



# HEALTH & WEALTH



# INTRODUCTION

...Everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

## 1 John 2:16-17

The world has its own promise, its own process, its own pattern for achieving *Health and Wealth*. We're raised and reared in this pattern; we grow up and apply ourselves to this process; and many of us hold out hope that the promise pays out in time. Some of us get ahead, others of us fall behind, and all of us are wondering which label (ahead or behind) fits us best. Have we acquired *Health and Wealth* – the “pride of life?”

In time, most of us discover for ourselves the wide cavity of this hollow lie. We find that a dressed-up self-image and more self-indulgent experience doesn't always equate to more health; more possessions and more money doesn't always bring us more wealth. However, these personal attachments, these obsessions of our culture – and their failure to bring lasting satisfaction – can lead us like early clues on a journey to discover our more fundamental longings, and a more substantial source for true and lasting *Health and Wealth*.



Over the next 4 weeks we will uncover those more fundamental longings and that more substantial source for true and lasting *Health and Wealth* in God. Each week we will start by looking at the common ways we, and our world, seek satisfaction by reflecting on the adverse pursuit of: money, vanity, materialism, and experience. Each day, we'll see how the teachings of God's Word correct and ultimately reorient some of the misplaced beliefs and feelings we harbor in these worldly pursuits. Sometimes there will be questions that help reveal undetected patterns of thinking, hidden desires in our hearts, and unhelpful habits we may unknowingly practice. We'll also engage in exercises that encourage us to pay attention to the ministry of God's Spirit within us as God seeks to redeem these pursuits or redirect their course.

Jesus came that we would have life, and have it to the *full*-true health, true wealth. We may not find ultimate victory in the next few weeks over "the world and its desires," but we can make ourselves more and more available to the redemptive work of God's Spirit. "The old has gone – the new is here!" Let's lay hold of the new work God wants to continue in our hearts and embrace for ourselves a greater portion of His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

**You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.**

**Psalm 16:11**





Week 1 | Day 1 **Money**

# GIVING GOD OUR WHOLE HEART

**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.**

## **Matthew 6:24**

It is impossible to serve God with your whole heart while also serving money. Jesus says it's flat-out impossible to do so. When both masters give conflicting orders, you are forced to make a choice and obey one, thereby despising the other. If we want to be people who serve God with our whole hearts, we **must** consider the power that money has as an authority over our lives and find out how to let go.

Take a moment to think about money. Think about the dreams, personal goals, luxuries, comforts, and securities that we often associate with the accumulation of wealth: buying that dream home in a safe location within a desirable school district; saving for a new car; becoming debt free; pursuing a comfortable retirement goal. Now, pause to consider Jesus' words once again: you cannot serve both God and money. Does that mean God wants us to abandon our dreams and pursuits? We won't know unless we ask. Perhaps He simply wants us to reconsider our dreams and pursuits in light of His dreams and desires for us.

Write down those personal financial goals that you've been holding. Are these goals that you've brought before God? Now consider prayerfully what additional goals or changes to your goals the Lord might have for you and write those down. Close your time in a prayer of gratitude for all that God has provided. Open yourself up to Jesus as your one true master and entrust your heart to Him alone.



Week 1 | Day 2 **Money**

## MORE MONEY MORE PROBLEMS

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. 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.

### 1 Timothy 6:9-10

Although commonly misquoted as “money is the root of all evil,” Paul asserts that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” There is an important distinction between money itself and the love of money. The Scriptures are clear that the **use** of money – when guided by the love of God – can be a powerful resource for the growth of God’s Kingdom and the nurturing of our souls. In contrast, the **love** of money is a seed of rot that when watered produces all sorts of harmful results on our spiritual lives and the lives of others. Ultimately, the accumulation of wealth as a means to provide security



and control over our lives, and the traps of seeking happiness and comfort in our bank accounts, will only distance us from our loving Father.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 5:10

Where do you see the love of money taking root in your own heart? Is there an eagerness for it? A preoccupation concerning your abundance or lack? Do you find yourself content with what you have or perpetually dissatisfied? Maybe you feel completely disengaged from either the positive or negative use of money. Write down some of your thoughts that are generated by these questions.

In prayer, ask God to do by His Spirit what you may not be able to do yourself: remove the possible root from your heart that is the love of money. Whether you find that such a root is there or not, invite God, in a place of openness, to plant a new work in you – a new view of money and one that will produce lasting and life-giving fruit.

# TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR FINANCES

Begin your devotional time today with prayer, inviting God into all of the feelings that you have regarding money. Allow God to meet you right in the middle of all your fears and doubts. Ask Him for the peace and freedom that comes from putting your complete trust in your Heavenly Father to provide for all your needs, even when you may not have the answers.

