

CLOSER TO GOD (57) Challenges (3) The Danger of Materialism (2)

As we continue our theme, we have begun addressing some challenges to our drawing closer to God. We have addressed worldliness, and last week we began discussing materialism. Materialism is the pursuit of things over God. Last week we looked at some key passages of scripture that address this subject including 1 Timothy 6:9-10 & Matthew 6:19-24, etc. We also noted a number of examples in scripture of materialism – from the rich, young ruler, to Balaam, Achan, Solomon, Anaias and Sapphira and of course Judas Iscariot, to name a few. Today we want to focus on some of the dangers of materialism and then address what we can do about it.

I. Dangers of materialism

- a. Realize that money is a major topic in the Bible. It has been estimated that there are more than 2300 Bible verses that deal with money in one way or another (directly, possessions, etc.). God knew from the outset that money would be an issue with mankind. There were direct warnings to Israel that when they inherited the land and prospered, they were not to forget God (Deuteronomy 8:7-20). Regardless of our social and financial status, we MUST beware of the dangers of materialism.
- b. No one is exempt of being materialistic
 - i. As you study the subject of money in the Bible, we learn that money and possessions are morally neutral. It is about what you do with them. The Bible gives us plenty of examples of the wealthy and poor were faithful to God AND those who were not.
 - ii. **The wealthy** – when we think of materialism, we often think of the rich. And for them it is a real danger, as we shall see momentarily.
 1. Some of the strongest warnings concerning money and possessions are directed toward the rich. 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Matthew 19:23-26 (Note: The text does NOT say impossible, with God's help), etc. NOTE: As we mentioned last week, we fit into this category more than we want to think at times.
 2. Certainly, with wealth one may be less likely to depend on God, or MORE likely to forget God. Proverbs 30:7-9, Hosea 13:6 speaking against Israel, we read, *When they had pasture, they were filled; They were filled and their heart was exalted; Therefore they forgot Me.* Mark 4:19 in describing the thorny soil notes how the deceitfulness of riches can choke out the word.
 3. Then there is the tendency to be greedy, selfish and discontent. Often the wealthy want more and more. Proverbs 30:15, *"The leech has two daughters – Give and Give"*. Again, Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver..."*
 4. God will hold you responsible – to whom much is given – cf. Luke 12:48. The concept of stewardship applies here.
 5. Understand, wealth can be a blessing – with it we are able to do many good things. We can help the poor and needy, we can sustain a congregation and support the furtherance of the gospel, we can take better care of ourselves as we make life decisions, the wealthy are the lifeblood of an economy – providing jobs, resources, etc. But, if we are materialistic, it can be a curse!
 - iii. **The poor** – we sometimes rationalize that only the rich are materialistic. BUT consider the following:

1. FIRST, consider that being poor CAN be a blessing.
 - a. The poor are more likely to trust in God, because they do not have all the worldly possessions that compete for their loyalty.
 - b. Often the poor are content and more considerate of others with needs. Recall how the widow with 2 mites was commended by Jesus (Luke 21:1-4).
 - c. They are more likely to be humble because of their status in life.
 - d. James 2:5 notes that God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith.
 - e. Proverbs 19:1, *“Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.”*
 - f. Ecclesiastes 4:6, *“Better a handful with quietness Than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind”*
 - g. HOWEVER, there is no virtue in poverty. If you can honorably obtain more wealth, it is noble to do so, for the reasons listed above.
2. But the poor can be materialistic, just like the wealthy
 - a. When one is envious of the wealthy, they have a materialistic attitude. The only reason they do not have more is because they simply cannot afford it. That is why it is not unheard of for someone who acquires a large sum of money (lottery, inheritance, etc.) to go broke within a few years, with some even claiming bankruptcy. Envy is an attitude that the poor can have.
 - b. They can covet what others have. They can engage in sinful practices to obtain wealth (but so can the wealthy).
 - c. They can refuse to work and demand handouts from others – 2 Thessalonians 3:10.
 - d. They can gamble with what little they have hoping for a huge paying supposing that it will solve all their problems. RARELY does it accomplish that, IF you are one of the extremely rare ones who does win! You are more likely to be struck by lightning (1.2 million to 1) or bitten by a shark (3.75 million to 1) than to win the lottery Jackpot (odds ~300 million to 1).¹ The odds of winning the 1 or 2 million dollar 2nd prize are still worse than being attacked by a shark (@ ~11.6 million to 1).
 - iv. The point again: It’s not how much you have but what you do with what you have.
- c. While sounding like a broken record, this is of a particular concern for us because we live in such a prosperous nation. The majority of the world lives on less than what our government gives for welfare (and I am not dismissing the struggles of welfare – TT).
- d. Debt – a major concern in America as debt continues to be on the rise. Proverbs 22:7, *The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender.* Proverbs 22:26-27, *Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge, One of those who is surety for debts; If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take away your bed from under you?* This is a major concern as we watch commercials that tell us we deserve more. It has been said that credit card companies spend more in advertising than any other industry. In the 2nd quarter 2023, the amount of credit card debt in the U.S. arose to over 1 TRILLION dollars for the first time.² Debt contributes to materialistic attitudes AND lifestyles.
- e. It can cause anxiety – when we have a healthy view of material possessions, prosperity can be a blessing. But often, materialism provokes a desire for more. And our society enables this with debt and advertising. These things can make us UNECESSARILY anxious. Ecclesiastes 5:10, *He who loves*

¹ October 19, 2023. <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/what-are-the-odds-of-winning-the-lottery-3306232>

² October 19, 2023 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245405/total-credit-card-debt-in-the-united-states/>

silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.
ALSO, we might view our self-worth based upon what we possess.

