

Getting to the Big Picture

Financial Stewardship

Last year, there was a great essay in the Patagonia catalog (yes, in a sales catalog) by Yvon Chouinard the owner of Patagonia. The essay was titled “The Responsible Economy” and his premise is that there are too many of us consuming too much stuff without regard to the consequences of consumption. Stuff we see (but need?), then want, then buy, then use, then tire of using, then discard. And the cycle repeats. This is a very interesting discussion from the owner of a company that is in the business of selling stuff but also a very sharp observation about American life styles.

Today more than ever, we need to understand that stuff comes in two parts – the stuff we want (luxury) and the stuff we need (necessities), both of which forcefully impact our finances. When we chose to limit our consumption to what we need rather than just want, we quickly move toward controlling our finances. When we chose to consume both what we want and what we need, we lose that control.

So what does this have to do with financial stewardship? More than you might think because as individuals or families, we need to be stewards of our own finances. Being a good financial steward means having the discipline to manage wisely that which has been given to us by God. By being a good steward of our money, we can distinguish between needs and wants which allows us to build savings and eliminate costly habits. We will also be able to overcome the fear that often prevents our living with a sense of gratitude and generosity; and will move us to live a life of charity.

If we are to be good financial stewards, then we need to accept the responsibility of managing the resource of our money. If we accept that responsibility, we can move away from a passive position to a proactive one. Doing this allows us to manage our finances and control how we allocate this limited resource. Taking into account what Yvon describes, we don’t allow what stuff we see to become a want that we then need to drive our financial decisions. In a world where always wanting more and never having enough to get more, creates an environment where we never make good financial decisions. It all comes down to simplifying, controlling and directing our financial resources; which will reveal what we indeed value.

One of the single most pointed statements by Yvon in his essay was “I think the simple life really begins with owning less stuff”. What do you think?