



Three Things That Money Cannot Buy

IT SEEMS so ironic: Even when people face the threat of losing their job, their home, and even their pension, many of them are still obsessed with getting anything and everything that money can buy.

Such people are easy targets for advertisers, whose seductive marketing campaigns tell us that we *must have* a bigger home, a better car, and brand-name clothes. No cash? No problem—buy on credit! For many, the goal is to *look* well-off even if they are deep in debt.

Of course, sooner or later reality sets in. “Buying flashy consumer goods on credit in order to look and feel like a winner is similar to hitting the crack pipe in order to improve your mood,” says the book *The Narcissism Epidemic*. “Both are initially cheap and work really well—but only for a very short period of time. In the long term both leave you penniless and depressed.”

The Bible exposes the folly of what it calls “the showy display of one’s means of life.” (1 John 2:16) The fact is, an obsession with possessions distracts us from the very things that matter most in life—the things that money cannot buy. Consider three examples.



1. FAMILY UNITY

Brianne,* a teenager in the United States, feels that her father places too much importance on his job and the money it provides. “We have everything we need and more,” she says, “but my dad is never home because he is always traveling. I know it’s because of his work, but I think he has a responsibility to his family too!”

To think about: What regrets might Brianne’s father experience later in life? By putting too much emphasis on material things, how is he affecting his relationship with his daughter? What does his family need from him *more* than money?

Bible principles to consider:

- “The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have . . . caused themselves a lot of pain.”—1 Timothy 6:10, *Contemporary English Version*.

- “Better to eat vegetables with people you love than to eat the finest meat where there is hate.”—Proverbs 15:17, *Good News Translation*.

The bottom line: Money cannot buy family unity. That only comes from spending time with your family and giving them adequate love and attention. —Colossians 3:18-21.



* Names in this article have been changed.

The Key to Happiness?

“On average,” says *The Narcissism Epidemic*, “materialistic people are less happy and more depressed. Even people who simply aspire to have more money suffer from poor mental health; they also report more physical health problems such as sore throats, backaches, and headaches and were more likely to drink too much alcohol and use illegal drugs. Striving for financial success, apparently, makes people miserable.”



2. GENUINE SECURITY

“My mom is always telling me that I need to marry a man with a lot of money and learn a trade so that I can have a good job to fall back on for the rest of my life,” says 17-year-old Sarah. “The only thing that seems to be on her mind is where her next paycheck is coming from.”

To think about: When contemplating the future, what legitimate concerns do you have? When does legitimate concern cross the line and become inordinate worry? How might Sarah’s mom provide a more balanced approach to financial security?

Bible principles to consider:

- “Stop storing up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal.”—Matthew 6:19.
- “You do not know what your life will be tomorrow.”—James 4:14.

The bottom line: There is more to a secure future than stockpiling money. After all, money can be stolen—and it cannot cure disease or prevent death. (Ecclesiastes 7:12) The Bible teaches that genuine security comes from knowing God and his purpose. —John 17:3.

A “Shift in Values”

“When asked about reasons for going to college during the 1960s and early seventies, most students placed the highest value on ‘becoming an educated person’ or ‘developing a philosophy of life.’ A minority deemed ‘making a lot of money’ as the main reason to attend college. Beginning in the 1990s, a majority of students say that ‘making a lot of money’ has become the most important reason to go to college . . . This shift in values among college students takes place at the same time that rates of depression, suicide, and other psychological problems have risen dramatically among this group.”—*The Price of Privilege*, by Dr. Madeline Levine.



“Retail Therapy”

According to Dr. Madeline Levine, spending can become “retail therapy” that gives people a measure of comfort in a world where family, community, and church have failed them. “Shopping

is one way to control our environment,” she writes in *The Price of Privilege*. “It puts us in charge of transactions and confers a sense of power on the buyer. This type of power is illusory . . . The real

power is being exerted by large corporations and their advertisers, who are paid to suggest that consumer goods confer magical and protective powers on buyers.”

3. PERSONAL CONTENTMENT

“My parents raised me to live simply,” says 24-year-old Tanya. “My twin sister and I were happy growing up, even though much of the time we had only enough to get by.”

To think about: Why might it be difficult to be content with basic necessities? When it comes to attitudes toward money, what example do you set for your family?

Bible principles to consider:

- “Having sustenance and covering, we shall be content with these things.”—1 Timothy 6:8.
- “Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.”—Matthew 5:3.

The bottom line: There is more to life than money and the things it can buy. After all, it is as the Bible says: “Even when a person has an abundance his life does not result from the things he possesses.” (Luke 12:15) Really, the greatest satisfaction in life comes from answering important questions such as these:

- Why are we here?
- What does the future hold?
- How can I fill my *spiritual* needs?

The publishers of this magazine, Jehovah’s Witnesses, would be happy to help you find answers to those questions. You may contact them locally or visit our Web site, jw.org. ■

