

# 2 THE LOOK, HISTORY, AND PURPOSE OF MATERIALISM

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## IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THE FOLLOWING:

- *The Modern Image of Success*
  - *A Brief History of Materialism*
  - *No Immunity to Materialism*
  - *Materialism's Constant Pressure*
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## THE MODERN IMAGE OF SUCCESS

The materialistic image is everywhere we look. Every time we turn on the television, we see images of success. If we pay attention long enough, we begin to internalize those images as our reality. Unscripted “reality” television, now a global phenomenon, features people competing against, backstabbing, and ganging up on each other in the spirit of fierce competition to win the big prize. An oft-repeated mantra on these shows is, “I am not here to make friends. I am here to win.” We inundate ourselves with this form of entertainment, and their mantra becomes the backdrop to our entire lives. *We are not here to make friends; we are here to win. We are here to maximize our own pleasure.*

However, 2 Timothy 3:2–4 shows us the result of pursuing pleasure:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

The materialistic worldview quickly becomes an ugly mess: “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 6:10). A worldview intended for gain ends in self-destruction. When reality show contestants appear on follow-up programs, their anger and vitriol at the other contestants continues unabated.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF MATERIALISM**

Television culture did not spawn this ideology, however, for there would be no television and no media-spawned trends without the social and cultural phenomena that gave them rise. Materialism is not new; it just looks different in the digital age. We can trace its origins to the beginning of biblical history. Lucifer and the angels who followed him fell to pride and the lust for power, bringing upon themselves banishment from heaven. Lucifer, as the serpent, later seduced Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with delusions of grandeur, telling them they would become like God if they ate the forbidden fruit. Enticed by the idea they could have it all, they ate the fruit, and God banished them from the Garden forever for their sin.

We can see the lesson repeated throughout history. Nations battle nations for territory and power, integrating civilizations into their own in the name of expansion and conquest. But even the greatest empires fall. The Roman Empire did not last forever, nor did British colonialism. Dictators come and go, proselytizing skewed ideologies that are almost universally based on human subjugation and oppression. Though these dictators speak promises of peace and prosperity for their people, a government or any human endeavor that does not acknowledge God or pursue His glory and presence as the greatest good is doomed to failure. Even nations whose foundations are purportedly based on the Bible are prone to failure, because people in charge pursue worldly achievements and expansion rather than what honors God and upholds His commandments.

## **NO IMMUNITY TO MATERIALISM**

One-time colonial nations of the west like England, France, Spain, and the United States are not the only peoples impacted by materialism, although they are the most visible examples because of their power and influence in the world. Materialism afflicts even the poorest nations and cultures, for it is not a quantifiable trait but a state of mind. Wherever there is covetousness and greed, materialism has taken root. When a great

divide separates those who have and those who have not, in all likelihood the have-nots will protest what they are denied by the haves. An equal likelihood is that the haves, never be satisfied with their stature, will seek more. Materialism is a destructive, endless cycle of envy, jealousy, and greed—a consuming hunger for more. Those afflicted by it marginalize and even destroy those who do not help them meet this goal.

We easily forget that death awaits us all, rich or poor, and we cannot take our belongings with us. Many people live their entire lives in pursuit of gain and will discover their folly in the afterlife:

The beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. (Luke 16:22–23)

## MATERIALISM'S CONSTANT PRESSURE

What *is* the purpose of wealth in this world? Why the insatiable hunger to possess it? The generally accepted worldview is that success and power affirm our place in this world; they affirm our value as human beings. We look down on the poor as people unwilling to take responsibility for themselves. Thus, we deem them unworthy of attention; what happens to them is not our concern. If they perish in their state, we may say with Ebenezer Scrooge, “Better to decrease the surplus population.”

However, no standard for wealth exists by which we can know we have “made it.” We push ourselves and others to get more, *more, more*, little realizing that as wealthy and successful as we become, there will always be someone more prosperous than us.

We may take great pride in our lawn and homestead, using only the most expensive fertilizers, spending large amounts of money for beautiful shrubs and bushes to create an elaborate landscape. Our grass may be green and rich, our shrubs flowering right on schedule. But when we look up and down our street, we realize all of our neighbors' lawns look the same. We have not distinguished ourselves at all. Two neighbors buy Hummers, and we feel pressured to do the same. By the time we save enough, they are investing in Lexuses instead.

Is all the money and time worth it? Did we sculpt our lawn and buy that Hummer for our own enjoyment or to earn the approval of our

neighbors? Did it work? Do we have more friends? Have we learned more about ourselves? “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones” (Proverbs 14:30). No good can come from envy; the pursuit of more only brings less. We will not enjoy the fruits of pointless busyness.

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. . . . I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. (Ecclesiastes 2: 11, 18)

## 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 2 will help you remember the important truths of this lesson.

### A. COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING

1. Materialism is a worldview intended for gain that ends in \_\_\_\_\_.
2. We can trace materialism’s origins to the beginning of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Materialism is not a quantifiable trait, but a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. There is no set \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ for wealth.
5. Our pursuit of more will only bring us \_\_\_\_\_.

### B. ANSWER BRIEFLY

1. Identify the end results of the pursuit of pleasure.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What happened to Lucifer as a result of his pursuit of power? What happened to Adam and Eve when they sinned?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why is materialism not just a struggle experienced by the rich and powerful? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What are some of the ways materialism manifests itself in our personal lives? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What does Scripture say about all our busy labor? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_