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# The Seduction of Materialism



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Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor  
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Most of us like a good story. We see ourselves in the action. Sometimes we are the hero. Sometimes we are the victim. Some of the best stories we will ever read are in the Bible, stories of murder, intrigue, history, war, romance. You may know the story about how the walls of Jericho fell, the army of Israel marched round the walls day after day, seven times and then on the final day they marched seven times and the walls fell. It makes a great song! But hidden behind this great victory lies another story, the story of an even greater defeat.

The next city they set out to conquer was the city of Ai, much smaller, less fortified, so they assume in the wake of the victory at Jericho that this would be easy as we say, a piece of cake. But instead the Israelite army is routed and sent running with their tails between their legs. Joshua, the Israelite commander is more than puzzled. He starts an interrogation to find out where the cause of the defeat lies. It comes down to a man who disobeyed an order not to plunder. His name is Acha. He stole some things that should not have been stolen. Some gold and silver and a coat, the latest fashion and he hid them in the ground under his tent.

## Joshua 7

**19 Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."**

**20 Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done:**

**21 When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."**

You see, You have to hide what you steal.

So God's final word to His people is, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

We come to the last word and the final warning from God in the Ten Commandments, do not covet. We are challenged to recognize the toxic disease of greed. The desire for more and more, for bigger and better is both seductive and psychotic.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the story of a man who probably had more than enough, but still wanted more and so he tore down the barns he had and built bigger barns. Is this what life is all about, just building bigger barns?

Our contemporary culture, especially in North America, is plagued with the passion to possess. It plunges families into financial crisis, credit mortgages. Our future as money that we do not have is already committed. We have had several reports that Canadians now carry more person debt than ever before. This past week, it was reported that for every dollar we earn, we owe \$1.63. Highest level of personal debt.

As we come to the season of Christmas, this drive becomes out of control. As someone has said, People buy what they cannot afford to impress people they don't like, with money they don't have.

The television commercial and the flyers that come into our homes and apartments are not there to give us information. They are there to seduce us. Their message is that the happiness we want will be found in buying things. They tease us by saying that the pleasure we are looking for our lives is be

found in what we do not already have.

The result of this Christmas season is that we can often left strained, breathless and hurried and broke! We have lost touch with reality.

We have seen that these ten words from God cut across the grain of our society. They challenge us to think in ways that our culture does not think. They call us to go against the current of popular philosophy. This is perhaps more true of this final word on coveting than anything else. Edith Schaeffer calls this word on coveting, The inside of the cup. What she means is that people can see when we steal, lie, cheat. These are visible, but coveting is where our heart is. It does not expose what we are doing, rather it exposes what we desire. The ultimate price of coveting does not lie in what we purchase, what our credit card bill says at the end of the month. The deadly cost of greed lies in what it does to our heart.

One of the things that prevents us from doing something that may be harmful to us is to be confronted with the facts of what it does to us. This is what is behind the campaign to stop people smoking. We are told, this is what it does to your body. This is the harm that it causes.

The Bible does the same thing with coveting. It tells us the dangers that come from a spirit of coveting, from a greedy lifestyle.

### **IT CHOKES OUT THE LIFE-CHANGING INFLUENCE OF THE WORD OF GOD.**

In the parable of the sower, Jesus uses different kinds of soil to illustrate what happens when good seed (the word of the kingdom) falls.

Hard ground = ideas that are fixed and inflexible

Shallow ground = initial enthusiasm that falls away

Rocks and weeds = lives that are too busy.

#### **Mark 4**

**19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.**

### **IT LEADS TO SPIRITUAL PERIL. IT PUTS YOU IN DANGER.**

#### **1st Timothy 6**

**9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.**

**10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

People are seduced by get-rich-quick schemes.

### **IT LEADS TO CONFLICT BETWEEN PEOPLE.**

#### **James 4**

**1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?**

**2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.**

**3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

When there is an argument in a family when someone dies, especially over a will, follow the money.

## **IT STIFLES AND SUFFOCATE THE LOVE OF GOD IN US.**

### **1st John 2**

**15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

**16 For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.**

**17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**

We are told that smoking is dangerous to your body. But coveting is even more deadly to your soul. Greed kills! It stains and fouls the inside of the cup which is our heart.

What is the antidote to this cancer of heart? What is the remedy to this psychotic lifestyle that can plunge us deeper and deeper into debt financially, robs us emotionally of peace, and which bankrupts us spiritually.

The Bible has an antidote. It calls us to live a life that is

rooted in a rare spiritual gem. It is called contentment.

Contentment does not mean that we sit back and become couch potatoes. Rather it is a state of heart and mind that understands that meaning and significance does not come from buying more things. Our satisfaction does not come from what we have. The seductive voice of materialism says, if you only had this, then you would be happier. Your life would be more meaningful. All of that is a lie.

This is first generation in history to have so much to live with and so little to live for.

We need to have the insight and the courage to look that kind of thinking and say, that is a lie. Things do not create a meaningful life.

The Bible calls us to climb beyond the view of life created by advertising and promised by credit cards. It invites us to breathe the air at a higher level and to experience the pure oxygen of contentment.

The apostle Paul had breathed air at this altitude.

### **Phil 4**

**11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.**

**12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**

### **1st Timothy 6**

**6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.**

**7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.**

**8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.**

So what does this mean for us? Here are three vital areas of life in which we can practice this biblical discipline of contentment in contrast with the thinking of our culture.

