

Farmville Baptist Church
June 27, 2021
How Much is Enough?
I Tim. 6:6-12
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This morning we continue our series on Enough by asking the question, "How much is enough?" I confess, the closer Jay and I get to retirement, this is a question I really struggle with. I want us to be generous with causes we support, but I want us to have enough to not be a burden to our children. The balance is there somewhere, but I'm not sure quite where it is.

No matter where you find yourself today, this is a hard question to answer in our culture, isn't it? A friend of mine who is a financial planner routinely asks his clients how much they would need to have enough – enough to live comfortably, enough to retire. Their answer is almost always some version of "just a little bit more." Just a little bit more. Most of us don't want a lot more – but just a little bit more. Unfortunately, "just a little bit more" has no end, and vendors and advertisers of all types are quick to try to convince us that we need, or deserve just a little bit more.

In a 2016 Super Bowl commercial, Rocket Mortgage promised people they could qualify to buy houses quickly and easily. Then they would then need lots of stuff to put in it, fueling jobs in the economy, and then those workers would be able to buy houses and fill them with stuff. Back in the 1990s, there was a commercial for Rubbermaid storage products that beautifully illustrated this point. When the ad opened, it showed a family with a house full of stuff strewn everywhere – they clearly needed help and it was Rubbermaid to the rescue. Soon, everything was neatly stored and labeled in a variety of bins and containers. When they were done, the family had all this free space in their home. What did they decide they needed? "More stuff," they scream as they run out the door to go shopping. Today it's Shelf Genie or Closet

Connections ó and if that doesn't work ó there are storage units. Back in 2014 ó 7 years ago, the Huffington Post reported that there were 48,500 self-storage facilities in America -- more self-storage units than there were McDonald's and Starbucks combined.ⁱ In 2020, there were over 23,400,000 units in these facilities ó all to hold our stuff. Friends, how much is enough?

Not only are advertisers convincing us that we need more stuff, they are selling us higher end stuff. A study was done that looked at magazine ads from the fifties and sixties, and then ads from the same magazines today. They found that in the fifties those magazines showed a lot more ads for household or lower end products. The same magazines today, even though they are focused on the same demographics, have a lot more ads for luxury items like cars, and expensive vacations.ⁱⁱ

This quest for "a little bit more" ó or a lot more, is costing us a number of ways. 38.1% of all American households carry credit card debt. Experian reports that in 2019 Americans carried \$829 billion dollars in credit card debt ó that came down some in 2020 when we all stayed home, but I can't help but wonder what good we might do in the world with all the money that we are paying in interest on this debt load. How much is enough?

Our consumer mentality is also harming the planet. It is well known that Americans consume far more natural resources and live much less sustainably than people from any other large country of the world. Dave Tilford of the Sierra Club reports, "A child born in the United States will create thirteen times as much ecological damage over the course of his or her lifetime than a child born in Brazil and the average American will drain as many resources as 35 natives of India and consume 53 times more goods and services than someone from China."

"With less than 5 percent of world population, the U.S. uses one-third of the world's paper, a quarter of the world's oil, and 23 percent of the coal. Americans account for only five percent of

the world's population but create half of the globe's solid waste. Overall, National Geographic's Greendex found that American consumers rank last of 17 countries surveyed in regard to sustainable behavior. Furthermore, the study found that U.S. consumers are among the least likely to feel guilty about the impact they have on the environment, yet they are near to top of the list in believing that individual choices could make a difference.ⁱⁱⁱ How much is enough?

Scripture has a great deal to say about our quest for more. (There are over 2,000 verses that deal with money in one way or another) The author of I Timothy reminds us that we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it. In these verses, we are also reminded that a quest for riches leads us into temptation and runs the risk of putting us in a downward spiral toward ruin and destruction. Now, let me be very clear here. There is nothing inherently wrong with money or wealth. Many people, a number right here in this room, use a good portion of their resources to do wonderful things in the world. This passage is often misinterpreted to read that **money** is the root of all evil. It's not. The **love** of money is the root of all evil. If acquiring more and more wealth is our sole aim, if the love of money is what motivates us, that's when we have a problem. Instead Scripture reminds us that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and that we to be the stewards, or managers, of what is God's. How would our lives be different if we truly understood this and lived by these principles?

