

1 WHAT IS MATERIALISM?

IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THE FOLLOWING:

- *A Godless Quest for Meaning*
 - *The Behavior of the Materialist*
 - *The Destructive Power of Materialism on a Global Scale*
 - *How to Solve This Dilemma*
-

A GODLESS QUEST FOR MEANING

Human existence is often characterized by the endless search for meaning and affirmation. World civilizations have developed religions and cultural traditions meant to help find meaning in an often chaotic environment. From Greek myths to the Hindu pantheon of gods, we have consistently looked to a higher power or force to give us a sense of purpose and explain our existence. In the contemporary global era, however, a new god has taken our attention, a god not really recognized as a god at all, but viewed as the summation of human achievement. Today, people on a mass scale worship wealth—its acquisition and maintenance. As the apostle Paul said in his letter to the Romans, we have “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man” (Romans 1:23). The contemporary, godless religion through which we seek to attain wealth is called materialism.

THE BEHAVIOR OF THE MATERIALIST

Materialism is an outwardly benevolent force that becomes increasingly destructive inwardly as people pursue it. Being financially prosperous becomes the goal of our lives, and we put every human institution and aspect of our existence to work for us as we seek to

acquire and maintain wealth. Other people become commodities. We associate only with those who can provide us the easiest, quickest, and most assured path toward wealth and fame. We ignore and devalue the poor, and build working relationships with investors, stockbrokers, lawyers, doctors, and politicians—all because we are never satisfied with what we have and continue to seek more.

AN UNHAPPY LIFE

The life of the materialist is actually quite an unhappy one, despite appearances. We all have known someone obsessed with appearing successful, driving the finest automobiles, building grand homes and mansions, rings on every finger, wearing the latest fashions. Every conversation is somehow directed toward money and possessions, whether it be to tell us about a new boat or car they just acquired or to celebrate a business merger that is bringing huge returns. There is an unhappy, unhealthy fixation. We can see it in their eyes; they speak endlessly about these things that define the value of their lives. Without such things, materialist feels lost and empty. If all they possessed disappeared tomorrow, they would be left with no ground to stand on. This fear produces unbelievable stress in materialists' lives, and they often take desperate measures to hold on to their wealth.

THE SUBTLE DEVALUING OF LIFE

Materialists often typecast some people as disposable because of their place on the financial food chain. Bank tellers, grocery store clerks, waiters and waitresses, and road crews are merely means to an end. This attitude becomes so pervasive and ingrained that the materialist may not even realize he is speaking to and dealing with human beings when he encounters people in the service industry. The very term *human being* carries little weight for the materialist; the other person is merely a source of goods and services.

THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF MATERIALISM ON A GLOBAL SCALE

The materialistic worldview, however, can be devastating and has contributed to some of the worst crimes against humanity in world history. Through his widespread propaganda campaign against Jews,

Adolf Hitler was able to turn millions against a race of people merely by playing on his own countrymen's desire to become greater than they were, to rise from the ashes of World War I into a more glorious society. There was absolutely no causation between the European Jewish population and Germany's losses in that war and its long road to repair since, but people's minds were weakened by a fear of regression and economic depression. Jews were an easy scapegoat for their problems.

Abortion has become a convenient solution for unwanted pregnancies; by defining babies as nuisances rather than as living human beings, and splitting hairs over the definition of when life actually begins—conception or birth. The pro-choice movement has successfully advocated that babies are also commodities, disposable if their mothers decide they do not want them. Euthanasia works in much the same fashion. When someone can no longer make “adequate” contributions to society, they forfeit their right to live. These may sound like drastic extremes of a seemingly harmless worldview, but if taken to its logical end, materialism leads to any number of horrors.

HOW TO SOLVE THIS DILEMMA

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Does any of this sound familiar? Can you relate to the disillusionment and disconnect fostered by the materialistic mind-set? Perhaps you struggle with a materialistic worldview yourself. Do you find yourself laboring long hours at work, trying to compete with those around you, yet finding yourself falling short of the mark? At the end of the day, what are you left with? Do you feel empty inside, your confidence shattered by a lack of meaning in it all? You may feel, after years of living this way, that you have somehow wasted your life. You have not found what made you feel valuable. In your quest to be loved, adored, and—perhaps most importantly—rewarded by others, you may feel lost and lonely because nobody really ever loved you for who you are, valuing you instead for what you possessed and what you achieved.

THE PRIZE WE REALLY SEEK

There is good news, however, because the thing we are really searching for is available right now, in this very moment. The emptiness we so

WHAT IS MATERIALISM?

often feel arises because we miss the simple but profound truth that there is Someone greater than us, and in Him is found all the fulfillment and joy we need. God wants us to leave the exhausting life of endless workdays behind and embrace a new, free life in Him. In this book, we will discuss what materialism is, how it began (it is much older than we may think), and how to leave such a life behind to begin a new one in Jesus Christ.

TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please complete the following statements in Part A. Then Answer the questions in Part B. You may write in your book or on separate paper. After you complete this assignment you may compare your answers with the correct answers provided in the section titled “To Help You Learn—Answers” in the back of this book. Completing this part of Lesson 1 will help you remember the important truths of this lesson.

A. COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING

1. People on a mass scale worship _____.
2. Materialism is an outwardly benevolent force that becomes increasingly _____ inwardly.
3. Materialists will often go to _____ measures to hold on to their wealth.
4. If taken to its logical end, materialism can lead to any number of _____.
5. God wants us to leave the exhausting life of endless workdays behind and embrace a new, _____ life in Him.

B. ANSWER BRIEFLY

1. What purpose do religious and cultural traditions serve in human life? _____

2. What purpose do other people serve in the materialist’s life? _____

3. Identify some of the large scale problems materialism has led to. _____

WHAT IS MATERIALISM?

4. Why is the materialist's life unhappy?

5. Who holds the key to our escape from materialism?
