

I See, I Want, I Take

Memory Text: “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:22)

Setting The Stage: Materialism – “excessively concerned with physical comforts or the acquisition of wealth and material possessions, rather than with spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values.”

In his new book “Curing Affluenza: How to Buy Less Stuff and Save the World,” Australian economist and author Richard Denniss argues that we often mistakenly conflate materialism with consumerism, but there’s a key difference between the two: at the heart of materialism sits the love of things, while consumerism is the neurotic love of purchasing things.

Where materialists derive joy from owning and using products, consumerists compulsively buy stuff they don’t truly value or need because consumption unleashes an addictive dopamine hit in the brain. That satisfaction, however, is short lived because it fades shortly after the purchase is made—hence why so many of us are swept over by feelings of buyer’s remorse.

Ellen Goodman said, “Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work and driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for, in order to get to the job you need to pay for the clothes and the car, and the house you leave vacant all day so you can afford to live in it.”

There’s this quote that states, “Dreams shouldn’t be about what you can buy—they should be about what mark you leave in the world.” Rather than buying into the American Dream, we ought to buy into God’s dream. True happiness comes from those things that really matter: a saving relationship with God, family/friends, helping people, and giving back.

Sunday - The Prosperity Gospel

2 Corinthians 8:1-7; Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 11:24; Matthew 8:20

“A popular television preacher has a simple message: God wants to bless you, and the proof of His blessing is the abundance of material possessions that you own. In other words, if you are faithful, God will make you wealthy.

“This idea, or variants of it, has been called the prosperity gospel: follow God, and He will make you wealthy in worldly goods.

“This idea is nothing but a false theological justification for materialism, because what it’s really saying is, Do you want to be materialistic and to feel good about it? Well, we have got the “gospel” for you. Yet, connecting the gospel with guaranteed wealth is misdirected. At the core of this lie is the issue at the core of all sin, and that is self and the desire to please self above everything else.

“The theology of the prosperity gospel teaches that, in giving to God, we gain in return a guarantee of material wealth. But this makes God a vending machine and turns our relationship with Him into nothing but a deal: I do this and You promise to do that in return. We give, not because it is the right thing to do but because of what we get in return. That’s the prosperity gospel.” (Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, 1st Q, 2018, p. 15)

2 Corinthians 8:1-7. What is happening here? What principles do we see in these verses that go against this idea of the prosperity gospel?

These people, although in extreme poverty, were very generous, giving even more than they could afford. Verses such as these, and many others, help refute the false theology of the prosperity gospel, which teaches that if you are living right with God you will have many material possessions to show for it.

Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Hebrews 11:24: “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in[e] Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”

Matthew: 8:20: “And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ “

Monday – Blurred Spiritual Eyesight

Matthew 13:3-7, 22; Luke 8:14; Hosea 10:12

Matthew 13:3-7, 22. This parable teaches that our eternal destiny depends on how we treat Christ’s message. Luke (8:14) likens the thorns in the parable to three major distractions for the Christian, to you and me:

Cares of this world: No one is really exempt. The poor fear of want and this brings perplexity. The rich fear loss and this brings other burdens. Christ can’t take their burdens because they have not given them to Him. They find no time to study, pray, and serve. There’s no fruit because the world and work are nourished, not the soul.

Deceitfulness of riches: A recent article entitled Lottery’s Biggest Losers: Big Wins Don’t Equal Better Lives catalogued the reality of this:

Jack Whittaker: This West Virginia businessman won \$315 million in the Powerball lottery in 2002, the largest jackpot ever from a single ticket in American history at the time. He was robbed of \$545,000 in cash while out one night, and was sued by Caesars Atlantic City casino for bouncing \$1.5 million worth of checks to cover gambling losses.

Juan Rodriguez: This New York City parking attendant was earning less than \$30,000 in 2004 when he won \$149 million in a Mega Millions drawing. But soon after taking the lump sum option of \$88 million, his wife filed for divorce and was awarded half of his winnings.

While earning money is perfectly appropriate, Jesus warns against the insatiable appetite for more and more and more. More certainly isn't always better!
Pleasures: This is anything that weakens the physical powers, that fogs the mind, or numbs the spiritual perceptions. While it's perfectly acceptable to enjoy innocent pleasures, even these needs to be balanced with work, study, and rest.

While the spiritual life of the thorny ground hearer is being choked out by an obsession with questionable practices and attitudes, things that aren't necessarily bad can still suffocate the spiritual life too. The key is allowing God to help you prioritize your life. His grace is sufficient!

Hosea 10:12: "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you."

