



**MONEY:
HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?
HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?**

By Susan V. Vogt

©1984, rev. 2006

We've just finished figuring out our yearly budget. This task always starts an annual dilemma for me that I imagine is shared by many others. WHERE'S THE MONEY! What seemed like plenty of money according to last year's budget looks rather meager in hindsight. Call it inflation, call it a growing family's needs, or call it the care and feeding of a house – it all comes out the same. I feel poor!

I look around me and see others who seem to have so much more. TV told me years ago that I needed a microwave, a dishwasher, and a country club membership. In 2006, having acquired many of these, I'd add the latest/fastest computer, a flat screen TV, and a trip to a tropical paradise. It's not fair.

I'm quickly called out of my pity party, however, by remembering the gospels. "...Do not lay up for yourselves earthly treasure." (Mt 6:19) "It is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven." (Mt 19:23)

The words ring out so clear and strong. What a challenge! And I feel rich, perhaps too rich. We are employed – too many can't find work. We have enough food, even enough for an occasional treat – too many go to bed hungry. Of course, I could go on with these examples, but we all know enough sorry stories just by glancing at the daily mail solicitations.

So I live with this tension daily. Am I rich or am I poor? Do I have enough or do I have too much.

Some have said to me: "Don't lay such guilt on yourself. You have responsibilities to your family." Or "The goods of the world are not evil. They can be used for great good. Is it bad to be comfortable?" or "Labor saving conveniences can free you to do more good with your time. It's not how much you possess, but how you use it."

Yes, there is truth in these comments, but I can't help thinking there is also a temptation to rationalize. So I hold on to my tension and call it good.

I'm not about to enter into the complex evaluation of precisely what is a luxury and exactly what income level or lifestyle is "more than enough" for others. I haven't figured that answer out for myself yet, and I've learned the hard way that these questions touch people in a very sensitive spot. Defenses rise quicker than the national debt. But I have come up with some personal learnings from wrestling with this friendly dilemma for several decades.

1. As one's income rises, one's "needs" rise.
2. It's essential to also have the *spirit* of poverty and not be attached to my money, possessions, time, or ways of doing things.
3. The *spirit of poverty*, however, should not be used as an excuse such as: "It doesn't matter how much I have as long as I'm not attached to it."
4. Stay close to the poor; they keep me honest.
5. Whatever I have, it probably is a little more than I need. Take one more step to let go.
6. I can become too proud of my "poorness". This is call self-righteousness.

Is there a limit to how much wealth one can have and still be Christian? Probably. Don't ask me any figures, however, for all I can do is invite you to spend time with my friend – the dilemma of how much is enough/how much is too much?