

MONDAY MANNA

10 July 2017

MONEY AND HAPPINESS – NOT NECESSARILY RELATED

By Jim Mathis

In addition to my regular business restoring old photographs and making executive portraits, I am also a tax professional for a national tax preparation services company. I have done about 1,000 tax returns in the past several years and earned the designation "Enrolled Agent - Master Tax Advisor."

Over time, this has given me a pretty good understanding of American's financial situation. By talking with people and getting a view of their levels of happiness and contentment, and then looking at their finances through taxes, I have made some interesting observations.

As you might expect, there is a disconnect between income and net worth. Some people with only modest income, have accumulated a lot of wealth, and many high-income people have spent it all and then some. A colleague and I were reviewing a tax return recently when I commented that this proves, "You can't out-earn stupid." Foolish people almost always spend more than they earn.

Many people think if they made a little more money they would be happier. Probably not. If there is any correlation between income and happiness, it would be a bell curve, with the happiest people located in the middle. The lowest income and the highest income people, on both ends of the curve, are the least happy. In case you are wondering, surveys report that the highest percentage of people claiming happiness peaks at about \$75,000 per year income. Earning more does not make people happier.

Which brings up the eternal question, "Can money buy happiness?" I believe the answer is: It could, but it seldom does, because people spend it on the wrong things. A new car won't bring happiness, but a road trip with good friends just might result in a lot of happiness – and fond memories that last a long time.

If it is true that money in itself cannot buy happiness, could we use it in ways that can bring us at least some degree of satisfaction, fulfillment and joy? Yes – especially if we follow principles found in the Bible:

Avoid extremes. As I mentioned, by far the happiest people seem to be those who would be categorised as neither poor nor rich, but somewhere in the middle. The challenge is to recognise where the "middle" is. *"Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God"* (Proverbs 30:8-9).

Indebtedness can put people in physical and emotional bondage. Many times, "buying" things with credit can satisfy immediate desires, but the long-term cost can be devastating – and restricts financial flexibility in the future. *"The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender"* (Proverbs 22:7).

Sharing with others can bring great joy. Too often people take a dim view of giving, whether to help individuals or support charitable causes. However, knowing we can use some of our resources to lighten the financial burdens of others can be very rewarding. *"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Jim Mathis is the owner of a photography studio in Overland Park, Kansas, specialising in executive, commercial and theatrical portraits, and operates a school of photography. He formerly was a coffee shop manager and executive director of CBMC in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri.

Postal Address:

PO Box 8168,
Woolloongabba, QLD, 4102

ABN: 42 005 622 515

Office Address:

Suite CBMC,
Sung Do Lawyers,
12 Annerley Road,
Woolloongabba, QLD 4102

Email:

admin@cbmcaustralia.com.au

Phone:

07 3172 9365

Reflection/Discussion Questions

What has been your experience in attempting to buy or experience happiness with money?

Do you agree with the observation that the happiest people – regardless of society or culture – are neither the poorest nor the richest of people, but rather those whose incomes fall somewhere in between the two extremes? Why or why not?

If it is true that money cannot buy happiness, why do you think so many people are intent on trying to prove otherwise? Explain your answer.

When we think in terms of money and material resources, we typically think in terms of what we possess. How can happiness be attained not through gaining and keeping things, but rather by giving portions of them away?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 11:24-25, 13:11, 15:16, 19:17, 22:9

Acts 20:35

Luke 6:38, 12:13-21