



## **Rule 1 for Gaining Financial Happiness What Is It You Want?**

Years ago, just after we got married, Mary Jo because of her high volume of sales for the company where she worked earned a free dinner for two at the restaurant of her choice. She of course did not choose McDonald's but the most expensive restaurant in New Orleans. It was then, and still is, one of the most famous restaurants in the world. We dressed up in our best clothes and excitedly gazed over the menu. After careful consideration of each item, we decided what we would have. A specialty was turtle soup, which neither of us had tried and we chose it as an appetizer. We waited for someone to come take our order, but no one arrived. We saw others who had come after us being served and yet still we waited. We had never been to a restaurant this nice and so we were a bit intimidated by the experience. For forty five minutes we chatted and enjoyed the ambiance but still not a waiter or waitress came to our table. Finally, after an hour I went to someone serving at another table and told her of our circumstance. She quickly went and got her supervisor who was almost immediately at our table, apologizing profusely. He confessed that the waiter assigned to our table quit and left the restaurant just as we arrived, and the staff failed to have someone take his tables. In the end the food was very good, and we had a fun time together pretending we were rich, but we would have been just as happy at the Camilla Grill, enjoying an omelet for one fifth the price...and we would not have had to dress up to go.

A strange quality many of us possess is the common inclination that more is better. Bigger salary. More friends, clothes, furniture, rooms, cars. If we just had one more plant, painting, potato chip, drink, day at the beach, top, bottle of perfume, cable channel, we would be happy, content. David the king ruined his later years because he was not happy with how many wives he had. Evel Knievel got his start as a stunt motorcycle rider by jumping cars when other showmen were using motorcycles to jump over animals and pools of water. His show was so exciting that he decided on each successive one to jump an additional car and kept extending out the jumps until he got to twelve cars and a cargo van. This time it did not go so well. Knievel's front wheel hit the top of the landing ramp and he was sent reeling, breaking his arm and several ribs. That of course was just the beginning of all the broken bones, concussions, and internal injuries he suffered trying to always do more and more dangerous jumps.

Knievel is not alone in the search for more, better, greater. I heard recently of a young woman who went to the front of the line to buy food and drinks at a music festival food stand. The others had waited forty-five minutes to reach the head of the line but when people complained and yelled at her, she told them she was beautiful and had seventy-five thousand Tic Toc subscribers, so she deserved to be able to go to the front. The belief that I deserve more or better is pervasive, nearly universal. Solomon never found happiness and was in a constant search for more: more wives, more riches, more palaces, more slaves, and more gods. He famously noted about himself and others like him, **Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.** (Ecclesiastes 2: 11 NIV)

Aesop's Fables have rich insight into the psychology of the pull towards more. A pot filled with honey spilled onto a table and a collection of flies gathered. Each, in an effort to get more, stepped into the spilled honey and when satiated discovered their feet were plastered to the table. They said to each other, "For a little

pleasure we have destroyed ourselves.” Were they not right? There is also the tale of a tortoise who was not satisfied with his terrestrial life. He had to fly. He kept complaining to the birds about his terrible lot in life and finally an eagle agreed to take him up to learn how to fly. High up in the sky among the clouds, the tortoise finally got his chance. The eagle released him and the tortoise instantly started hurtling toward earth. As he was about to crash, the thought came to the turtle, “What good is it to want wings and clouds when I could get along well enough with my four feet on the ground.” Is it not true that many of us would be much better off enjoying what we have rather than striving so hard for what we don’t have?

Let me share a Proverb that at first glance seems to be all about the evils of alcoholism but certainly has broader reach than that. **Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.** (Proverbs 20: 1 NIV) What makes wine a mocker and beer a brawler? Is it not when you go too far with either? We have all known someone who has made a mess of his or her life because of too much alcohol. Is this verse saying God’s people should never drink wine or beer? No! What it is warning against is letting your desire for alcohol decide your fate. It is that way with money. **Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.** (Ecclesiastes 5: 10 NIV) It’s universal, the craving for more food, possessions, control, affection, attention, success, or free time! What mail order catalogues did to generations before us, online shopping is doing today. You’re bombarded with the push for more and better.

Have we not all fallen for the lie that more increases happiness? Even when we know it is not true, we still make that leap. The Proverb says it well, even if it is a bit grotesque. **As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.** (Proverbs 26: 11 NIV) Somehow we keep falling for the same trick of the devil. If you aren’t happy with your life, find something or someone new, better, more...whether it is a different spouse or a different car or among Christians, a different church. A pastor of a small church was approached by a representative of a mega church. They wished to know if the pastor of the tiny church wanted to let their church take over the facilities and start a new church. The property was worth \$15,000,000. Previously the pastor had asked if the mega church could help them with an outreach to the community but unfortunately the church representative said they couldn’t. However, the church could send people up to start a new church and remodel the facilities. Not only that, but they also had plenty of people in the area who watched their broadcasts online who would be thrilled to join the new church. Why couldn’t they help the poor struggling church grow and aid in outreach? They were only available if the megachurch took over the old church so they could restart it and make it a part of their network of churches. Why though could they not out of generosity and a love for the greater Kingdom of God help the struggling church get on a firm footing and provide the resources to help it grow? Strangely, or perhaps not strangely, that wasn’t a part of the mega church’s strategy.

Even good people with good intentions can get pulled into the allure of having to possess more, gain more, be more. The world famous televangelist Jim Bakker titled his autobiography, I Was Wrong. He recounted how many times he let his hunger for more derail his life with Christ and in the end he lost his ministry, his marriage, and the respect of Christian people around the world after he was sent to prison for the crime he committed in his drive to build his world-wide ministry to greater heights. We must be very careful that we are not falling into the trap of having to get more to be happy! It may not seem like a big deal to want more, but like Solomon, it could hurt us and others a lot. Proverbs 3: 5-6 is our Heaven sent protection against the ruin we can fall into if we are not careful. **Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.** (Proverbs 3: 5-6 NIV) The rule for you if you want to gain financial happiness is to lean heavily upon this promise of God. Talk with God about a questionable purchase or any decision for that matter where you experience a “Divine Catch”. You have a pause moment when what you are about to do you aren’t sure if you should pursue it. Pray instantly and bring the matter to Christ. Then believe with all the faith you have that God will guide you from that point forward.