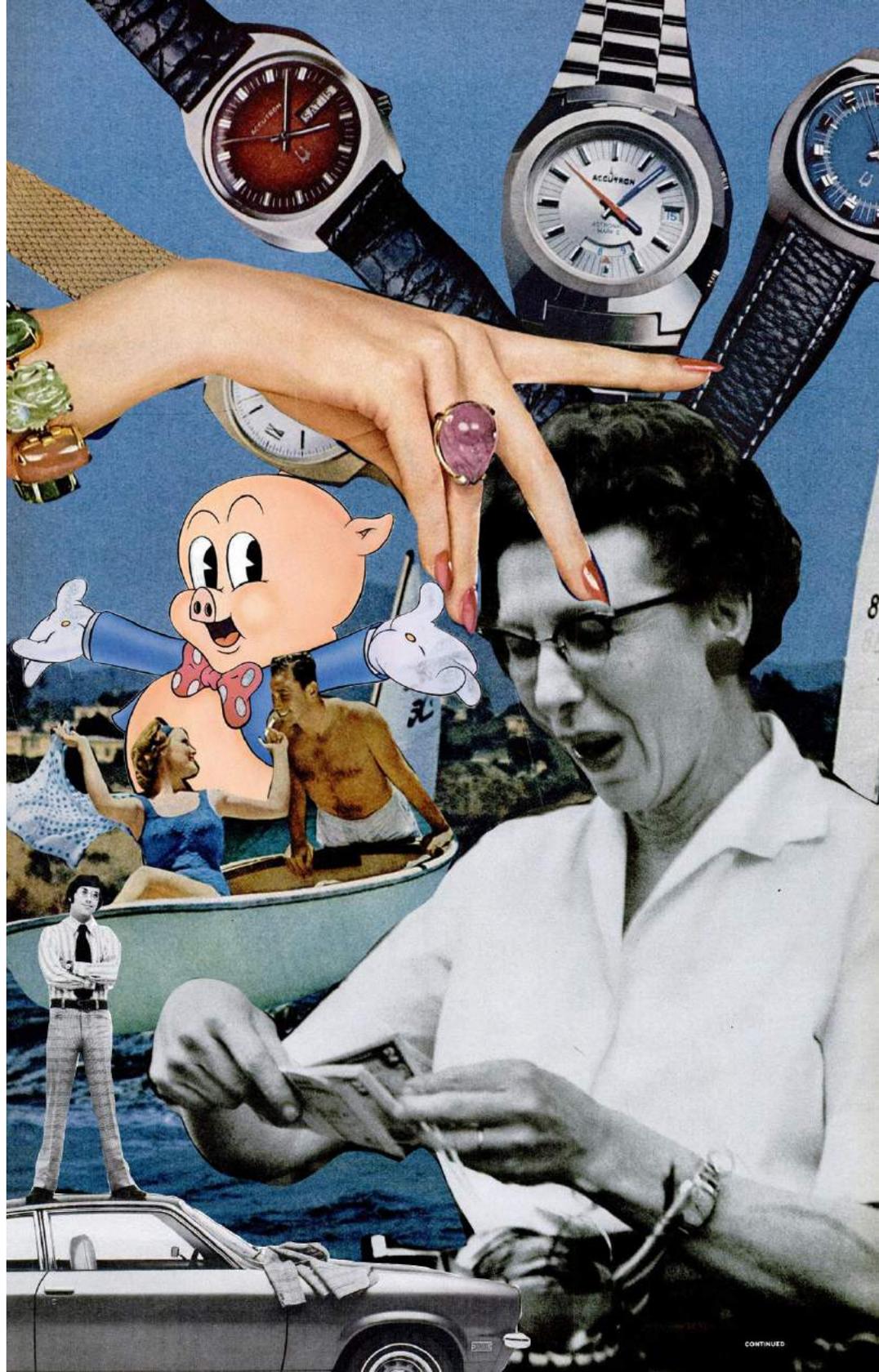
**Read:** Mark 12:41-44

Jesus looked beyond the dollar amounts that people gave to God in the temple offering box, but rather focused on the personal cost of their gifts to God. When the poor widow put in two small copper coins worth a penny it represented her entire net worth. Jesus points out that though her gift was smaller than the others, it was worth more in God's eyes than all the other large sums of money that were given out of abundance.

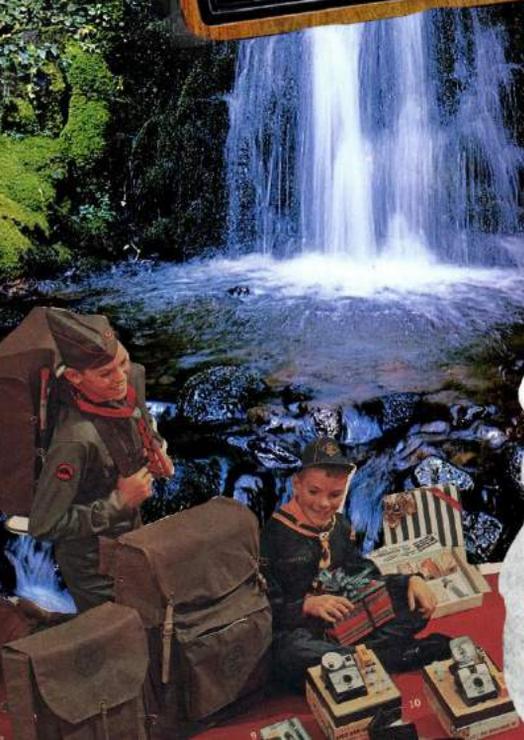
The truth is we don't have to possess a lot of money for God to be pleased with our sacrifices, but we do require a heart that's willing to release what we have for a purpose bigger than ourselves. Jesus isn't commanding everyone to give up all they have through the example of the widow, but He is inviting us to marvel with Him at the courage and devotion of this woman who gave to God "all she had to live on."

Prayerfully close your eyes and imagine yourself in the place of the widow Jesus talks about here in Mark 12. Imagine in your hands your whole net worth, the combined balances of your bank account. What you now see is the equivalent of the gift of this widow. Could you place it before God as an offering and leave it there? Imagine yourself doing so. What do you feel as you walk away? Hesitation, fear, or regret? Freedom, joy, and satisfaction? Over the next 5 minutes, pray and invite Invite God into these feelings and ask Him to identify the deeper reasons why your heart goes where it does. When you've finished praying, write down some words, thoughts, or images that came to mind.

The purpose of this exercise is neither to elicit feelings of guilt nor self-righteousness, but to help you identify where your heart is in relation to your wealth. Whether you feel a close association with the widow, or completely removed from her example of generosity, accept where you are in the grace of Christ and invite God to lead you to a place of greater devotion.



**GIFTS!**



# SHOWING LOVE THROUGH GENEROSITY

**Read:** Matthew 25:31-46

Many of us often dream of the multitude of ways we can employ our money in service to ourselves or those closest to us, but we miss out on the myriad of ways wealth can be employed for the grand purposes of God. In Matthew 25 Jesus gives a practical lesson to illustrate the various scenarios where people need our wealth more than we do: providing food to the hungry or water to the thirsty; welcoming the outcast and strangers into our lives and even our homes; providing clothes to those in need of clothing and warmth; caring for those who are sick; and visiting those who are in prison. In each of these scenarios, the focus is on the needs of others, rather than our own wants and desires. Furthermore, Jesus declares that these earthly acts of generosity and grace are of eternal significance and represent ways we can practically express our love for Him as Lord.

The ultimate picture of God's love for us is demonstrated through an action. Because God loved the world, He proved it by **giving** His only Son as an offering in our place. God gave the most costly and generous gift He possibly could, in order to show His great love for us. Similarly, we demonstrate the true motives and love in our hearts through our actions (or inactions) as we generously give those resources to the eternal work of God's Kingdom.

