



## SESSION 6

# WHEN MATERIALISM CONSUMES

### ▶ **The Point**

Possessions never satisfy nor last, but the love of God does.

### ▶ **The Passage**

1 John 2:12-17; 3:16-18

### ▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Let's admit it, we enjoy the American lifestyle. We live well, relatively speaking. Even the bottom ten percent of Americans fare far better than they would in other countries—even better than the top ten percent in some nations!<sup>6</sup> When the economy is good and we've got money, it feels only natural to spend it. Just when we want to cut back or save, the advertisers seem to clobber us with extra hype to convince us we need whatever they're selling. And when "everybody else has it," it becomes even easier to make that next purchase. Consider . . . We buy food—certainly a necessity—then let nearly forty percent of it go to waste; Americans spend more on fashion accessories than college tuition; Our children own nearly half the world's toys; Homes in the United States have more TVs than people; The average American household has \$7,500 in consumer debt.<sup>7</sup>

The things we consume appear to be consuming us! God certainly wants us to enjoy life, but He has a far better and more satisfying way. God's approach has nothing to do with possessions, but it has everything to do with our love for Him.

### ▶ **The Setting**

Toward the latter part of the first century, the apostle John wrote the Letter of 1 John to an unidentified group of believers who most likely lived in Asia Minor. Many Bible commentators believe John spent the latter part of his life in Ephesus, from where he ministered to churches in Asia Minor. John wrote this letter to combat a group of teachers who were troubling these Christians with false teachings concerning the Person and work of Christ.

# What does the Bible say?

**The evil one** (2:13)—This term refers to the devil or Satan. (See Matt. 13:19,38; Mark 4:15.) He is the adversary of God's people, using temptation, deceit, and lies to lead us away from God.

## **1 John 2:12-17; 3:16-18**

**2:12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.**

**13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father.**

**14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**

**15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

**16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.**

**17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**

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**3:16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.**

**17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?**

**18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.**

# GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 109 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**What’s your favorite thing to spend money on?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 110 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of putting God before our possessions by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 110 of the PSG: “**Possessions never satisfy nor last, but the love of God does.**”

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 10**, “Consumerism by the Numbers.” Use this poster to discuss consumerism in the United States. Share how our spending habits are leading us to accumulate more things than ever before.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, obtain three one-dollar bills. **Ask:** “What can you turn money into?” Fold one bill into a paper airplane and fly it across the room. **Say:** “We can turn it into toys.” Wad up the second bill into a ball and throw it into the trash can. **Say:** “We can turn it into trash.” Put the final bill into an offering envelope. **Say:** “We can turn it into treasure.” Discuss how to make wise choices in using money.

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help us take our eyes off of our possessions and onto Him. Praise Him for being worthy of our worship and attention.



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# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

### 1 John 2:12-14

*<sup>12</sup> I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. <sup>13</sup> I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. <sup>14</sup> I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 2:12-14 on page 111 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the references John makes to the three "age groups."

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from pages 111-112 of the PSG. John clearly had something to say for all those who follow Christ.

- ▶ **Children.** "Your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. . . . you know the Father." That is the starting place, the beginning of salvation. Salvation begins when we turn from our sin and self and acknowledge Jesus as Lord.
- ▶ **Young Men.** "You are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." Because Jesus has won the victory, they could live daily, knowing they too had victory. They could stand against the evil one in spiritual battle because they were strong through God's Word.
- ▶ **Fathers.** "You know him who is from the beginning." It is the same for the spiritually mature as it is for the young believer: faith begins and ends with knowledge of Jesus Christ.

**DISCUSS: Question #2** on page 111 of the PSG: **"What are some ways you know God better now than when you first came to Christ?"**

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that loving the things of the world is the opposite of loving God.

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*How has growing in your knowledge of God helped you overcome the evil one?*

## 1 John 2:12-14 Commentary

**[Verse 12]** The apostle John wrote 1 John to a group of believers to both refute the teachings of false teachers (see 1 John 2:3-11) and to encourage the true believers' faith. Whether John was addressing a single group or three groups at various stages in their physical and/or spiritual development in this passage, he most likely considered all of them his spiritual children.

The **little children** were those who through their relationship with God by their faith in Jesus Christ had their sins forgiven. Through His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for believers' sins—past, present, and future.

**[Verse 13]** The **fathers**, which is probably a reference to spiritual maturity, were those who **know him who is from the beginning**. Because they had been walking longer with the Lord, these people had a deeper knowledge of Him that went beyond the foundational understanding of their forgiven sins. **Him who is from the beginning** most likely refers to Jesus, given that John is writing to refute false teachings about the Person and work of Jesus.

