

The Materialism Trap

In this study we will look at God's perspective on materialism and determine how we can keep materialism's subtle snare from robbing us of God's blessing.

Materialism is a timely subject to study, especially in the Western world. Our society is governed by it. We must turn to the Word of God for a true bearing through the riptides of greed, covetousness, and uncontrolled desires that would overturn our spiritual vessels.

There may be persons in your class from a variety of financial backgrounds, and it is possible that some will be sensitive about this subject. Use care in pointing out the "snare" aspect of materialism. By definition, materialism includes looking for comfort, pleasure, and wealth—none of which are bad in themselves. It is the shifting of priorities away from a focus on spiritual pursuits which allows the snare to tighten around us. Also avoid measuring a person's value and success by what they have.

Response 1— Discussion should center around the fact that we are stewards, or managers, of the money and possessions God entrusts to us. The servants in the parable used their master's goods to increase the value of what they had been given. In a similar manner, we are obligated to use whatever the Lord entrusts to us, for the furtherance of His Kingdom. Despite the fact that others might possess more, and regardless of society's attempts to push us away from God, we are individually accountable for the way we handle our possessions. It is made clear in 1 Timothy 6:7, that we bring nothing into the world and will take nothing out of it. We will leave it all when we die, no matter how much we have accumulated.

Response 2 — The rich man was called a fool because of his incorrect assumption that he would not be required to give an account when

Objective

The students will be able to explain the dangers of materialism in the light of Scripture, describing how Satan will try to use it to trap us. They will also be able to tell how we can avoid its snare.

Key Texts

Job 1:21; Ecclesiastes 5:10,11; Matthew 19:24; 25:14; Luke 12:15-23; Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 6:3-8,11; 17-19; Hebrews 13:5,6

Other Scriptures Used in This Study

Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:9,10,15

Suggested Verse for Memorization

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. — Luke 12:15

he died. This basic error precipitated two other incorrect views. One was that he could find no "room where to bestow [his] fruits." No doubt there were those in need in his area, and yet he was not willing to share of his abundance to help supply for those needs. The other incorrect view was that of false security. We can never be truly secure with possessions. Only God provides security. We can and should plan for our needs, yet our trust must never be in our plans or accomplishments but, rather, in the Lord. Verse 15 tells us there is more to life than things.

Response 3 — Your students will likely respond that those possessing limited resources can still have a problem with materialism. The reverse is also true—a person with great resources is not necessarily making them his primary focus. Have the class create a list of people in the Bible who were rich or who had

great possessions. Some who could be included are Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, and Solomon. Discuss the fact that many of these were rich because of God's blessing and direct provision, yet their desires were not turned from Him because of their riches. In fact, God often used those riches for His glory.

It is not money which is the root of all evil; it is the love of money. See 1 Timothy 6:10. Because of this, even those with very few possessions can be caught up in the snare of materialism. With the use of credit in the form of charge cards, store accounts, etc., those of modest means can enslave themselves because of their uncontrollable desire for things. According to Scripture, some have erred from the faith because of this extreme desire. In 1 Timothy 6:9, we read of "they that will be rich," meaning they may not actually be rich but are possessed with an inordinate desire to be.

Response 4 — The discussion should center around three major points. The first is that riches, if not held in God's perspective, can breed pride. The temptation is that we will think more highly of ourselves because of our possessions. Have the class outline ways that our possessions influence how we feel about ourselves. The second snare is that our trust can be turned from the Lord to self-sufficiency in our financial security. Finally, discontentment with what God has provided can come from overabundance. The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, was quoted as saying "Give a man everything he desires and yet at this very moment he will feel that everything is not everything." This is often true. We can avoid these snares by following the instructions in 1 Timothy 6:17-19; it is a charge to those who are rich in this world's goods to use those riches as a means to lay up a permanent source of divine wealth in Heaven by being liberal in giving.

Response 5 — Contentment is the state of being satisfied with what one has, and not wanting more or anything else. Your discussion should center around the fact that following after the things of God and maintaining an up-to-date relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ are the things that bring lasting contentment. In the discussion, words such as salvation, trust, faith in God, consecration, and willingness to do God's will should be an integral part. The contentment spoken of here is not a complacency in spiritual matters, because true godliness will create a desire to draw closer to the Lord. Rather, it refers to the need of following the Lord with all our heart and accepting His provision with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:19).

Discussion concerning whether contentment is a feeling, attitude, or act of our will, might not lead to a simple or single answer. Your class will probably decide on a balance between all three. Feelings are certainly involved, as are our attitudes, but it seems that the key is our will. We must choose to accept God's provision or to deny His promise, "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). The famous American humorist, Will Rogers, said, "Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." Our choice in accepting God's provision will influence our attitudes and our feelings.

Response 6 — It appears that the Lord allowed Paul to go through these situations so he could learn that his contentment was based on God alone and was not rooted in circumstances, possessions, health, etc. Your students should understand that the Lord still works in this way for us, and He does it for the same reason. Times of need can help us appreciate times of abundance. Both situations can help us develop an attitude of faithful stewardship in using what has been entrusted to us for God's glory.