveller the stone. The traveller departed quickly, overjoyed with his new possession. However, a few days later, he came back, searching for the monk. He returned the stone to the monk and made a request: “Please give me something more valuable, more precious than this stone. Please give me that which enabled you to give me this precious stone!”

This is an example of someone who has broken free from the chains of materialism and consumerism. Paul wrote about a similar attitude in his own life.

Philippians 4:11-12, New International Version:
I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I’ll give you five warning signs or symptoms of materialism.¹

a) Anxiety over money

You don’t just manage your money; you worry about it. If you’re married, you argue about it with your spouse. It’s usually the result of spending more than you take in. Now you can’t pay the bills, you’re in trouble, and you’re afraid.

b) Coveting

This is when we are envious. We want what other people have, or what we see advertised. We get something, but tire of it quickly, and want something newer and better.

c) Selfishness

There is no joy in giving. You do it, but grudgingly. It means you have less to get things for yourself.

d) Greed

Coveting is wanting what others have. Greed is wanting more, just for the sake of having more. It will never be enough. Greed loves “get rich quick” schemes. It loves lottery tickets—that is, trying to get rich by gambling instead of working for it. Greed constantly thinks about its investments, about the rate of return. It is preoccupied with making more money.

e) Discontent

You no longer appreciate the things you have. This is the goal of advertising: to make you unhappy with what you have, to make you discontent.

You see materialism is not what you have, it is an attitude. It is anxiety over money, coveting, selfishness, greed and discontent.

Here’s the final word on what God teaches us about being content.

Hebrews 13:5, New International Version:

¹ From a message by John McArthur Jr.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

"Never will I leave you." That's the key to contentment. It isn't in our stuff; true contentment is based in our relationship with God. Knowing God makes all the difference in our lives.

Next Steps:

- Be honest: do you show any of these symptoms?
- If you do, you need to start practising contentment. The first step: instead of *getting* more, start *giving* away. Discover the joy of being generous.

Song: "O Christ, in Thee My Soul Hath Found"