



Session 3: Stuff



Jesus is not against personal possessions and shopping should not be a guilty pleasure – but in a culture where shopping and acquiring more and more stuff has become an addiction, can we find a new approach?

Previous session review

- Recap on your experience of the previous challenge. How did it go? Was it helpful?
- If you weren't able to try the challenge, explore the question: Where and how did you experience God last week?

Read

Read the passage several times through, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section.

As you read, look out for shockers and blockers.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

Matthew 6.24-34

You cannot be the slave of two masters! You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing? Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth more than birds? Can worry make you live longer? Why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow. They don't work hard to make their clothes. But I tell you that Solomon with all his wealth wasn't as well clothed as one of them. God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields, even though it is here today and thrown into a fire tomorrow. He will surely do even more for you! Why do you have such little faith?

Don't worry and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?" Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all of these. But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well.

Don't worry about tomorrow. It will take care of itself. You have enough to worry about today.

Setting the scene:

- This selection of Scripture is part of the Sermon on the Mount – where Jesus taught on some of the most important aspects of daily life.
- A 'slave of two masters' touches on the theme of 'single-mindedness'. Whilst we can choose what to set our hearts on, material things or God – but we can't prioritise both.
- Money here can be taken to refer to all 'material possessions'.
- Jesus does not call us to be carefree, lazy or irresponsible. We are to provide for ourselves – even the birds have to search for food. But they do so without worry and anxiety.
- In these verses, Jesus sets out seven arguments and defences against worry. Worry is essentially the inability to trust God to provide what we require – including food, clothing and other needs. Our priority is to put God first in all things – this is the key to the entire sermon and the antidote to anxiety and worry.

Reflect

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your shockers and blockers. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

Q1. Are you a regular buyer of 'stuff'? Why is shopping (arguably) the no 1 leisure time activity of our era? How might you apply Jesus' teaching on money and anxiety in your life?

Q2. How have you seen God's provision in your life?

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'Having, first, gained all you can, and, secondly saved all you can, then give all you can.'

John Wesley

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Respond

Stuff challenge: As a group, create a challenge that will help you to live with a good attitude towards money and possessions or choose from the following:

Challenge ideas:

1. Generosity

This week, practice being generous as a way of gaining a better perspective on money and possessions. You can practice generosity by tipping double if you go out for a meal (without being flash about it!). You could buy cinema tickets for a friend. You could pay for the car behind you at the toll. The key is to do these things without showing off or making other people feel awkward. If you can, practice this secretly – deliver a bag of shopping or a gift to someone without leaving your details. You could order a gift online and have it delivered. You don't need to be extravagant, it is not about the value of the gift – it's about developing a loose hold on your stuff.

2. Check Your Balance

Spend some time this week analysing your spending habits. Look back at your bills and bank statements to get a view on where your cash is going – are you buying stuff you want or stuff that you need? Are you buying on impulse? How prepared would you be to show your bank statements to others? In the light of this, consider whether you could make better use of money.

3. Shared-ownership

Consider setting up a communal pool of items with a few others that could be shared rather than owned – for instance a communal lawnmower, laptop, bike, barbeque, car. We don't always need to own stuff; we could make arrangements to borrow stuff from each other as we require it. In doing so we promote community and enjoy the freedom of living more simply.

Group Prayer

You might like to commit to praying for each person in the group this week as you look to evaluate your attitude towards possessions.