

Artificial Inflation, Comparison and What It Means for Christians

I received a little gift I got from a co-worker and friend. It's a \$10 million bill. It's the most expensive gift anyone has bestowed upon me.

So many questions must be racing through your mind right now:

1. What if you used the bill for something like coffee or breakfast? Imagine running into your local convenience store and laying this down?
2. How do you break a \$10 million bill? Clerks usually lose it over \$100 bills.
3. How long would it take to count out the change?
4. Where would you put the change? It wouldn't fit in a wallet, and it would take a whooper of a purse.

Zimbabwe Inflation

Luckily (or unluckily), none of that is an issue with this particular note. The African nation of Zimbabwe issued it. So maybe a relocation would ensure my life of affluence. But it wouldn't, because a currency-exchange analysis told me this bill's exchange rate with the U.S. dollar is four cents.

I could trade in this baby for four American pennies. But it's a nice shade of red.

Zimbabwe is known for runaway hyperinflation. The U.S. economy historically averages an annual inflation rate of 3%. Zimbabwe's rate of inflation? 100,000%. (That is not a typo.)

Let us seek to understand what this means in the real world.

How long would it take for the price of things we need to double, given these inflationary rates?

The academic definition of inflation is “a general increase in prices and fall in the purchasing value of money.” So every item you need to purchase costs (a little bit) more. This is natural and expected in a stable country with decent economic growth. Most people are working while some people are making more than they did in the past, which means there is more money to spend.

However, the Zimbabwe experience is anything but normal. It offers a case study in artificial inflation. Government activity such as issuing more debt or increasing the amount of currency artificially increase prices. The Rule of 72 in this instance predicts that prices double several times daily. This means my exalted G-note might yield a bus ticket downtown but the trip home would set me back \$20,000,000.

This economics lesson illustrates two concepts:

1. The rule explains compounding blessings but also compounding burdens such as inflation and interest owed. Likewise, our calling can yield compounding burdens as well as compounding blessings. The barriers keeping us from walking like John build up over time if left ignored.

The rule initially explained how much money you reap from long-term investing. However, it also identifies how much it costs to borrow money plus the impact of inflation on your hard-earned ducats. Your relationship and attitudes toward money typically seal your fate. My friend John developed a healthy monetary mindset, which resulted in positive compounding. This is hardly the American norm. We crave conspicuous consumption of goods and services that help us feel wealthy, but more importantly create an affluent image that demands respect and awe from friends, family and the world at large. This segues to point No. 2.

2. Worldly validation is a form of artificial inflation. Earthly success is inadequate on its own terms. We need validation from others. We want people to know and acknowledge our accomplishments. I call it artificial validation, or AV, given its fleeting and destructive nature. And what is the AV medium? Social media.

Facebook is the case study. Look at our vacation and all the fun parties with beautiful friends. No worries here! Yet blaming social media almost has a hollow “shoot the messenger” feel to it. Social media simply shines a light on the human condition. We advertise our ideal brand to the world, as that is what we want everyone to see, while reality remains much murkier. Social media is merely the portal for our insecurities. Your life becomes a search for consumption over meaning.

A psalmist penned his tales of comparison woe for the historical record. Asaph was a prominent singer in King David’s court who also served as a chief Levite minister. That said, Asaph’s most enduring legacy was drafting several psalms at the king’s behest.

According to Walvoord in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Psalm 73 (ESV) is one of Asaph’s most exalted compositions. It offers us a wonderful peek inside his battle with envy and temptation. Indeed, the first 20 verses describe how he fell into those traps and how he escaped.

Truly God is good to Israel,

to those who are pure in heart.

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,

my steps had nearly slipped.

For I was envious of the arrogant

when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

*For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.*

To his credit, Asaph identifies the existence of his weakness and thanks God for healing. Yet how did this mindset increase his personal pain? He assigned blame in lieu of seeking solutions to widespread suffering. This slowed Asaph's own healing and robbed him of the greatest blessing of all: the ability to forgive others.

Comparing does that. Asaph fretted over one question: "Why do these people have it so good? Or not so bad? How is that fair?" The comparison curse comes with one guarantee: You will reside safely outside God's will. {eoa}

Listen to *Wonkyfied with Dr. Robert Sullivan* on the Charisma Podcast Network, where he helps listeners make sense of a world that has stopped making sense by addressing culture, calling and career.

Dr. Rob Sullivan is an emerging thought leader in politics and policy, urban studies and the Christian walk. He currently serves as dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Dallas Baptist University. You can follow his podcast on CPN or learn more at .

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in

our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.