

Introduction:

I have a confession to make; my wife and I love purging things from our house. We get a lot of pleasure from being able to fill boxes and bags up with our stuff that is no longer being used and taking it to MCC Thrift Shop. I get this feeling of freedom because when I have less things in my house, I can move around more easily, feel less guilty about the things I don't have time to use, and can spend less time cleaning up because everything has its place.

When Erin and I got married, we combined a LOT of stuff into one household, stuff we had accumulated throughout our lives and hadn't yet had a reason to get rid of. We've been married for 10 ½ years now, and I'm still astonished every time that we have a new box to get rid of; it seems by now we would've run out of things we could give away. But the reality is, and I think that this is true for everyone, even though we've been able to sell or give things away on a regular basis throughout our marriage, we still are consuming as well. I'd like to believe we've been able to reduce our intake since we first got married, but there always seems to be a bit of a revolving door with stuff coming in and stuff going out.

We feed our love for purging by reading books on minimalism and organization and watching TV shows centered on purging. The latest TV show in this vein of things to sweep the nation is on Netflix and is called 'Tidying Up with Marie Kondo.' The show is centered on this little Japanese lady who authored the best-selling book "The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up." She

goes into the homes of ordinary families, most who have a lot of stuff but wouldn't fit in the category of "hoarders," and teaches them her method of "tidying" up so that their homes and lives become better organized. Part of this 'tidying' involves getting rid of things, but it has a different twist. Rather than simply getting rid of things for pragmatic reasons, like you haven't used it for at least a year, you didn't know you had it, or it's broken, and keeping things because you "might use it someday," she instead instructs her clients to simply go through their items in order of clothes, books, paper, miscellaneous items, and memento items, hold each item in their hands and ask the question "Does this spark joy?" If it does, then great, go ahead and put that bad boy in the keep pile. But if it doesn't, thank the item for all that it did for them and put it in the giveaway pile. "Marie-konndoing," as fans of the show call it, has had such an impact on American culture that Thrift Shops have noticed an uptick in donations since the show debuted.

Tidying, organizing, and purging may be all the rage, but the problem of having too much stuff is not new. So, what drives us to keep, and what drives us to consume?

Reasons we have, keep, and can't let go:

- security (both security for the now, and security for in the future)
- identity (we define ourselves by what we have; we want to appear well off, put together, and have a certain style or flair; we also collect things that feed our identity)

- comfort (make sure that we have enough, that we will never lack entertainment, and that we won't have an emergency situation that can't be fixed by something in our garage)
- guilt (I was given this, I can't possibly get rid of it)
- expectation (keeping up with the Joneses, to fit in this town I should have x,y, and z)

Where do we get this drive to keep and accumulate? I was listening to a podcast the other day on the 1% mega-rich and how they think. One of the interviewees was a part of that group, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and he was commenting on why the mega-rich give philanthropically. He said that philanthropy, or giving generously to needs, is a way for the wealthy to assuage their guilt; he also said that it is much easier to give a million dollars to a homeless shelter than it is to give money to a campaign that might help end homelessness because it would inevitably involve tax reform, which would mean real sacrifice for the wealthy. And since the wealthy get an inordinate amount of power to make tax laws, they are going to do what they can to protect and keep what is there's. I wondered, is this drive to keep and protect just something that rich people experience, or is it a drive that we all have? Then I remembered our nephews coming over earlier that day; they were playing with Rivers toys, and she made it very clear that she not only wanted what they were holding but also that she wanted them to stay away from her stuff. Rich or poor, young or old, the desire to keep, and protect is innate.

But we don't just keep, we also consume and accumulate.

Reasons we consume:

- We are enticed (commercials)
- We are convinced that everything needs a regular upgrade (phones, cars, tv's, entertainment systems, clothes)
- We live in a disposable culture, so our things aren't made to last as long as they used to.
- We're dissatisfied, and hoping that newest thing will bring that contentment we've been looking for.
- There's a rush of adrenaline and dopamine that goes along with shopping for some people.
- It's cultural (black Friday, cyber Monday, Christmas shopping, gifts at Easter, birthday presents for kids and their siblings so they don't feel left out)

Transition into Scripture:

Drawing our attention back to the Scripture for today, materialism is not a recent problem. Although materials and forms of money that we covet have changed, humanity's ability to place too much of themselves into their things is an ancient struggle. Jesus brings the problem of materialism to the forefront by contrasting two different types of treasures: treasures that we have, keep, and store on earth, and treasures that we have, keep, and store in heaven. He makes the simple point that nothing we treasure or value on earth is indestructible; it can all be broken down, destroyed by time, pests, or even stolen by people. And even the things that we've created that have no natural ability to biodegrade, like Styrofoam, lose their value and ultimately become trash. On

the other hand, heavenly treasures keep their value and stay with us forever.

Main Point:

As believers, we are called to live distinctly from our consuming, materialistic world that places its trust and finds its value in money and possessions. We place our trust and find our value in God. The hard truth is that if our possessions possess us, then we cannot rightly serve God. And what we have and more importantly, how we invest in what we have will reveal our hearts.

So, let's consider this morning the sin of materialism and how we can live differently in a world where materialism is normal and even encouraged.

A) What is materialism?