If we are honest, this is a struggle sometimes, isn't it? It certainly was for the Israelites after they left Egypt. Now, their situation was very different from ours. They truly did not know where their next meal was coming from and they were understandably anxious about that. They were anxious to the point that they were looking back to their time in bondage, seemingly willing to return to that horribly oppressive life because they had enough to eat there. So they complained to Moses and Aaron. It's a complaint against their leadership really. But then God

spoke to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions."

Here is where their situation is like ours. They had to choose whether they were willing to trust the Lord to provide for them, or if they were going to trust Pharaoh to feed them. We have to do the same. Are we willing to trust in the Lord's provision and seek to live more simply, or are we going to follow after the world's admonition to keep accumulating more?

That tendency to accumulate more got Israel in trouble in the wilderness. When the people tried to hoard the manna, to save it for the next day, it spoiled by morning. Instead, God told them to gather only as much as they needed – those who needed more were welcome to it, and those who needed less were to gather less. The beauty here is that when everyone took only what they needed, there was plenty for all.

This narrative is taken up in powerful ways in the gospel where Jesus miraculously feeds thousands who are in need of food. In these stories, when people took only what they needed, there was also plenty for all, with plenty of leftovers.

Jesus also uses this story of manna in the wilderness to teach about his own mission. As a part of the "I am" statements in John, he says, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." Jesus is presented as the assurance of God's generosity, the one who supplies our needs.^{iv} It is in Jesus, not in material wealth or bread, that we will find our contentment.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' instructions for prayer and his teachings against anxiety are closely related. Jesus reminds us that we are not to worry about what we will eat or drink, or what we will wear. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things," he says. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things will be given to you as

well. But not necessarily in abundance. In the Lord's prayer, that we prayed together earlier, we are instructed to pray, "Give us this day our DAILY bread," not what we need for the week or the month, but we are to pray for enough for today.

The apostle Paul also draws on the manna narrative in Exodus. In II Corinthians 8, he is discussing the collection for the Jerusalem church. In this passage, he suggests that equity in the Christian community is possible when those with abundance and those with need live in generosity with one another. The way the bread is distributed in the manna story is a model for the way the church shares and distributes goods with equity and liberality.

So how much is enough? What does it mean for us to be responsible and prepared, yet trust God for God's provision? Of course there is no definitive quantifiable answer to these questions ó there is no one size fits all formula. But for most of us, I imagine that instead of "just a little bit more," our answer can be, "Just a little bit, or maybe even a good bit less." One of the things that I have learned about this church in the last 18 months is that you are generous and giving individuals and you are a generous and giving congregation. But even as we seek to be faithful stewards, I know that it is hard not to get drawn into our cultural quest for more. That is our continuous challenge as we ask God and ourselves, "How much is enough." My prayer is that we can answer that question in ways that honor God, our planet, and all of humanity that we share it with.

I invite you now into a time of quiet reflection. What might God be calling you to do to live more simply and sustainably?. Perhaps God is calling you to be a better steward of this planet we call home. Do you need to be better about recycling or conserving energy? Do you need to find a different source of water than the disposable bottles that are littering our planet and covering massive amounts of our oceans? Might God be calling you to live in moderation in

a particular area so that you might be more generous with your resources? Might God be calling you to donate some of your stuff to others who might really need it? I invite you now to listen to the Spirit.

ⁱ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/21/self-storage-mcdonalds_n_7107822.html

ⁱⁱ <https://www.biblemoneymatters.com/consumerism-and-contentment-what-does-it-take-to-be-content-and-happy-in-this-culture/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/american-consumption-habits/#>

^{iv} Exegetical work from Walter Brueggemann, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, volume 1, pp 814-815.