

ARE YOU THE GRINCH? (Part 2) - Giving, the Remedy for Materialism

Last week, we talked about CONFLICT and the Bible's remedy for conflict which is PEACE. Today, we want to talk about MATERIALISM, which is rampant in North American society. But thankfully, there is a remedy in the Bible for that as well. It's called GIVING.

A Future Shop ad I got in the mail said, "Love thy neighbour. Just make sure you have a bigger TV than him." (Their ad also includes their current slogan, "We get it." I'd just like to say, "No you don't!") Like the Grinch who dressed up as Santa to steal everyone else's presents, some people just want things so that other people will be "lower" than them.

VIDEO CLIP: YOU'RE A MEAN ONE, MR. GRINCH – #1

Matthew 6:19-21 ¹⁹ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: ²⁰ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: ²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Some time ago, Milton Bradley released a game called "Mall Madness." It's a board game similar to Monopoly. Here's their description ... "Will you be the first to lose your money? You are let loose in a shopping mall with \$200. Go to it and spend it all. Empty your pockets first and you will win the game. When you've spent every cent, your marker moves triumphantly into the winner's space labeled 'broke' and you win!" The game even features an electronic voice that announces sales and clearances, and credit cards so you can plunge yourself into debt.

A recent survey of female teenagers discovered that 93% of them said their number one favorite pastime was SHOPPING. Sorry guys, it beat out DATING by a long shot! One husband said, "If my wife doesn't go out shopping at least three times a week, I send her a get-well card."

Never before have people been as "pushed to possess" as we are. Marketing research is a billion-dollar-a-year business. Thousands of people spend forty hours a week designing ways to trigger our buying mechanisms, using music, images, slogans, fear, nostalgia, pride, jealousy, even sex to attract our attention. Their ultimate goal, though, is to impair our self-control just long enough for us to decide that we simply "must have" their product.

According to the Educational Forum (Winter 1996), "The typical [North American] consumer is the recipient of 3,000 advertisements daily. The general message in this merchandising is that all of our problems can be solved immediately by the consumption of the proper product."

Our culture actually discourages the idea of contentment. People are continually bombarded with the message, "What you have isn't enough. You need more. A bigger house, a better car, a larger salary, whiter teeth, fresher breath, nicer clothes, etc. etc." The list is endless!

MATERIALISM: (1) the theory that physical matter is the only reality; (2) the attitude that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life; (3) an excessive regard for worldly concerns; (4) a desire for wealth and material possessions with little interest in spiritual matters.

One of the Ten Commandments forbids COVETING. That's an old word that we don't use much any more, but it simply means "the uncontrolled desire to acquire." The Hebrew word "CHAMAD" in that commandment means "to desire something you were never meant to own" – that's why the command specifies not to covet "your neighbour's" possessions. Just because someone else has it doesn't mean that you need it!

The impulse for WANTING is a very necessary part of being human. Without this particular form of energy, people would be inactive and unmotivated. However, it is also true that human nature desires more than it needs. Animals and plants function automatically to take from their environment only what they need to survive. There are clear limits to their acquisitions, dictated by instinct. But not so with human beings!

VIDEO CLIP: YOU'RE A MEAN ONE, MR. GRINCH – #2

When one journalist asked the late John D. Rockefeller how much wealth was enough, the millionaire, who was at the time one of the richest and most powerful men in the world, answered, "Just a little more."

Proverbs 30:15-16 ¹⁵ The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: ¹⁶ The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.

1 Timothy 6:10 (NLT) For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

MATERIALISM IS THE "MONSTER OF MORE"! It steals your life one bite, one possession at a time.

Jesus talked about becoming as a child if we want to belong to His kingdom. Have you ever noticed that we ask children, "What do you want to BE when you grow up?" We never ask, "What do you want to GET?" But once we become adults, that's exactly the way we act!

FIVE EFFECTS OF ALWAYS WANTING MORE

1. Fatigue

In our push to get more, we overwork ourselves and take on second jobs. Everybody in the family works just to keep up in the material rat-race. As a result, everyone is tired and cranky.

Proverbs 23:4 (GN) Be wise enough not to wear yourself out trying to get rich.

2. Debt

The average North American puts \$1300 on credit for every \$1000 he makes – that’s called deficit spending and the only people who can get away with that are called government officials! (And – just like you – they can’t get away with it forever!)

A LOT OF WHAT WE CALL **NEED** IS REALLY JUST **GREED**! We have a problem distinguishing between needs and wants (“keeping up with the Joneses”). **We spend money we don’t have to buy things we don’t need to impress people we don’t even like!**

If the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, you can bet the water bill is higher over there, too!

Ecclesiastes 5:11 (LB) The more you have, the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income, so what is the advantage of wealth – except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your fingers!

3. Worry

The more you have, the more you have to worry about: How am I going to protect it, save it, invest it, insure it, repair it, maintain it, avoid taxes on it, keep from losing it?

The higher you rise on the corporate ladder, the more likely you are to bring work and job frustrations home with you and stress out about it. **One study said insomnia increases with income.**

Ecclesiastes 5:12 (GN) Workers may or may not have enough to eat, but at least they can get a good night’s sleep. The rich, however, have so much that they stay awake worrying.

4. Conflict

There is no place harder hit by covetousness than the home! The number one cause of divorce is financial tension – arguments over money and possessions.