**Read:** Luke 16:9

Realistically, we cannot meet every need around us, but each of us is called by God to see our resources as tangible ways we can bless individuals, and likewise, bless God Himself. Close today in prayer asking God to show you who in your life needs to be blessed through the resources He has entrusted to you. After some reflection, write down these opportunities to demonstrate this love to meet the needs of those around you. For those that came to mind, what is at least one tangible or actionable way you can practice generosity toward them (whether a family member, friend, neighbor, or person you come across each day)? Pray that God would increasingly lead you to dream of the nearly infinite ways your money can be utilized to bless others for an eternal purpose, and that He would help you release some of your personal wants for the sake of loving others.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

## 2 Corinthians 9:6-8



Week 1 | Day 5 Money

# GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

**Read:** Matthew 6:19-21

The answer is simple and yet so elusive for many of us. We are called to let go of the false sense of security, control, or comfort that money provides. We are called to let go of the fear, dissatisfaction, and strife that often accompanies a striving for more wealth than we currently possess. Your Father created the heavens and the earth, including money itself, and is most certainly capable of maintaining control over your struggles and needs in life. God wants to be your true source of comfort and joy, that we may be a people of contentment in His presence alone – a people freed to the life of generosity and grace for which we were created.

Many in our world want to get rich, but Paul and Jesus both remind us that there are eternal realities that are more valuable than money. To live generously is to open ourselves to receive – to receive the blessings God wants to grant us, the cheer that comes in giving, and the abundance in every



good work. Do we want to get to the end of our life amassing larger digits on a screen or piles of paper in a lockbox at the bank, or do we want to overflow with the riches of a life lived expressing the love and grace of God? Maybe your relationship with money doesn't feel that simple, but instead you've discovered a more deeply held belief and attachment in your heart. In that case the better question may be: do we want to live a life motivated by fear, lacking trust, and consumed by an endless search for security, or do we want to receive the continual comfort of our Father in Heaven who openly invites us to rest from our worries and find ultimate satisfaction in Him?

Close this week reflecting on how your views on money have changed as a result of your prayer times and the study of God's Word. Ask that God would solidify the work He has begun or continued in your heart. Ask Him to identify next steps. Maybe you are going to be led to realign your long-term financial priorities; maybe you will rewrite your weekly/monthly budget; maybe you will get coffee or lunch with a friend and share what you've learned in order to encourage him/her and produce a greater accountability. Whatever the Lord leads you to do, take action, and ask that He would continue to be the source of your security and confidence as He leads you in a life of pursuing true and eternal wealth.



# TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

What do you see when you look in the mirror?

In a city where there are roughly 20 gyms, 14 tanning salons, and 8 plastic surgeons, it's not hard to experience the pressure to be and stay a desirable person in the eyes of others. How we look and, sometimes more importantly, how we are perceived by others can often result in an overemphasis on managing our external image. It's easy to get lost in the game of comparison. Whether it's our pant size, diet, salary, car we drive, or job title, we can find ourselves striving to project our idealized self. While physical fitness and good health remain important practices that respect the body God gave us, we must be cautious of the excessive focus on physical presentation and image so often promoted in our culture at large.

We see in Romans 12 that in response to Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross we are invited to new life in the Lord as living sacrifices – a transformative renewal that includes the way we think and what we value. In this (lifelong) process, God will remove the pattern of the world's values and its perceptions so naturally ingrained in our thinking, replacing them with values and perceptions that originate in Him and His Word as we submit ourselves to the work of His Spirit. In this week's readings and exercises, we'll participate in that process by walking in the truth of this passage, re-examining our focus on our self-image from an eternal perspective.

Take 10 minutes to prayerfully reflect on Romans 12:1-2. Try to spend half the time in silence to quiet your heart and mind while you sit in the presence of the Lord – if our mind is going to be renewed we need the ability to hear God's voice beyond the dialogue we often keep with ourselves, and the noise of the culture around us. If you find your mind wandering, slowly read over Romans 12:1-2 again. What is God revealing to you in these verses?

Close by inviting God to use your devotional times this week to begin the process of transforming the metrics you keep regarding your self-worth. Additionally, take a few moments to write down any thoughts, reflections, or specific prayers that arose during your time in the Scriptures.

## Week 2 | Day 2 Vanity

# WHAT YOU SEE VS. WHAT GOD SEES

**Read:** 1 Samuel 16:1-13

God sends the prophet Samuel to anoint a new king of Israel after He rejected the current king, Saul. Samuel arrives at the house of Jesse in Bethlehem where he meets Eliab. Eliab is not only the oldest son, but he is also described as attractive and tall. Naturally, Samuel thinks that he must be the man God has chosen. However, in contrast to Samuel's assumption, God declares His true criteria for selecting the next king.

Samuel was quick to assume Eliab as the next leader. By all of society's standards, he fit the make-up of a strong king: mature, tall, and attractive. But God sees forgotten David in the fields tending the flock. He sees beyond the external – He sees *who* David is, not simply the way he looks. David's status and appearance had absolutely no bearing on him being chosen by God to be the next king. The values in his heart were what caught God's attention.

Like Samuel, this supposedly "spiritual" prophet of God, we can become distracted if not obsessed by the external standards of beauty and success—fighting for that next promotion or starving for that last five pounds. We may even judge others based on those same empty standards. God is distinct from these fruitless examinations; society's standards are not the standards of God.

So, let that truth sink in and let it continue to renew your mind: God sees you, not for your appearance, your status, or the image you project, but as you are within your character and your heart.

Spend some time reflecting on 1 Samuel 16:7 and conclude your time in prayer. How have you been overly concerned with how you appear before others or judged others based on their appearances? Write down some thoughts.

Now, share your thoughts with the Lord and commit yourself to the grace of Christ. Pray that God would continue to free you from the standards of society that emphasize the external appearance of things and possibly even your own deeply held beliefs and fears regarding your appearance and your value. Ask that He would lead you to see yourself and others as He does. Know that your appearance and image may wrongly disqualify you in the eyes of others, but nothing can separate you from the love of God in that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

When you think about it...



