

Lottery Ticket

... a short story. This never happened, but I'm pretty sure it could ... Fred is like that.

"I'll go in too. I want to buy a lottery ticket. The prize is fifty million dollars this week!"

I was in the car with Fred, my brother-in-law. I was visiting him and his family for a few days, and we'd gone out to get some groceries.

He looked at me. "You buy lottery tickets?"

"Well, hardly ever" I admitted. "But all that money ..."

"Money? What would you ever do with all that money?" He was serious ... although he was smiling. Fred is always smiling.

Fred is a wonderful person. He was the first person I told about my becoming a Christian. His advice has always meant a lot to me. He gives good advice.

"What couldn't I do? It's fifty million dollars, Fred!"

Fred thought for a moment. "OK ... what *would* you do with it?"

"Well, Emily is in college, and ..."

"But you're doing all right with that, aren't you?"

"Well, yeah, I suppose. But I could retire early ..."

"Retire? Weren't you just telling me this morning that you love what you do, and still can't believe that they pay you for doing it? Would you really retire?"

"No, you're right. I guess I wouldn't."

I did love my job. And retiring early would probably mean moving back to Ontario. I wanted to stay in Alberta so I could see Jesse and Melanie become teachers, and help Emily with her college courses ... although she still had no idea what career she might be interested in.

"But the things we could buy with all that money ..."

"Listen, Bill. I know that money doesn't mean a lot to you. You live in a simple little home, and don't drive expensive vehicles. You don't take fancy vacations to Hawaii. You mostly spend your holidays with family. 'Things' aren't important to you. Am I right?"

"Well, yeah, I guess that's true. Money isn't very important to me ... it's what you do with it that's important. But if I won, I could give a lot of money away to charities, and to other ..."

Fred laughed. "You do that already, don't you? Help people, I mean? And Jane has told me about all the charities you give to. If you give what you are able to, shouldn't that be enough?"

“But ...”

“I know. The thought of all that money you might win makes it seem attractive. But do you really think it would make you *happier*?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I know from talking to you that you are very happy with your life. You have a wife that you love, and two daughters you’d do anything for ... and a new granddaughter you dote on. I hear your son-in-law is a pretty nice guy too. And you love God, and you know He loves you. So why would you wish for anything else? Wouldn’t that mean that you’re unsatisfied with your life now?”

I had to think about that for a moment. Fred has a way of getting right to the most important things in any discussion.

“Wouldn’t you ...”

“...Want to win a lottery? No, not especially. I’m happier than I’ve ever been in my life. Why would I want to change that?”

After a very successful but highly stressful career in managing various leasing operations, Fred had ‘retired’ to become the manager of a Christian theme park and campground in eastern Ontario. He loved every minute of it.

“But ...”

“Your sister is doing OK, isn’t she? I know she’s a doctor. And your brother, the one who used to be a cop, is good at what he does now, right? He doesn’t need your help?”

My brother had left the police force as a sergeant, ready to do something else with his life. For the past few years he’s been the head of security at a college in southern Ontario. Now he was thinking about retiring to P.E.I.

“Yeah, they’re doing all right.”

“Listen,” Fred continued, “Why on earth would you wish for a winning lottery ticket? You’re happy, you have everything you need, you have people who love you and who you love, you have friends you help and who help you, and you love your job ... and on top of that, you get summers off!” He laughed.

I thought for a moment. Then I smiled. “Well, if I won the lottery, maybe I could afford to stay at your expensive campground instead of ...”

He made me pay for the groceries.