The **young men** were spiritual young adults who understood that believers are in a struggle against the spiritual forces opposed to God. (See Eph. 6:12.) With the spiritual weapons God provided them (see vv. 13-18), they had **overcome the evil one**. The **evil one** refers to a personal being, also known as the devil or Satan. (See Matt. 13:19,38; Mark 4:15; John 17:15; 1 John 3:12; 5:18.)

This victory for believers only comes by the power of God. (See Matt. 6:13.) The tense of the verb translated **overcome** indicates a permanent, ongoing state of victory. Most certainly John had in mind how his readers continued to be victorious as they stood against the false teachers.

The **children** were living out what they had been taught about how to know **the Father**. Jesus described God as the heavenly Father who longs for and has made possible an intimate relationship with sinful people. When we receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, we go from being enemies of God to being His adopted children and heirs. (See Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:1-7.)

**[Verse 14]** The **fathers** had come to know **him who is from the beginning**. Again, while both the Father and the Son are eternal, **him** most likely refers to God the Son, given the background of the false teachings about the Person and work of Jesus against which John was writing. John had emphasized Jesus' existence in "the beginning" in this letter (1 John 1:1) and his Gospel.

The **young men** were **strong**. This most likely refers not to their physical strength but rather to their spiritual strength, which did not come from their own efforts. They had been strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength because of their faith. (See 1 John 5:4.) These strong young men had **overcome the evil one**. Their victory came not only because they trusted in and yielded to God, but also because of **the word of God**, most likely the Old Testament and the accounts of Jesus' life and teachings. John noted that the Word **abides** in them. They had built their lives on the Word and so were able to withstand whatever difficulties came against them in life. (See Matt. 7:24.)



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

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### 1 John 2:15-17

***<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.***

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 2:15-17 on page 112 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the values, perspectives, and concerns of the world system John is referring to.

**DISCUSS: Question #3** on page 112 of the PSG: **“How do we navigate the tension between enjoying our possessions and being consumed by them?”**

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 113 of the PSG. John identified three ways the world entices us to seek contentment and fulfillment apart from the Father.

- 1. The desires of the flesh.** This phrase may cause us to think first of misusing sex, but this lust is much broader than just sexual sin.
- 2. The desires of the eyes.** The desires of the flesh has to do with our physical appetites, but the desires of the eyes is about our mental appetites.
- 3. The pride of life.** We can lump anything that causes us to focus attention on ourselves rather than Christ into this category.

**DISCUSS: Question #4** on page 113 of the PSG: **“How does a focus on the gospel change our perspective toward our possessions?”**

**TRANSITION:** The next verses show us that loving God is reflected in our attitude toward our possessions.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**  
*What’s the relationship between the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions?*

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## 1 John 2:15-17 Commentary

**[Verse 15]** After writing words of commendation and assurance, John turned to words of instruction and challenge: **Do not love the world or the things in the world.** After having written about how the believers had overcome the evil one, the “ruler of this world” (John 16:11), John was concerned about how the devil would use the world to draw believers away from God. The **world** refers to the values, perspectives, and concerns of the world system opposed to God that is “in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

John warned, **If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** These two types of love are mutually exclusive. Just as we cannot serve both God and money (see Matt. 6:24), we cannot love both the Father and the world. (See Jas. 4:4.)

**[Verse 16]** To clarify some of the worldly loves, John listed three broad categories that can trap believers and pull them away from their devotion to God. Again, the *world* John identified here refers to everything associated with the world system ruled by Satan that stands in opposition to God and His will.

John first mentioned **the desires of the flesh.** The Greek word for **desires** (*epithymia*) is neutral. Elsewhere it is translated “earnestly desired” (Luke 22:15) or “desire” (Phil. 1:23) and in both cases refers to wanting something good. Most often, however, the word emphasizes a negative craving or passion. Likewise, the Greek word for **flesh** (*sarx*) is neutral. It can refer to the human body or to human nature. In this verse John may have had in mind a natural desire fulfilled in the wrong way, which leads us away from God.

While God blessed us with eyes, they can lead us into thoughts and actions that go against God’s standards. The eyes have a direct pathway to a person’s mind (thoughts, emotions, and feelings). **The desires of the eyes** refers to those people or things which visually entice a person to act in the hopes of gaining momentary pleasure.

The third category John noted, the **pride of life**, is the tendency to boast about what we possess or what we have accomplished. This phrase could also include our aspirations (such as for power or status) that become idols and thus push God out of His rightful place at the center of our lives. (See Luke 12:16-21.)