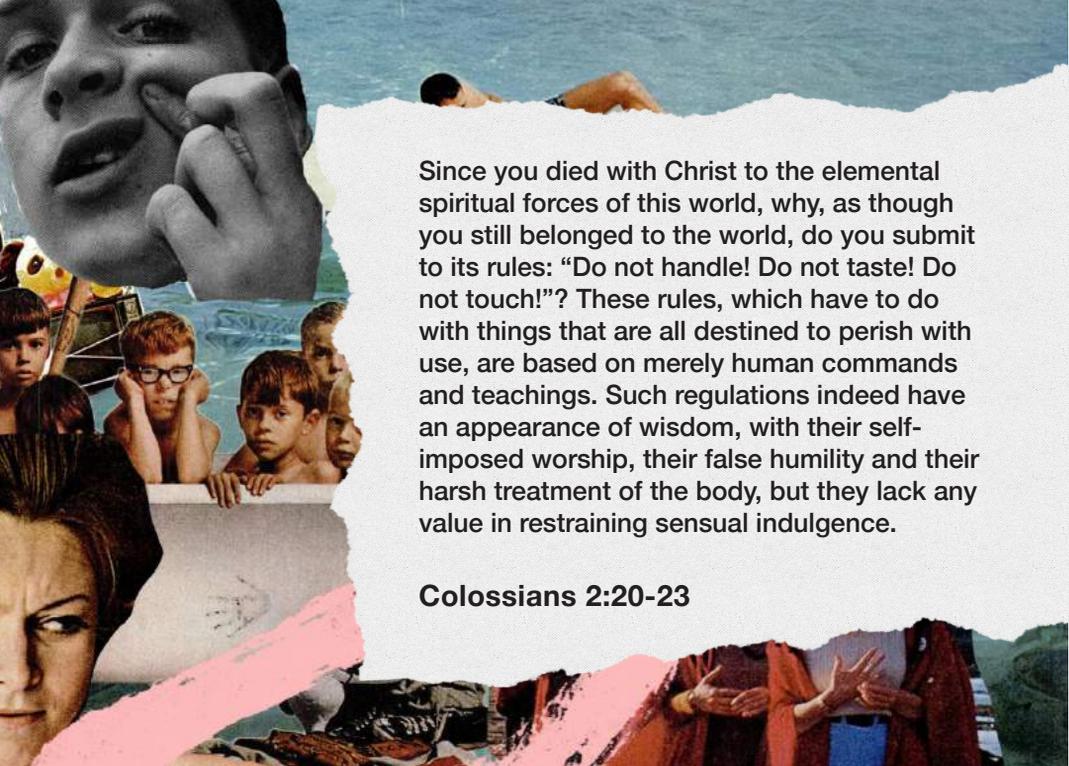


Week 2 | Day 3 **Vanity**

## THE DANGER OF BECOMING SPIRITUALLY “SKINNY-FAT”

There’s a term for people who appear outwardly healthy but aren’t. It’s called “skinny-fat.” A skinny-fat person looks healthy (because he/she is skinny), but they are actually unhealthy beneath the surface. It’s already been established that our culture often values the external image above true character and heart, but it appears that this danger exists even for those who make up God’s church. Paul writes in Colossians to identify this skinny-fat problem in the spirituality of the Christians of that community.

We all have the potential to be, in a spiritual sense, “skinny-fat,” possessing an overemphasis on the spiritual image we project within our church community. We have to consider: How much time do we spend projecting good health, success, spiritual maturity, or popularity? Is there only the appearance of wisdom in our lives? Whether it’s through social media,



Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

### **Colossians 2:20-23**

Christmas card updates, reunions at school or with family, or even on Sundays at church – we can hide our true selves behind the shroud of an oversized sweatshirt of “skinniness.”

Paul is warning the church of Colossae of the serious dangers of such practices. The “spiritual disciplines” the people are giving themselves to are vanity; they appear spiritual but mean nothing to God. Instead, the church must learn to reject the external standards of their community, the “rules” as it were, of their neighbors. They must seek a deeper transformation at the core of who they are beyond empty religious practice.

Spend time in prayer, both speaking and listening to God regarding your spiritual health, and considering the following:

- Are there any areas in your life that you present an image of spiritual health where you are actually lacking?
- What is your motivation for projecting this false self? What would happen if you stopped worrying about your image and aimed for a more substantial transformation of your character and heart instead?

# JUST A VENEER OR THE REAL DEAL

In the days of Paul – as well as at all times – people have sought to adorn themselves in a way that speaks to their value and worth. There’s no doubt that the more affluent areas of America are bastions of beauty and fashion, seeking the same ends as the audience of Paul’s letter. Whether it’s that new car, more makeup, or bigger biceps, we are tempted to invest in the ornaments of our lives rather than the substance of it. Though Paul specifically addresses women in 1 Timothy 2 with this corrective word, the message is just as poignant for the well-groomed and material-laden 21st century man – set aside the external and embrace the inner image we were created to reflect, that is, the image of God.

Genesis 1:27 states, “...God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” That isn’t taken to mean that we physically appear as a reflection of God’s physique. Rather, it means our heart, mind, character, and nature were made to share their essential being with God Himself. To neglect this supreme purpose and pursue external projections simply puts a paint job on rotten wood. Paul in 1 Timothy 2 is essentially saying, “let the natural beauty shine through” as we embrace the heart of God through the practice of good deeds.

In prayer before God, imagine a world where the inside essential nature of people was visible on the outside. Would the people we parade around as beautiful and desirable in our media and culture really be what they are projected to be? What would the world look like? Where could you go to find true beauty? Ask God to give you such eyes for yourself and others.

The world as we know it, our very bodies, and the ornaments that we adorn them with are all ultimately passing away. Though we have a responsibility to respect the creation of God that is our physical body, consider before God in prayer how you might practically deemphasize the external image you project and instead magnify His image by clothing yourself with the character and deeds of Christ. Write down what steps you can take.





# APPEARING IN GLORY

**Read:** Colossians 3:1-4

We all feel the pull of gravity attaching our feet to the earth. If we jump, it pulls us right back down – that’s just the nature of the forces around us. Likewise, when we attempt to live into the truth of Romans 12, to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, it seems we often can be pulled almost by gravity back to old patterns and ways of thinking in the world. We often see this is true in the patterns many of us have in managing our physical and spiritual self-image.

