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# How Much Is Enough?

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◆ Issue #13 ◆ Douglas E. Reese

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## Money Matters

As this is the first official column of MONEY MATTERS, I'll briefly review the purpose and future focus of this section of "As I See It." My focus will center upon two primary themes: 1) a PHILOSOPHY OF MONEY MATTERS, and 2) MONEY MATTERS IN PRACTICE (i.e. application).

My thinking will always be guided by the driving principles of *stewardship* which I build into each money matter topic. I will work towards helping you identify critical components in your own *stewardship development* and guide you on a course of integrated steps to defining, refining and implementing what I believe to be a very fundamental part of your life, *your own stewardship of wealth*. I will look forward to each upcoming opportunity to share my ideas with you.

**PHILOSOPHY:** "Money matters, because it is one of the greatest contributors to relationship disharmony in the society we live in today." I believe this to be an undisputable statement of the reality of our current society. My belief is supported by countless surveys which each conclude that the number one contributing factor to relationship problems, at work and at home, is *money*.

Why have we let a unit of measure, something we carry around in our pocket, have such a strong influence in our marriage, our jobs, our friendships with others? Let me pose some questions for you to consider.

1. Have you ever borrowed money from a close friend or family member, assured them you would have it repaid promptly, and then missed the repayment date? As time passed and you continued to owe them money, how did you feel in that person's presence? How did it impact your relationship?
2. Have you ever entered into business negotiations regarding salary, bonus plans, benefits, structuring an associate's compensation plan, or working out a practice sale or purchase? In the midst of your negotiations, did your feelings for the other person(s) involved in the negotiations change? In other words you often have an established relationship with someone whom you then enter into MONEY MATTERS negotiation. How have your feelings for that person changed, once the talk of dollars, value, and worth begin?
3. A long-time friend decides to bring their family to you for dental care. You thoroughly enjoy taking them through your new patient experience, integrating them into your practice, and helping identify dental needs. How does your "warm feeling" change when after a sip of tea one of them bluntly asks, "OK, how much is this going to set me back?"
4. And finally, you and your spouse have agreed on certain parameters of spending in your family BUDGET (I'll try to be sparing in my use of this "B" word; I know it's painful for

most). You come across a “can’t pass up” purchase and go well beyond the budget. How do you feel when your spouse gets the mail and opens the new credit card statement, with your “now I’m caught” purchase staring them in the face?

You may feel I’m overstating the impact money has in our everyday life, our relationships and our emotional well-being. I could provide countless real life examples which suggest I am not overstating money’s impact, but rather citing plainly and truthfully how money matters create disharmony in our lives, and in our relationships.

“So what’s the point?” The point is you have at your disposal, this very moment, the greatest gift available to a human being. You have the freedom of choice. You have the freedom to decide, to choose how you will allow money matters to impact your life, your relationships with others, and your emotional well-being. Sounds pretty simple, doesn’t it?

If it were simple, I wouldn’t have a job. It is not simple because money matters reach far beyond our pocketbook, way past our savings account, and into those places where seemingly simple decisions seem to become complicated. Those places I’m speaking of are our hearts, our past experiences, our lessons of the past, and our expectations of the future.

It would be very simple to say, “Today, I choose to no longer allow money to create disharmony in my life. I will simply spend less than I make, save enough to retire someday, buy low and sell high, and my family will do the same.” I have a term for the distance which lies between saying and doing the above, which I call “the *stewardship influence*.” Here is my definition:

*Stewardship influence: the forces which combine to direct one’s decisions involving money matters*

What forces am I talking about? What forces direct your decisions involving money? Let me address that question by leaving you with a few thought-provoking questions to consider.

#### **PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:**

1. What’s the earliest memory you have of money? What lesson(s) did your parents teach you about money? (i.e. did they teach you to fear it, respect it, save it, spend it, ignore it, covet it, abuse it?).
2. What lessons are you teaching your children about money? (whether knowingly or unknowingly, you are teaching your children about *stewardship* by the very nature of your own personal handling of financial affairs, both with your words and through your actions).

We’ll continue this theme of “Stewardship influence” next month. In the meantime I’d like you to do some mental homework. For the next few days I’d like you to be consciously aware of the decisions you make involving money matters. From the simplest choices of what you choose to buy at the store, to more impactful decisions such as discussion of salaries, money discussions with your children, and discussion of money matters with your spouse. Make a few mental notes about what impact your decision will have on the relationships in your life. We’ll compare notes next month.