Taken together, these three categories comprise a materialistic focus. They are **not from the Father** but rather come **from the world.**

**[Verse 17]** The **world** (the world system opposed to God), along with its values and **its desires**, is temporal—it is passing away. It’s foolish to love those things and live for them because those who do so will end up with nothing. In contrast, **whoever does the will of God abides forever.** The emphasis here is on both ongoing action (continuing to do God’s will) and ongoing result (continuing to remain or abide).



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

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### 1 John 3:16-18

***16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.***

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 3:16-18 on page 114 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the sacrifice the Lord is calling believers to make.

**RECAP:** Instead of being consumed with materialism, we could sacrifice our possessions for the sake of others. We may not have to sacrifice our physical lives, but we can certainly give up material possessions. We need to consider how much we spend on ourselves compared with how much we give toward the needs of others and to the cause of Christ. We need to limit our consumption and increase our compassion.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

***Who do you know that demonstrates love for God and others with their possessions?***

**DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 114 of the PSG: ***“What are some practical ways our group can demonstrate love in truth and action?”***

**DO:** Direct group members to complete the activity, “Evaluating My Heart” on page 115 of the PSG to clarify personal perspective between the things of the world and the things of God.



*Look at the list below and evaluate your own heart.*

*Where do you think you stand in each of these areas?*

*[Two columns are in the PSG: “The Things of This World” and “The Things of God” with the numbers 1-5 listed for each of several contrasting choices.]*

**GUIDE:** Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: ***“Possessions never satisfy nor last, but the love of God does.”***



## 1 John 3:16-18 Commentary

**[Verse 16]** John's writings emphasize not only how God loves us but also how we are to love God. One important way we demonstrate our love for Him is in our attitude toward our possessions.

Contrary to what is portrayed in our culture (driven by the world system opposed to God), true **love** is far more than an emotion. The Greek word used here for **love** is *agape*, an action word that stresses self-giving. The highest form of self-giving was demonstrated by Jesus, who **laid down his life for us**. This was a once-for-all-time action that never needs to be repeated. Jesus willingly gave Himself as the sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins and to enable us to have eternal life. We come to **know** (understand from personal experience and reflection) this genuine love when we trust in what Jesus did on our behalf and enter into a personal relationship with God.

John emphasized that Jesus' sacrifice should prompt a similar response from us: **we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers**. John's tone suggests an obligation borne out of gratitude—because we appreciate what Jesus did for us, we should be willing to do the same for others. Jesus not only modeled this self-sacrificial mindset, but also commanded His disciples to “love one another as I have loved you,” and then added, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13).

**[Verse 17]** It's rare that a person has the opportunity to literally die for others. Self-sacrifice, however, can be demonstrated in other ways in our daily lives. John used a negative example in case anyone wondered what this kind of love might look like on a practical level. When we as believers know of a **brother in need** and have the means (this world's goods) to meet that need, we should do so. This is one way to practice the self-giving love Jesus expects of us. The Greek verb translated **sees** emphasizes a careful consideration of the situation that results in understanding. If we realize someone's need and are able to meet it but refuse to help, it raises a legitimate question about whether we have truly experienced **God's love**. The phrase **closes his heart against** pictures someone who has no feelings of sympathy for another person's legitimate needs. John's words remind us that those who have truly experienced the self-giving love of God will in turn show self-giving love to others.

**[Verse 18]** Like a father addressing his beloved **little children**, John reminded his readers that in regard to their faith in Christ their practice should match their profession. As genuine believers they shouldn't **love in word or talk**, that is, simply only talk about love. Rather, they needed to demonstrate love **in deed**. To love **in truth** means those actions must be sincere, not just done for show or for the sake of fulfilling an obligation. Those who sincerely demonstrate this kind of love give evidence that they are truly disciples of Christ. (See John 13:35.)



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 116 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:



Notes

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- ▶ **Pray.** Ask the Lord to help you love Him more than anything. Pray that others would see your love and heart for Christ through your actions.
- ▶ **Evaluate.** Chart the many ways you use your money. List the possessions you own and their relative value. Consider what your possessions and finances reveal about your priorities and goals in life. Is it evident that you love the Lord by what you do with what you have?
- ▶ **Give.** Think about tangible ways you can help someone in need. Find ways to use your possessions for the benefit of others. Give things away as you seek to express the love of Christ to others.

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 116 of the PSG:

Our society thrives on the latest and greatest. Nothing is inherently wrong with having things, but they can hold us back from loving the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength if we're not careful.

**PRAY:** Conclude by thanking the Lord for setting the example by laying down His life for us. Ask Him for the courage for us to be willing to do likewise for others.

**GROUPS  
MATTER.**

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