Paul tells us in Colossians 3 that we are to “set our mind on things above,” the things of Christ, rather than upon earthly things. Being on earth, driven by what we can see and touch, often pulls our values in a direction away from God. Paul says we must possess an intentionality that reaches higher, we must actively press our thinking toward the reality of who we are in Christ apart from what the world may say of us. We are no longer resigned to chase the appearances of success or attractiveness that may temporarily gain us the fickle approval of others or even our most critical selves. Who we are is now hidden in Christ away from this exhausting pageantry and we now are open to receive in Jesus the promise that we will one day soon *appear with Him in glory*.

In prayer, commit your self-image and your self-worth to Christ. Ask Him to continue to peel back the layers of cultural and spiritual vanity and replace them with the substance of His heart and character.

What have you learned through this week’s study? What is God renewing in you? What patterns will you leave behind? Write these things down as reminders and ask for the help of God’s Spirit to aid you in the daily work of setting your mind on the things above. Close by reading Colossians 3:1-17 and find refuge in Christ “who is your life.”



# FIGMENT OF OUR IMAGINATION

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

## Psalm 135:15-18

Materialism – this may be a familiar term, but if we take time to revisit the dictionary definition and consider its impact on our Spiritual journey, the reality of the behavior is quite frightening. According to Webster, materialism is “a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values.” This tendency essentially causes empty objects fashioned by our hands to function as sources of our security, hope, and meaning.



We live in a world filled with material goods; from necessities to pleasantries, daily we find ourselves using, interacting, and inundated with *things*. And while culture tells us we need evermore of these *things*, Scripture tells a different story.

As Psalm 135 illustrates, man-made objects possess no real power and their significance to us is a figment of our own imaginations. As we'll see over the course of this week, God is eager to provide for us our every material need so we have no reason to fear, to trust in, or run after the overabundance of material goods. We can instead enjoy the peace and security that comes from knowing and trusting in our God who can truly save and provide us with the security, hope, and meaning we're all seeking.

Take some time to make a list of your things – all the things you own that you most value and would be angered or grieved if lost or broken. Also, list out any things you presently want, but don't possess.

Close your time in prayer, starting with gratitude for the blessings God has given you. Ask that God would begin to reveal the material idols in your life over the course of this week, revealing also their emptiness. Pray that God would help release you from the all-to-typical pattern of striving for more stuff, and help you discover where to find true security, hope, and meaning.



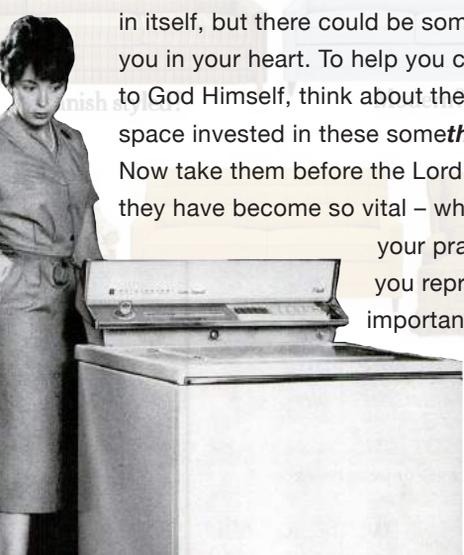
# LOOSENING OUR GRIP

**Read:** Luke 17:26-35

In this passage, Jesus reminds us that when the Kingdom of God comes into fulfillment, we are to drop *everything* in order to embrace the abundant and eternal life that is promised in Him. The warning that Jesus has regarding the people's relationship to their possessions on the day of His return is not meant to tell us that all possessions are bad; we all have possessions and Jesus acknowledges that fact, just as all of us are living our daily lives like the people in this passage. The real problem arises when those items hold more importance for us, more value for us, more attachment for us than the reality of Christ's Lordship. In Luke 17 Jesus warns us that upon His unexpected return, our true values get revealed, and He invites us to anticipate His return as a means of scrutinizing our own attachment to our things.

In prayer and reflection for 5-10 minutes, imagine yourself in the account that Jesus gives us in Luke 17. Imagine you're the one outside your house, or you're the one in the field. As "the Son of Man is revealed," suddenly you find yourself having the urge to go and retrieve something. What are you tempted to go and get? What are the first items that come to mind?

Having finished this exercise and with the certainty of eternity in mind, consider: what things in your life seem to be carrying more value, more importance, and holding more attachment in your heart than other people or even God Himself? The possession of these things may not be wrong in itself, but there could be something amiss in what they have become to you in your heart. To help you consider their importance to you in relation to God Himself, think about the amount of time, money, energy, or mental space invested in these **somethings**. Write down and name these items. Now take them before the Lord and ask God to help you understand why they have become so vital – what meaning do they hold in your heart? End your prayer time by asking God to continue to help you reprioritize what you value, either reordering the importance of certain possessions or by helping you to remove their hold entirely from your heart.



# WORRY AND OUR WELFARE

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

**Matthew 6:25-27**

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6 that we do not have to spend our life worrying about our basic provisions, for our Heavenly Father promises to sustain us. He tells us that we do not have to be anxious about the things we do or do not have, for He values us highly. As an all-powerful and providing Father, He calls us to trust Him for everything we need. Living this out is easier said than done, especially as many of us have encountered hardships throughout the course of life that have left a mark of fear on us emotionally. Even if you moved past those times of hardship, consider how much energy and concern went toward your fears and “what-if’s” in those times? How much help did your worry bring you?

Our anxieties can often be more naturally traced to a scarcity of possessions,





## Week 3 | Day 4 **Materialism**

# SHARING IS CARING

**Read:** Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35

Many of us utilize Craigslist and host garage sales typically in an effort to clear out unneeded items, and quite frankly, get rid of the junk that just seems to naturally pile up over time. Can you imagine selling things you don't want to give up? Watching prized possessions leave in the hands of someone else? That very thing was occurring in Acts – the people were giving up things that still possessed a great deal of value – it's just that those possessions suddenly weren't as prized.

This freedom from material attachments seems to be a direct consequence and outflow of the multitudes receiving the good news about Jesus in Acts. Suddenly and drastically, the way that the early Christians related to their possessions changed and the mission of God and the work of Christ's love became more vital than amassing property and material goods. This wasn't some sort of forced communism the people were experiencing, but it was a reflection of their own willingness and generosity to release their things to care for their brothers and sisters in the church.