- f. ***It affects our character*** – it can cause us to be prideful, boasters, thankless and even prejudiced, if we look down upon others who are not “like us” materially.
- g. ***It may cause us to exploit the poor*** – cf. James 2:5-6, 5:4; Proverbs 22:16 warns, *He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, And he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty.*
- h. ***It affects our families*** – often, the pursuit of material possessions means less time with one another as family – which can lead to a myriad of problems itself. Parents may also be sending a message about values to their children that true success is found FIRST in what you possess. And it may affect how one addresses the needy.
- i. ***It affects the church*** – in Revelation 3:15-17 we read about Laodicea. The church was wealthy, but lukewarm and “sickening” to the Lord. They were called upon to repent. Many concerns may surface in a church because of materialism – an emphasis on the externals (the building and amenities, perception by the community), how we treat visitors who are “not like us”, and possibly even how we approach God’s word. Materialism can cause a church to ignore preaching on societal issues that are impacted by the affluence of the congregation. It can also affect our relationship with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, because we are too busy pursuing “the American dream” to spend quality and quantity time with one another.
- j. ***Materialism is a major obstacle for many to drawing closer to God.***

II. **Addressing materialism as we strive to draw closer to God**

- a. ***First realize that having possessions and being wealthy is not wrong*** – God created this world for us to enjoy! 1 Timothy 4:4, James 1:17, 1 Timothy 6:17. The Bible gives numerous examples of the godly who were wealthy. This is about perspective. I MUST understand money and what it can do to me, both positive and negative.
- b. ***We need to be content and thankful.*** Philippians 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 6:6-10. Do NOT covet – that is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Hebrews 13:5, *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*
- c. ***Learn and appreciate that which is of real value*** – Proverbs 16:16, *How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.* Matthew 6:19-21 speaks of our treasure in heaven. Galatians 5:22-23 describes the qualities of “the fruit of the Spirit” noting *“Against such there is no law.”*
- d. ***Realize that material possessions are temporary*** – 1 John 2:15-17, 2 Peter 3:10 tells us that the elements will melt with fervent heat. Matthew 6:19-21 warns of the deteriorating nature of material things. We can learn from the example of Job who when he lost everything said, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.”* In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. (Job 1:21-22)
- e. ***Realize that rarely do things satisfy*** – related to the temporal nature of material things, the problem with materialism is it is never enough! If you are trusting in “uncertain riches” (1 Timothy 6:17), you will always desire more.
- f. ***Realize that a materialistic attitude can jeopardize your soul*** – again, Luke 12:16-21 – the parable of the rich fool; Matthew 6:24 – you CANNOT serve 2 masters. You have to make a choice – this is not about which is better. God and materialism are total opposites when it comes to choosing WHICH one you will serve.
- g. ***Realize that we are God’s stewards*** – what we have actually belongs to Him. Luke 12:18-21 describes the “rich fool” who stored up treasures and forgot about God. A faithful steward will faithfully manage all that he has (1 Corinthians 4:2).
- h. ***Beware of the dangers of debt*** – Proverbs 22:7. Rarely will debt solve a problem. AND it typically creates MORE problems, some of which we have noted. Consider Proverbs 6:1-5 in the midst of Solomon’s discourse about wisdom, *My son, if you become surety for your friend, If you have shaken*

hands in pledge for a stranger, You are snared by the words of your mouth; You are taken by the words of your mouth. So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; For you have come into the hand of your friend: Go and humble yourself; Plead with your friend. Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids. Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, And like a bird from the hand of the fowler. NOTE: How does a gazelle deliver himself from a lion? He RUNS like there is no tomorrow! If you have debt, it ought to be your highest priority to get rid of it!

- i. **Use what you have for good.** Think about glorifying God with your resources.
 - i. How often do scriptures call for us to be benevolent and concerned about others – 1 Timothy 6:17-19, 1 John 3:17 – especially our brethren (but not limited to that). Romans 12:6-8 speaks of giving as a gift to be used for God (with liberality).
 - ii. Support the furtherance of the gospel
 - iii. Use it to live a comfortable life giving you the best advantage to serve God. With contentment, do what you can afford.
 - iv. This is a godly way to put possessions in proper perspective. As you freely and generously give of your possessions, you are reminding yourself that this life is about more than getting everything you want.
 - v. Proverbs 3:9-10, *Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.*
- j. **Where is your treasure?** Matthew 6:19ff. NEVER forget this! WHO is your priority! Remember, we are to be seeking first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)

And thus we see how materialism can be a danger to our pursuit of relationship with God. It is a challenge that each of us WILL face, especially in our affluent society. But as we have seen, it is something you can overcome. You will notice that many of the steps associated with dealing with materialism have to do with our attitude and perspective about what is really important. I remind you of 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 which calls for us to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” This MUST include how we approach our possessions. I conclude with the word of Jesus from Matthew 16:26, *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?* What about you? What is the most important thing to you in this life? Think about it!