

Enough

By Sibyl Towner

“Thank God for what is given, not allowing the not given to spoil ”it. —Elizabeth Elliott

Enough

(e–nuf) *adj.*

– to attain or achieve as much or as many as is necessary, desirable or tolerable; sufficient.

So when is enough?

On the surface it would not seem difficult to come up with an answer. From a survival perspective, “enough” is food, water and shelter. From a biblical perspective, we could say “enough” is whatever God provides after we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness; or that it’s what we ask him to provide in the prayer Jesus taught us — “our daily bread.”

But in fact it’s not an easy question to answer. Let’s take a look at what lies behind the inevitable difficulty we face when trying to answer this fundamental question of enough.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Industrial Revolution made it possible for the first time in human history to produce everything we needed at basically affordable prices. The challenge for business became how to get people to buy *more* once they had everything they needed. Industrial leaders responded, in words attributed to Charles Kettering, that the mission of business must be to create a dissatisfied consumer. That is, a consumer who would be dissatisfied with what they had even though they had everything they needed.

In the early 1900s futurists predicted that by 1980 people would only have to work two hours a day because they would already have everything they needed. The major issue of the day would be how people could effectively utilize all their leisure time. Astute business leaders responded to that potential challenge by setting the goal of having people value consumption more than leisure.

From a business perspective, the responses to the potential issues that an industrialized society posed were very effective. But, business’ successful responses created a new set of challenges to the consumer trying to answer the question of enough. Today, in America, we have more and are less content. We work extra hard and extra long to buy extra things which take extra time to maintain, store, worry about and protect ... and we are left rich in stuff and impoverished in relationships.

As we struggle to define enough, there are two conditions under which enough will never be enough:

If we try to define enough in terms of what others have.

If we love money. “He who loves money will never have enough.” Ecclesiastes 5:10.

Our tendency is to replace God with things, which is idolatry. In our culture and in many of our lives, money has been imbued with deity-like characteristics — the ever-present, all-powerful provider of ultimate security — the chief rival god. We have come to love that which Jesus said is impossible to love and still love God. (Matthew 6:24)

Given the spiritual implications of our dilemma, let's look at principles which can help us navigate the issues of enough:

Grow in a biblical understanding of stewardship.

God created everything (Genesis 1:1) and he retained ownership of what he created. If that's true then we are not *owners* of anything from an eternal perspective. (Psalms 24:1) What does it *really* mean that the house with *my* name on the deed actually belongs to God? Or that *my* children are really the beloved sons and daughters of God and they have simply been *entrusted* to me as their earthly parent?

Create a spending plan.

Have a plan for how the financial resources at your disposal will be distributed. A plan that provides safe financial boundaries and a guideline for saying "No." A plan that eliminates the inevitable waste that accompanies not having a plan. A plan that aligns your spending with your values and priorities. A plan that leads to financial peace and freedom.

Reflect on the costs after the cost.

Many purchases include a hidden cost — the cost of time to maintain, protect, store and worry about the item. We can only spend our time in one of two basic ways — with things or with people. The more things to care for and worry about, the less time for relationships.

Grow in generosity.

Money is powerful and can become our idol. Few things do more to break the hold money can have on us than the act of giving it away. It's as though we say to our money, "You don't control me, I control you — and just to show you, I'm going to do the unnatural act of giving you away!"

Practice living with delayed gratification.

See something you *really* want? Write it down on a note card and commit to waiting 30 days to purchase it. If during that time you see something else you want even more, scratch the first thing, write down the new item and again commit to waiting 30 days. If, on rare occasions, something remains on the list for 30 days and the money is in your spending plan to purchase it, go for it!

Grow in gratitude.

Gratitude for and contentment with what we have is the antidote to greed and envy. You might want to repeat that statement out loud to help it sink in. To get a perspective on

your relative wealth go to www.globalrichlist.com and type in your annual household income. Hint: \$50,000 puts you in the top 1% of the world's richest people.

Become involved with those who have less.

Locally or internationally, reach out to those who have much less. Get to know them. Experience the fact that often they have greater joy than many of us who have much more. Reflect on the reasons for that.

Grow in the realization that God, not any earthly amount of money, is our security.

That retirement nest egg that we have carefully accumulated and which we believe will provide for our needs in these latter years could be gone tomorrow due to “rust, moths or thieves” — or economic downturn. If that happened do we believe God would provide in some other way — that he is our ultimate security? Andy Stanley says there's a question we can ask to determine how deeply we trust God for our security. The question is, “Would you be more upset to learn there was no God or to learn there was no money in your accounts?” Ouch.

Practice fasting.

Keep a “Sabbath from shopping” one day a week and allow that practice to influence spending behavior on the other days. Consider expanding your Sabbath to include other over-full areas of your life including time and activity. You may be surprised to find there is enough of you when your life isn't so cluttered — with things or activities.

When is enough, enough? The answer is elusive but begins with re-orienting our thinking toward God.

About the Author

Sibyl Towner is Director of Spiritual Mentoring at Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, IL. She worked on this article with her husband, Dick, Executive Director of the Good Sense Movement of the Willow Creek Association. The topic is one that they address together as a couple in their lives and teaching.