**I WILL BE CONTENT WITH WHO I AM AND THAT WILL ALLOW ME TO DEVELOP WHO GOD MADE ME TO THE FULLEST EXTENT.**

Perhaps the first and most basic level of content we need to come to is being content with who we are, who God has made us to be, and stop trying to be like anyone else.

I believe deeply that what makes us unique is that each of our lives is stamped with the

stamp of God. Each of us is one of a kind. God does not create Xerox copies. We need to recognize that humbly and rejoice in that deeply.

Does that mean that we just sit back and coast? Not at all! We are responsible to discover every aspect and every fiber in our lives about who God has made us to be, and to develop that to the fullest.

Remember the scene from *Chariots of Fire* (1981)? It was the story of the Scottish runner Eric Liddell who was also a missionary, but he says, when I run I feel his pleasure.

Here we need to acknowledge that many of us, if not all of us live below par, we are less than God intended us to be. Do you feel God's pleasure in your life?

We need to be content in who God has made us. By this does not mean we are just here to be passengers, to go with the flow. The New Testament is full of pictures taken from the world of sports, challenging us to press on, to run the race, to be like a boxer, but we are not trying to get ahead of other people. We are competing against our own laziness, our own sluggishness. That attitude that finds it so easy to drift along without effort, today's word is **WHATEVER!**

We are not trying to be someone else. We are trying to be all that God would want us to be.

**I WILL BE CONTENT WITH WHAT I DO, AND THAT WILL ALLOW ME TO ENJOY WHAT I DO TO THE FULLEST.**

There are no perfect jobs. Someone will always make more money than we do. They will have more prestige. If we think that contentment will come only as we climb the ladder of success, we may find that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

Contentment comes by realizing with gratitude the skills and gifts that God has given to us and then using them to the fullest.

The people who are the most unhappy in their work, whatever their jobs may be, are the people who are doing just enough to get by, or who look busy only when the boss is looking.

### Colossians 3

**Whatever you do – do it heartily (lit. from the soul) as for the Lord not for men.**

Contentment comes when we work from the heart.

This kind of contentment does not deny us the opportunity to work for a promotion or to get ahead or to move into a new

line of work or to take more training and advance ourselves. In fact inner contentment may encourage and stimulate us to do all of these things. But we do so with the honest realization that the promotion will not make us happier per se. The new job will not bring contentment, rather contentment lies within us.

I am one of the lucky people in life. I have been able to do what I love and I love what I do. Some days it is hard work, some things and some situations move me to tears, some things give me a heavy heart, some things give me the greatest joy.

Some people say that if they had to live their lives over again they would not change a thing. I think that is really stupid. I once bought a 63 Pontiac in Toronto which turned out to be a real lemon. There are some mistakes that I would not want to repeat.

But there are some things I would do over again.

*I would marry Harriet over again.*

*I would want the same kids.*

*I would serve God and the church.*

## I WILL BE CONTENT WITH WHAT I HAVE AND THAT WILL ALLOW ME TO SHARE WHAT I HAVE TO THE FULLEST.

I think it J. Paul Getty of the very wealthy Getty dynasty was asked, how much money was enough. He said, just a little but more.

There will always be someone who has more money, a bigger home, the newest car, a faster computer. For pastors, a bigger church. We have to let that go and with gratitude to God be content with what we have, which for most of us is more than we need.

The trouble with greed is that we con ourselves. We seduce ourselves into thinking that if we had that little but more, we would be able to share more. That is not true. What brings contentment is holding what we have with a spirit of gratitude.

The fruit of contentment in our lives is gratitude and the fruit of gratitude is generosity.

### 2 Corinthians 9

**6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.**

**7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under**

**compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

Word cheerful = hilarious.

Our society has lost touch with reality. The demands of rushing to accumulate more and more threatens to overwhelm us and if we give in to its seductive shouts, more than we know we will damage our spirit.

[Richard Foster—*Celebration of Discipline*]

Because we lack a divine centre, our need for security has led us to an insane attachment to things. In our moments of weakness we believe that things will bring us happiness, so we crave what we neither need or enjoy. We buy what we don't need to impress people we don't like. Where planned obsolescence leaves off, psychological obsolescence takes over...The mass media has convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality.

We need to speak the truth and say that it is our culture than is out of step with reality.

More than smoking that will choke our lungs, more than trans fats that may clog our arteries, greed will stain the inside of our spirit and blacken our soul.

There is an antidote. There is a remedy. It is to breathe the pure air of contentment that comes from the breath of God.

Postscript:

We began this series some 10 weeks ago. I trust we have found that the Ten Commandments are anything but out-dated and irrelevant. On the contrary, they are a relevant challenge to living as God's people in the times in which we live. Thank you for the attentive spirit you have given this series.

We live in changing and challenging times. They are not times for the faint-hearted or the fearful. We are again like Israel living in a land filled with strange voices and seductive sounds.

The Ten Commandments call us to a radical counter-cultural lifestyle as the people of God. The more that the moral stage of our culture darkens and becomes distorted, the more important it will be for God's people to stand in grace, to let grace shine and live out of His grace as His people.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ calls to us. He and he alone is the one and only! We are to live in such a way that the land, our land, will be filled with His glory.