Prayerfully consider for yourself if your faith in Christ has led to a different outlook on material possessions. Do you find you are less attached to your things or driven in the same way to possess things like the culture around you? Is there anything valuable the Lord would call you to give up or sell in order to further the Kingdom or as an expression of generosity or love to someone in need? Write down those items. Ask God, by His Spirit, to give you the courage and boldness to give generously and free yourself from any unhealthy material attachments.





## Week 3 | Day 5 **Materialism**

# HAND IT OVER

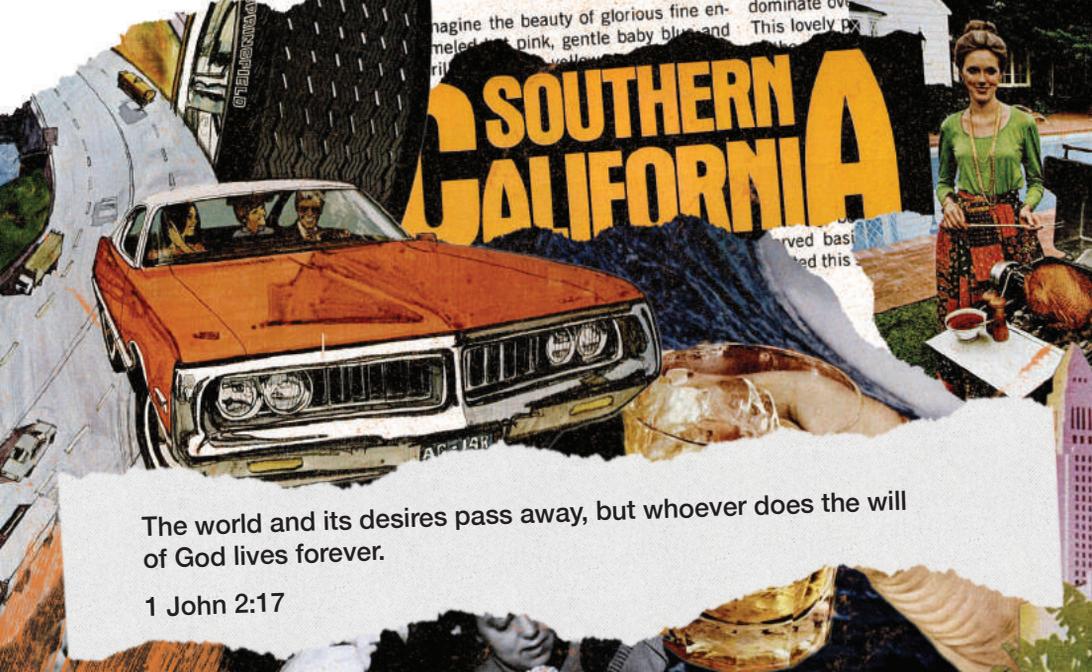
**Read:** Luke 12:13-15

Possessions and the want of possessions can divide people. Whether it's stories of people's families that disintegrate over someone winning the lottery, friendships ruined by the invitation into multi-level-marketing schemes, or brothers and sisters arguing over the division of their inheritance like here in Luke 12 – the seeking of material goods can often divide us and make us lose the plot.

Jesus tells us, "A man's life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Like we discovered in the first day of this week's study, created things have no life or breath in the them, no capacity or power to give us the security, control, and meaning we desire. Jesus is right to remind us, no matter how many things we have, the substance of our life is not synonymous in any way with what we acquire or possess. If we have a little, this fact might encourage us; if we have a lot, it may be sobering.

Material goods can also unite when we move from valuing our things to valuing God and others above them. The exercise of generosity and sharing akin to the life and love of Jesus frees us from cycles of anxiety and fruitless ambitions associated with the hoarding we're often tempted to practice. May God continue to aid us by His Spirit to be free of our worries and released to the love of people over our possessions!

As you close your time in prayer, read Psalm 139 and open yourself to receive the most treasured blessing mentioned throughout this Psalm: the nearness of God.



The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:17

## Week 4 | Day 1 Experience

# TASTE AND SEE

Experience has become a commodity. Paradoxically, as we spend more time isolated with our technology, our craving for adventure, newness, and improvement has only increased. TV commercials, billboards, and social media ads are all fighting for our attention and trying to sell us a feeling, a world of different possibilities. An Instagram-worthy vacation, a remote music festival, a new restaurant, an exercise regimen that promises to deliver new results, a conference that will change your life. We want to experience it all.

There are also darker things that try to sell us an experience. Drugs and alcohol offer a way to escape reality and cope with the pain of difficult circumstances. Faced with the flaws of our partner, some of us may seek out new relationships to try to experience the excitement of a budding romance again and again. Even as Christians we can also be tempted by the pursuit of experience. Our worship times and gatherings can sometimes lean toward catering to an emotional experience rather than a genuine devotion to God. We can find ourselves chasing a spiritual high, wondering whether we can be close to God in the “real world.”

But what if there was something better to experience than what this world can



offer? The psalmist writes, “Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the one who takes refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8). God has something better to offer those that remain in Him. That’s not to say life is a breeze for Christians. Most of us can attest to the fact that our real-world experiences are often hard and at times overwhelming. But the experience that God has to offer is far superior to what this world can offer.

In a posture of honest confession and prayer, if experience could be considered a commodity, do you believe it is a commodity that you are seeking? Do you find that you’re driven by that next vacation, that next dinner out, or that general craving for adventure? More seriously, do you find yourself using alcohol, sex, and drugs as a means of release and escape? Be honest before God in confession and write down those experiential commodities and any questions or thoughts that come up as a result of your prayer time.

Close by inviting God to help you by His Spirit on this journey, that He would lead you in the coming days to more fully *experience* that He is good. The experience He wants to take you on may not be seen so much as a commodity to be possessed, but the essence of true and lasting life. In prayer, receive with gratitude this invitation to discover the “abundant life” of Christ for yourself.

