



A resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.



THE IDOL OF MATERIALISM

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All of us, parents and kids alike, are swimming in a cultural soup which promotes materialism. We are encouraged hundreds of times a day to hinge our happiness and fulfillment on the ongoing accumulation of as much as we possibly can. As Christians, we need to not only recognize this fact, but we need to take steps to understand how we are drawn to this pervasive idol so that we might smash it to pieces, and raise our kids to love and serve Jesus Christ above all else.



WORLD

What is Happening?

- *Materialism* is defined as “the belief that money, possessions and physical comforts are more important than spiritual values” (*Oxford Dictionary*), and “a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things” (*Merriam-Webster*). In today’s world, the pervasive presence of marketing has coupled with spiritual emptiness to convince us that it is through the accumulation of money and possessions that one finds the pathway to happiness, satisfaction, security, and joy in life.
- Materialism is fed by a marketing machine that it is estimated now spends \$17 billion to \$20 billion on marketing to children and teens, a number that is projected to increase significantly on an annual basis over the coming years. Using sophisticated strategies, marketers are reaching kids through television, print, social media, phone apps, peer influencers, and school-based advertising. It’s conservatively estimated that by the time they reach the age of 18, our kids will easily have seen over a million ads.
- Children and teens are targeted for several reasons, all of which wind up fertilizing the seeds and roots of materialism sown in their lives by the culture. They are easily influenced, and they are known to develop brand loyalty as early as age two. They have their own money to manage and spend as they wish, and they influence the spending decisions of their parents (cars, food, clothing, electronics, vacations, etc.). Marketers leverage this spending influence, feeding what has been called “pester power” and the “nag factor.”
- In today’s world, consumer goods and styles are developed with “planned obsolescence”, meaning that durability is sub-standard (things aren’t made to last) and styles will change. Without this built-in design, companies would not be able to continue creating and selling new goods. We come to believe that we cannot be happy without the latest thing. There is always something new promising to fulfill the emptiness in our hearts.
- We must consider the fact that as materialism, marketing, and spending power has been on the rise, there’s been a parallel decline in the mental health and well-being of children and teens. Anxiety, stress, body-image issues, depression, loneliness, suicide, and a host of other mental health problems are being fed by the combination of a desire to have more, and the realization that your continued, gnawing emptiness means you still don’t have enough.



WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

We have been created by God for a relationship with God. Sin has broken that relationship, leaving us spiritually empty and hungering for redemption and restoration. We have eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11), which means that our yearnings can only be answered and filled by God. Only God can fill the hole in our souls (Psalm 107:9).

God cares deeply about our attitudes towards money and wealth. Did you know that more is said in the New Testament about money and wealth than about heaven and hell combined? Five times more is said about money than about prayer. And 16 of Christ's 38 parables deal with money.

There is no quick way to survey the Bible's exhortations and warnings regarding money, wealth, and materialism. The Bible is clear that while God does bless many with abundance, it is the love of money and wealth that is sinful and idolatrous (I Timothy 6:10). The 10 Commandments forbid the worship of any god other than the one true God (Exodus 20:2-6), along with coveting things that belong to others (Exodus 20:17). Jesus tells us that one cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24), and that money can blind us to our need to worship and serve God (Mark 10:17-31). We are called to put our hope in God alone (I Timothy 6:17) and to be content with what we have (Hebrews 13:5).

God's people are stewards rather than owners of all they've been given. We are to honor the Lord with our wealth (Proverbs 3:9-10), giving freely and generously to the work of the Lord (Luke 6:38).

Money and things cannot heal the sin and brokenness in our lives. There is only one Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who invites us to come to Him to find fulfillment and rest for our weary and empty souls (Matthew 11:28-30). C.S. Lewis once said, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Materialism is a dead end.





WALK

Conversation Starters and Questions:

- Sit together as a family and read through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). As the passage is read aloud, have each family member jot down anything from Jesus' words that offer insight into how we are to view and manage money and wealth, along with insight into where one finds true meaning and satisfaction in life. Take time to discuss your observations.
- Tell your children about times in your own life when you had your hopes dashed by something material that did not fulfill as you imagined it would. Then, read and discuss Ecclesiastes 5:10.
- Evaluate any hopes and expectations for your children and teens that might be pushing them into a lifestyle of materialism. Adjust your hopes and expectations based on this definition of *success*: "True success in life is faithfulness to God and obedience to his commands, whether your net worth is 10 cents or 10 million dollars."
- Examine your own attitude toward money and things. Your example speaks loudly. Make adjustments where necessary in order to conform to God's will and way for material things.
- Look together for opportunities to readjust your family spending priorities in order to increase your monetary giving to missions organizations that provide spiritual and financial help to those in need.
- Discuss these words from John Wesley: "Work as hard as you can, to make all the money you can, to save as much as you can, in order to give away all that you can."
- Download and regularly use *The Simple Seven Ad Filtering Questions* available at cpyu.org. This tool allows families to engage in real-time evaluation of advertisements, helping you to think critically and Christianly about how marketing promotes an emptiness that only their product can fill.

<https://cpyu.org/resource/the-simple-seven-ad-filtering-questions-2/>

"What Jesus forbids his followers is the selfish accumulation of goods; extravagant and luxurious living; the hardheartedness which does not feel the colossal need of the world's under-privileged people; the foolish fantasy that a person's life consists in the abundance of his possessions; and the materialism which tethers our hearts to the earth."

– John Stott, Authentic Christianity, 242.



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