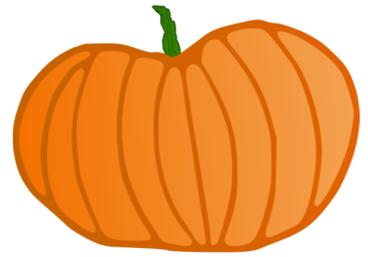


The Family Friend



A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.

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Things

Have you ever thought about the way we recognize value? If we can't devise some way to measure, weigh, count or calibrate something, then it doesn't have worth in the eyes of most people who live in a materialistic culture.

We have devised methods to determine quantitative value complete with an ever-expanding vocabulary to help us describe it. We've been looking into the possibility of purchasing a video projector for the church we serve and we are in the process of gathering information. The quality of a projector is determined by some mysterious standard called lumens. We wouldn't know a lumen if we came across one in the street, but we will simply add that to yards, feet, inches, meters, centimeters, millimeters, volts, watts, ohms, degrees, pounds, ounces, grams, milligrams, carats and who knows what else. We also attach a monetary value to everything. We ask, "What is it worth?" The answer to that question may well determine its im-

portance in our own thinking. We have a cliché, "You get what you pay for." That standard of worth is the dollar, the pound, the euro, the yen or some other monetary label.

On the other hand we don't have a quantitative measuring standard for love, kindness, joy, compassion, understanding, grace, mercy, virtue, honor and dozens of other intangibles. Many of us consider things so valuable that we are willing to place our own sense of well-being and the stability of our families at risk in order to have them. But what about those intangibles, those things the American Express commercials call "priceless." How much is a baby's smile worth? Can you put a dollar value on a good night's sleep? What is the going rate for a hug? How much do you have to pay for integrity? Obviously we can't buy those blessings.

Things Can't Satisfy

We live in a world that has become increasingly thing oriented and we live in a consumer-oriented culture. You're reading these words on a computer, which means you either own one or have access to one. We can't think of any object in our contemporary culture that more aptly illustrates the shortcomings of things.

Personal computers first hit the market a little more than twenty years ago. Since that time, the computer industry has been constantly producing upgrades, additional peripherals and new software.

A few years ago a friend called to share his enthusiasm about his new computer. His computer was what we now call a "low-end Pentium." He was ecstatic because his new processor came equipped with a 500 MB hard drive and a 56.6 modem. That conversation took place less than ten years ago, but it sounds a little bit like Noah describing the dimension of the ark when you look at it from the perspective of a world in which computers commonly come with multi-gig hard drives, DVD burners, flash cards and flat screen monitors. Computers and the accompanying paraphernalia are things - just that: things. They don't love; they don't feel; they don't hurt, although you might be able to make the case for some of them being demon possessed. Furthermore the lure to obtain the latest stuff sometimes works like a narcotic. You think, "I'll be so happy if I can just get that latest software update", but about the time you open the package,

the company comes out with version 16.0 or whatever number they've chosen to assign to the updated product. Things never satisfy when it comes to computers.

Several years ago the author of a book on labor and management relations wrote a chapter on employee satisfaction. He expressed the belief that a raise in salary keeps an employee happy until after he receives his first new paycheck. After that the employee will find other issues to stew over. Things don't produce permanent satisfaction.

Biblical Perspective

Jesus made it clear that his followers must not be consumer driven. He said, "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Luke 16:13). That's a hard teaching to accept when we are bombarded by daily television messages trying to convince us that happiness will occur when we drive a certain new car, own the latest labor saving device or go on a luxury Caribbean cruise.

On the other hand the Bible does not promote poverty. In Ephesians 4 the apostle Paul listed a series of ethical expectations for those who practice the Christian faith in a secular culture. He urged former thieves to enter the work force, become productive and receive remuneration " . . . that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28).

But how much is too much? In writing to Timothy, Paul offered this advice about acquiring

things. "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief's" (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Few in western society have been content with their ownership of things being limited to food and clothing. Paul was not necessarily saying "own nothing except food and clothing." After all Paul owned books (2 Timothy 4:13). He even accepted hospitality from wealthy persons who were homeowners (Acts 16:15).

Two principles emerge in this brief analysis of the Bible's teaching about things: (1) Things must not control us. (2) It is not a virtue to reduce yourself to such abject poverty that you become a beggar.

How Do We Decide About Things

Every day we make decisions about things. Shall I buy the brand name peas or the store brand, which is twenty cents a can cheaper? Shall I put in a new carpet just because I don't like the color? Which is more important, braces for my child's teeth or a new car? Shall I purchase drugs from Canada even though it is technically illegal? Do I really need to give my son a new car when he graduates from high school? Do I need a new suit when my old one is not worn out but it is a little dated? Shall we have beefsteak or hamburgers for dinner? Does good stew-

ardship require me to purchase a million dollars worth of life insurance? Or should I put more trust in God? We can't make each and every decision about things for you. We have enough trouble doing that for ourselves. But here are some questions that may help you make more intelligent decisions about things.

- ◆ Do my choices promote wastefulness?
- ◆ Do I find myself using the phrase, "I've got to have" quite a lot when I'm trying to decide whether to acquire something?
- ◆ Do I worry about keeping up with my friends and neighbors?
- ◆ Do I want it or do I need it?
- ◆ How do I determine the difference between wants and needs?
- ◆ If I put in the extra hours to make the extra money to buy the extra things for my family, will it benefit my family in the long run?
- ◆ Will the thing I acquire today make a difference in my life five years from now?
- ◆ Will the acquisition of this thing have a negative effect on relationships?
- ◆ Will the things I acquire make my relationships better?
- ◆ What kind of time price will I have to pay in order to get more things?
- ◆ How does the acquisition of things impact my relationship to God?

—Norman & Bales, **All About Families**, May 21, 2004