# CHASING AFTER THE WIND

We live in a culture saturated by the pursuit of experience. We often find ourselves addicted to the things that bring us comfort. Here are some interesting statistics:

- The average person checks his/her phone 110 times per day
- 50% of people admit to feeling uneasy when leaving their phone at home
- 70% of Netflix users binge-watch shows, with 37% binge-watching at work
- 61% of 12th graders have tried alcohol and 1 in 4 have used marijuana
- The average American spends 156 minutes per day watching TV and only 16 minutes relaxing and thinking

Do you see a trend here?

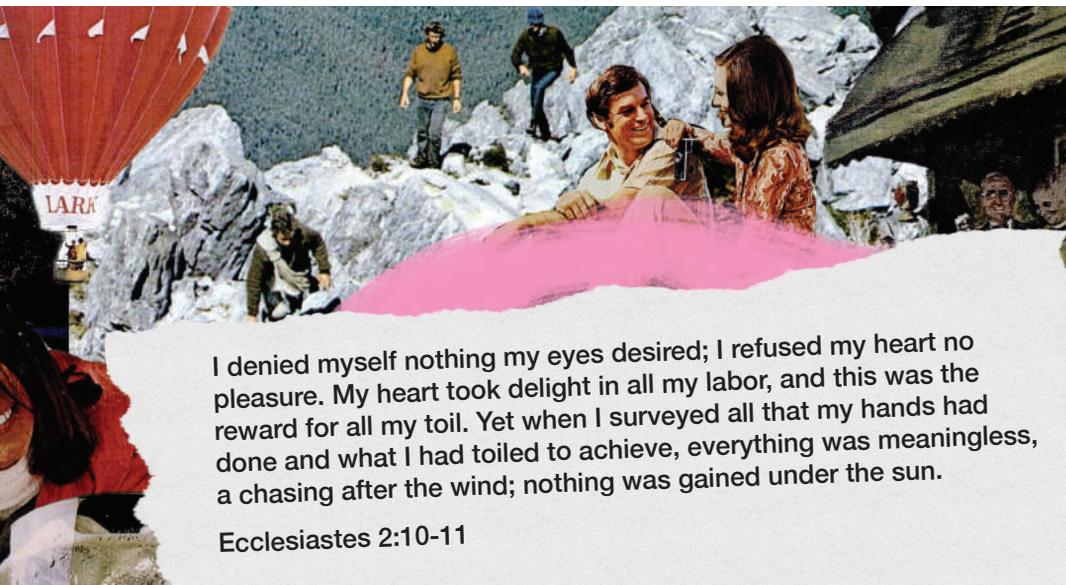
Many of us are wrapped up in an experience that takes us away from what's right in front of us. Often times, our families, friends, and jobs are all affected by our constant pursuit of distractions, comfort, and pleasure. Wrestling with this sense of there being more to life than the world's diversions, the writer of Ecclesiastes gives insight to the pursuit of worldly experience – he denied himself no experience the world had to offer, and yet he found in the end he had gained nothing.



Jesus says if we are to be His disciples we must “deny ourselves” and follow Him. This message of Christ stands in stark contrast to our culture; the world around us is constantly inviting us into a life of self-indulgence. Do we find ourselves buying the lie that by indulging our every desire we will find satisfaction? Or do we actually believe that we can *experience a more satisfying life* in obedience to Christ’s example? Maybe at this point, you’re still honestly questioning what that more satisfying life might even entail. We’ll explore that more in the days to come.

For now, consider in prayer: are there currently any areas of your life where you are practicing self-denial for the sake of Christ? List them out if you are able to identify any. Are there any areas where God is calling you to exercise more restraint? Any experiences God is calling you to set aside that may be absorbing too much of your effort, time, and money? Ask God to reveal to you how those pursuits may be giving you the appearance of value but are actually “chasing after the wind.” Write them down.

God doesn’t want to just rob us of all enjoyment, but He does want us to consider the sources of the joy we experience in life, and if they are truly life-giving, if they constitute empty gain, or if they fall somewhere in-between. Close by receiving the empowering grace of Christ to give you strength to address the areas of your life that require growth and ask for wisdom as you continue to seek Him this week.



I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

## Week 4 | Day 3 Experience

# CAN'T BUY ME LOVE

**Read:** Luke 16:19-31

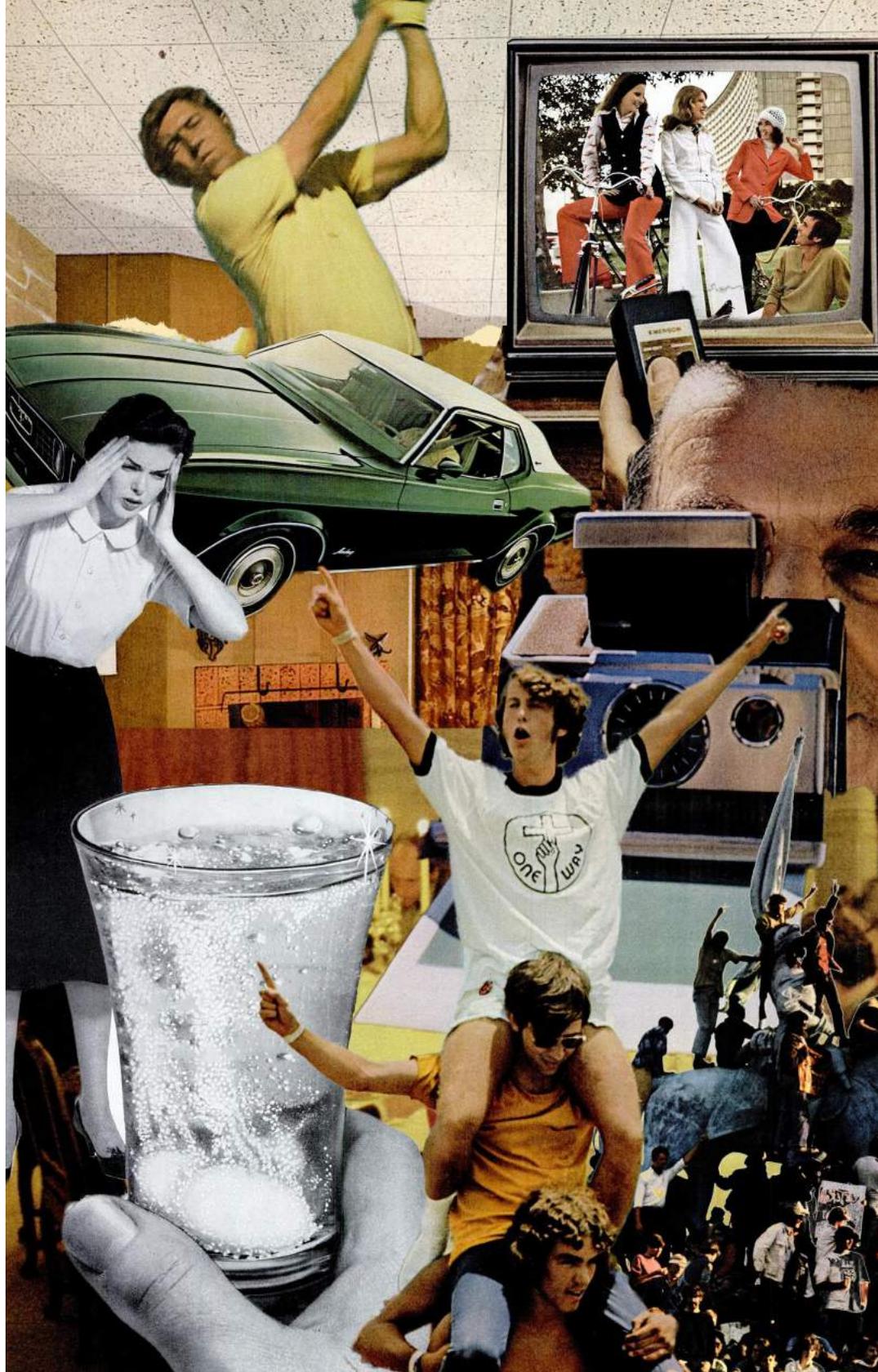
The story depicts a man who had everything and every experience life could offer, yet he still finds himself missing the point. The rich man was seeking out the pleasures of life while ignoring the life that God was calling him into. A beggar, who would have been a complete outcast in that time and completely ignored, had in the end found more favor with God.