Tuesday – The Steps Of Covetousness

Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 5:29; James 4:7, 8; Philippians 4:13

Like all sins, covetousness begins in the heart. It starts inside us and then works outward. This is what happened in Eden. **Genesis 3:1-6.** **What did Satan do to lure Eve into sin? How has he used the same principles through the ages to deceive us, as well?**

If one didn't know better, one could think that the advertising industry got its example of how to sell its products from the Eden story. The devil presented the fruit of the forbidden tree in a way to create in Eve a desire to want more than she already had and to make her think that she needed something that she really didn't. How brilliant!

Her fall is a demonstration of the three steps each of us takes when we fall to covetousness: (1) I see; (2) I want; (3) I take. Covetousness, of course, can be a quiet sin. Like lust, it's hidden behind the veil of our flesh. But when it finally brings forth fruit, it can be devastating. It can damage relationships, leave scars on loved ones,

and pummel us with guilt afterward. Let covetousness surface, and it will override any principle.

King Ahab saw Naboth's vineyard, wanted it, and pouted until his queen had Naboth murdered for it (1 Kings 21). Achan could not resist when he saw a garment and money, so he coveted and took them (Josh. 7:20–22).

“I See: First, we behold and fixate upon an object of desire, as our text for review illustrates. For example, Satan baits Eve with a display of the forbidden fruit, thus enticing her. Had Eve closed her eyes and immediately turned away, the entire course of human history would have been redirected.

“Our first defense is to look away. Potiphar’s wife’s infatuation with Joseph began as she “cast her eyes on Joseph.” (Gen. 39:7, NRSV) The believer’s infatuation with materialism likewise begins with “eye casting.” James writes, “One is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” (James 1:14, 15, NRSV). The secret to overcoming material temptation is to look away before it becomes sin. Jesus graphically underscored the importance of “eye control.” “ (SSBSG, Teachers Edition, 1st Q, 2018, p. 29)

Matthew 5:29: “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

“I Want: The second step is wanting. The ad company is not satisfied with showing you something. The industry spends millions researching how to make you want it. Will owning that item make you feel more valued and adored? Will it satisfy some basic longing for nourishment, sexual intimacy, or physical comfort? How can Christians withstand this manipulation that is funded by millions, if not billions, of dollars?” (Ibid.) James tells us:

James 4:7, 8: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

“I Take: The final step of falling into covetousness is the action step, the purchase point: I take. Even if we have compromised the first two, there is still hope.” (Ibid.)

Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Rather than taking, we can focus our energies on giving, as Christ gave and in the way He commanded us to give. (see 1 John 3:16, 17 and Matt. 25:31–46)

Wednesday – Greed: Having Things Your Way

Isaiah 56:11; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Colossians 3:1-7

Isaiah 56:11. What is this verse warning us of?

For us as fallen beings, greed can be as easy as breathing. And just as natural, too. However, it's hard to imagine anything in the human character that is less reflective of the character of Christ than greed.

2 Corinthians 8:9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Only the Lord knows the damage that greed has wrought throughout history. Greed has led to wars. Greed has caused people to commit crimes that brought ruin upon themselves and their families. Greed can be like a virus that will latch onto its host and consume every virtue until all that remains is more and more greed. Greed is a malady that wants everything: passion, power, and possessions

In 1886, Leo Tolstoy asked the question, “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” He illustrated his question by telling a story. It's the story of a young man by the name of Pakhom who was given an incredible offer. He could have as much land as he could walk around in a day. In this classic tale, Pakhom starts out at the break of dawn, anxious to obtain as much land as possible. He places stakes along the way to mark the boundaries of his land.

The task was difficult, because as he looks further ahead and notices a grove of trees, a pond or a ravine, he feels compelled to encircle it so that it is included in his property. As the sun begins to set, Pakhom realizes that he has gone too far.

Desperate to reach the finish he pushes his body beyond its limit, but he collapses at the finish line - dead. A servant picks up a shovel and digs a grave long enough for Pakhom to lie in. Tolstoy's conclusion to the question, “How much land does a man need?” ...“Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.”

The brief account is told about an American tourist's visit to a 19th century Polish rabbi (Hofetz Chaim). Astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench, the tourist asked, "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" "Where is yours?" replied the rabbi. "Mine?" asked the puzzled American. "But I'm a visitor here. I'm only passing through." "So am I," said the rabbi.

Colossians 3:1-7: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in

glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.”

Thursday – Self Control

Acts 24:24-26; Galatians 5:22-25; 2 Peter 1:5-9

“You can't have everything. Where would you put it?” (Steven Wright in Omni)

What are the following texts saying that can and should help us understand how people, rich or poor, can protect themselves from the dangers that greed, covetousness, and the love of money and material things can present to the Christian?

Acts 24:24–26: “And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’ Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.”

Galatians 5:22–25: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

2 Peter 1:5–9: “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

None of us, on our own, can defeat these sinful traits, especially if they long have been cultivated and cherished. We truly need the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in our lives if we are to gain victory over these powerful deceptions. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13)