James 4:1 (CEV) Why do you fight and argue with each other? Isn’t it because you are full of selfish desires that fight to control your body?

5. Dissatisfaction

Things can bring happiness for a while, but the excitement soon wears off and we get bored. Why don’t things keep you permanently happy? Because things don’t change. But human beings are constantly changing (just look at fashion and style!).

Pretty soon we have to redecorate, remodel, repair, replace, or at least rearrange! How many of you are still THRILLED about the Christmas gift you got last year? How many of you even REMEMBER the Christmas gift you got last year?!

Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NLT) Those who love money will never have enough. How absurd to think that wealth brings true happiness!

Have you ever noticed that “miser” and “miserable” come from the same root word? People who hoard wealth and possessions are just like the Grinch – never happy!

VIDEO CLIP: YOU’RE A MEAN ONE, MR. GRINCH – #3

THERE IS ONLY ONE ANTIDOTE TO THE MONSTER OF MORE – GIVING! You will never be a giver unless you learn to be content with your life now. Contentment is not passive or lazy – it’s not the absence of ambition. Instead, contentment means that at every stage of your life your happiness is measured by an appreciation for **what you have**, and not postponed by dwelling on an inventory of **what you are missing**. Contentment does not come naturally to any of us – we have to learn it!

Philippians 4:11-13 (CEV) ¹¹ I am not complaining about having too little. I have **learned** to be satisfied with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to be poor or to have plenty, and I have lived under all kinds of conditions. I know what it means to be full or to be hungry, to have too much or too little. ¹³ Christ gives me the strength to face anything.

Paul “learned” through his experiences that contentment is not related to our circumstances. I can have a giving nature even when my immediate circumstances are not “giving” to me, even when people “take” from me.

FOUR WAYS TO CONQUER MATERIALISM

1. Resist comparing myself to others

Comparing always leads to coveting! It just creates dissatisfaction within. You have to learn to **be able to admire without having to acquire**. Why do we constantly compare? Because the way we “keep score” in our society is by possessions. We’re insecure, so we look around and ask, “How am I doing compared to ...?” BUT NET WORTH HAS ABSOLUTELY NO RELATION TO SELF WORTH.

You can be possessed by your possessions, sacrificing values, morals, integrity, even relationships, just to obtain more things.

1 Timothy 6:9 (CEV) People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them.

When you can truly enjoy the success, happiness and blessings of others, you know you are on the right track. But when you feel **resentment**, you are ensnared by the sin of covetousness.

Proverbs 14:30 (CEV) It's healthy to be content, but envy can eat you up.

2. **Rejoice in what I do have**

None of us would have ANYTHING if it were not for the goodness of God. He wants us to enjoy what He has given to us! (Think of how you feel as a parent when your children enjoy what you give them.)

Ecclesiastes 5:19 (NLT) And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to enjoy it. To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life — that is indeed a gift from God.

Some people fall into the trap of thinking, "When I get ... then I'll be happy." But that's faulty logic, because things never satisfy! WHAT ARE YOU "WAITING FOR" TO MAKE YOU HAPPY? You are as happy as you want to be! Happiness is not getting whatever you want, it is enjoying whatever you have. One of the marks of maturity is being able to say, "Enough is enough."

There are two ways to have enough in life: get more or want less.

Ecclesiastes 6:9 (CEV) It's better to enjoy what we have than to always want something else, because that makes no more sense than chasing the wind.

3. **Refocus on what's going to last**

Everything earthly is temporary. We MUST give our attention to permanent values and reorganize our lives around eternal priorities!

2 Corinthians 4:18 (GN) For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time; but what cannot be seen lasts forever.

The worst thing about materialism is that it clouds our vision of God, and we begin to think that all there really is to life is getting and enjoying things. Our perspective gets warped.

Luke 12:15 (NLT) Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own."

You have to make the choice: IS MY LIFESTYLE GOING TO BE DETERMINED BY CULTURE OR BY CHRIST? What's really important in light of eternity? What do I talk about the most? What do I spend the most time on? WHAT AM I REALLY LIVING FOR?

VIDEO CLIP: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

4. **Release what I have to help others**

God is a giver by nature, so He doesn't want to just bless you for your own benefit. He wants you to share your blessings to help others. He's watching you to see WHAT YOU GIVE AWAY!

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (LB) ¹⁷ Tell those who are rich not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone, but their pride and trust should be in the living God who always richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. ¹⁹ By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven — it is the only safe investment for eternity! And they will be living a fruitful Christian life down here as well.

"But this verse is talking to those who are rich, pastor!" Well, that's **US!** North Americans are in the top 2% of income in the world, so even if you're on social assistance in Canada, you're RICH!

GIVING IS THE ANTIDOTE TO MATERIALISM! Materialism kills spirituality, and that's why the Bible talks more about giving than it does about either Heaven or Hell. That's why over half the parables Jesus told have to do with money. That's why there are more promises in the Bible related to giving than to any other subject.

The Bible teaches us to give ...

- Thankfully (Psalm 116:12)
- Generously (2 Corinthians 8:3)
- Expectantly (2 Corinthians 9:6)
- Cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7) - the root word is "HILAROS"

God loves a cheerful giver, but we'll take money from a Grinch!

Seriously, the main point of giving is not what your gift does for others, it's what your giving does in you!

Acts 20:35b (CEV) Remember that our Lord Jesus said, "More blessings come from giving than from receiving."

Luke 6:38 (MES) Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he **gave** ...