To start, let's establish a common definition of 'materialism.'

m-w dictionary online: a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So, if you store up your treasure on earth, meaning if you are more occupied with accumulating wealth and possessions than you are with the things of God, then you are committing the sin of materialism.

Dave Ramsey oftentimes talks about materialism as *spending money we don't have to buy things we don't need to impress people that we don't like*.

Transition: Now that we've got a common understanding of what materialism is, let's answer the question, why is materialism a problem?

B) Why is materialism a problem?

i. Materialism is a Great Lie:

Materialism tells us that we can find happiness, security, and joy through money and things. But we this is a lie. We experience this lie every December 26th when we survey all of the gifts we received and notice a thing or two that we really didn't want or need and remember a thing or two that we would rather have. If getting things truly lead to happiness, security, and joy, then we shouldn't have any post-Christmas blues related to things received, things not received, or even that the season is over. But most, if not all of us, experience some degree of sadness once the holiday has passed.

Harvard Psychologist Daniel Gilbert writes in "Stumbling into Happiness," "Economists and psychologists have spent decades studying the relation between wealth and happiness, and have generally concluded that wealth increases happiness when it lifts people out of abject poverty and into the middle class but that it does little to increase happiness thereafter." So according to their study, unless getting more brings a person

from extreme poverty into the middle class, it does not equal happiness. Materialism is a great lie.

ii. Materialism takes us away from God

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” No matter how hard we try, we can’t divide our attention between money and God. If we give away any part of our hearts to the love of money, then we may as well have given all of ourselves away. Paul tells us that the drive to increase wealth causes people to stray from the path of discipleship, which only causes pain for that person.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people 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.* Materialism takes us away from God.

iii. Materialism hurts you and your family:

Ecclesiastes 5:13-14¹³ I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: *wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners,* ¹⁴ *or wealth lost through some misfortune,* so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit.

What have we sacrificed for the sake of money and possessions? Have we overworked ourselves and missed out on important time with our families? Have we accrued debt beyond our ability to pay it off? Have we lost our ability to be content with what we have? Have we forgotten to rely on God because we've gotten so good at taking care of ourselves? And have we taught our children to be so reliant on things that they don't know there is a God who takes care of them?

iv. Materialism is an endless cycle of dissatisfaction:

Ecclesiastes 5:10-11

Whoever loves money *never has enough*; whoever loves wealth is *never satisfied* with their income. This too is meaningless.

¹¹ *As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?*

We will never be able to satisfy the material-driven need for MORE. The more we feed the beast, the hungrier it gets. And the endless creation of things creates an endless line of consumers. The market demands that we stay consumers. And like any addiction, the more we feed it, the more it wants. There will never be that one "final thing" that we purchase, unless we are willing to step off of the rat wheel of consuming.

Transition: Materialism is a great lie, it takes us away from God, it hurts us and our family, and it is an endless cycle of dissatisfaction. These are only a handful of the problems of materialism. The question then is, if we are to break free of the

sin of materialism, what are we to do instead? Jesus tells us to “store up our treasures in heaven.” What does that mean then, for us to store up eternal treasures, and how do we learn to appreciate what God has given us while also not falling into the trap of materialism?

C) What does it mean to store up our treasures in heaven?

Jesus tells us instead of gathering and storing what is considered valuable on earth, which can be destroyed and stolen, is temporary, and ultimately cannot be taken with us when we die, we should instead store up our treasures in heaven, which then has eternal value.

What does it look like, then, to store up our treasures in heaven? Paul gives some possibilities for this in his letter to Timothy in **1 Timothy 6:17-19**:

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to *put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*¹⁸ Command them to *do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*¹⁹ *In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

Do good, be generous, and put our ultimate trust in God, who gives us all that we need. These are the practices of storing up treasures in heaven. But I also believe that Jesus is not just encouraging us to earn points with God in heaven. Whenever

Erin and I do something “good” that was either hard or we didn’t particularly want to do it, we joke about earning “jewels in our crowns.” But really, this kind of “treasure” is meaningless in light of heaven, and this kind of thinking misses the point of the passage. God himself is the treasure. To store up our treasure in heaven in to invest in our relationship with the One who provides everything for us.

How then do we balance appreciating what God has given to us without becoming materialistic?

Firstly, we need to understand that the opposite of materialism isn’t poverty, and we aren’t being called to reject all possessions and wealth. In fact, there are examples of wealthy saints in the New Testament who were commended for using what they had to bless the kingdom of God. It’s not *money* that is the root of all evil; it is the *love of money*, according to 1 Timothy 6:10.

We need to evaluate ourselves, our money, and our possessions and ask, are we truly serving God alone, or are we serving money, spending our time, our energy, and our emotions to gain and keep treasures on earth. The opposite of materialism isn’t poverty, it is contentedness.

Secondly, we need to recognize that God is the great giver, and he does provide for his people. Instead then of constantly thinking of what we don’t have, we can be grateful for what he has given us.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

¹⁸This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. ¹⁹Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. ²⁰They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

Some of us might have some purging to do, both of our physical things, and of the materialism that has taken up space in our hearts and forced God out of the way. The sin of materialism is that we allow our money and things not only to remove God from the throne of our hearts, but also to obscure from our vision all of the blessings God has given to us. Search your heart. Where does your treasure really lie?