To say that he found favor with God because he was poor is oversimplifying things. But what if God is trying to show us that the life of the rich man – a life of exclusively pursuing our own comfort and selfish gain – is worthless? Jesus says as much elsewhere when He says, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Your response to all of this may be frustration or a feeling of conviction. You may be asking why it's so bad to have a good life with some luxuries. Jesus isn't saying all of these things are evil in and of themselves. Instead, he is urging us to reach for something far greater and far more rewarding. All of the rich man's answers for finding real and lasting gain were within arm's reach in the poor man's pain.

Paul tells us in the letter to the Galatians, “Carry each other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2). Bearing the burdens of others is an *experience* of substance, one in which we fulfill the law of Christ to love one another. The rich man only loved himself, so he found himself isolated in death. How can we leverage our personal comforts in life to minister to others and so experience the love of Christ flowing through us?

In prayer, ask God to lay on your heart those around you who have needs and are, like the poor man to the rich man, within your arm's reach? Write those names down. How is God inviting you the step into their experience and so help them bear the burdens they carry? We all have burdens ourselves, but God wants to relieve our own burdens by sharing love with another. If it is daunting for you to step into the needs of another then ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to do what you naturally resist and to help you establish healthy boundaries as you give to others.





## Week 4 | Day 4 Experience

# LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

We've spent some time exploring and evaluating our own lives and how our pursuit of experience may be interfering with our life in Christ and our mission to love others. Obviously, life isn't meant to be lived as a vegetable, sitting around and experiencing nothing. What if there was a way to redeem or repurpose our experiences in partnership with God and the work of His kingdom?

**Read:** Galatians 5:13-26

Paul describes the difference between living for the flesh, or the world, and living by the Spirit. Look at some of the words he describes life in the Spirit as: freedom, peace, joy, goodness, and kindness. These are the fruits of the Spirit. They build us up rather than tear us down. They allow us to experience the potential that God has for us and to be an extension of God's love in this world. They allow us to extend the kingdom of Heaven here on Earth – “on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

Many of us often find ourselves hungry for more self-gratifying experiences in life, and in reading the Scriptures, it can feel like God wants to rob us of



those pleasures. This passage in Galatians makes it clear: the practice and expression of love in our lives leads us to countless ways we can experience the fullness of life. What if we were a people who didn't just dream of the infinite ways we can serve ourselves, but the infinite ways we can serve one another? In serving one another we can discover a deeper more lasting pleasure and satisfaction in our lives, a pleasure and satisfaction that resides in relationships and in the love of God we were created to reflect.

In prayer, re-read the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. These are evidences the Spirit is with us and guiding us. They are also qualities that mark loving relationships. Ask that God would increase the *experience* of these qualities within you, enriching you deep within your heart, and overflowing into expressions to others around you. Are there any qualities that God wants you to particularly lay hold of as you go through your days and life experiences "keeping in step with the Spirit"? Which of these aspects do you find lacking in your life or character?

Spend a few moments in prayer asking God to help you understand why this is an area of struggle for you. Close by asking for God to continue to lead you in your experience of this day, or your day tomorrow, leading you as you intentionally follow Him on the mission to bring a taste of Heaven to Earth.

# ALL IN HIS NAME

Over the course of this week, we've processed what it looks like to live for experiences of the world in contrast to the a more substantial life lived for, and with, God. This journey is not meant to be a short one, rather it's a constant progression of awareness through life as we grow and mature. Today's choice of stepping into life in the Spirit can look different from tomorrow's. Furthermore, this journey is not meant to be walked alone. We have the opportunity to step into life in the Spirit together as community. Let this passage encourage you:

**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.**

## **Colossians 3:15-16**

As you are choosing to shift your daily habits to prioritize a life centered on God, fight the temptation to keep it to yourself. Share it with your community and family. God invites us into an experience of freedom, joy, and peace **together**. You're not alone. God is with you and we, as the church, are all in this together.

End your time in this devotional in prayer. Taking careful time to walk through this past week with God. Acknowledge the ways in which your heart may have shifted. Take joy in the transformation that may be taking place!

To cap this week's journey, share your experience with someone close to you. Take them out to coffee or invite them over for dinner. Tell them the ways you may be reorienting your life in order to experience greater life and freedom in Christ. Celebrate with each other and enjoy one of life's richest blessings – our relationships with one another!



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