

Overcome Fatal Distractions

Lesson 1: Pride

1. **What is pride?** From a human perspective pride is an overdose of self-esteem. Pride is an exalted view of oneself that is expressed in thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. It is manifest in self-centered wisdom (look what I know), egotistical strength (look at what I can do), and in the accumulation of possessions (look what I have).
2. **What are synonyms of pride?** E.g., egotism, vanity, conceit, arrogance, and boastfulness.
3. **Where did pride come from?** The original ego-trip occurred when Satan sought to become like God. God created angels with the ability to choose. He did not mandate their loyalty and obedience as if they were robots. Thus, Satan exercised his will and chose to sin (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:11-19).

Isaiah 14 begins with God's pronouncement of judgment against the king of Babylon (14:4-11). Then in 14:12 we read, "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations!" This can be no one but the angel now known as Satan. Why did God cut Satan down to the earth? This question is answered in 14:13-14. Satan reared up in rebellion and tried to tell God how things were going to be.

Satan's five "I will" statements:

- I will ascend to heaven;
- I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
- I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north.
- I will ascend above the heights of the clouds
- I will make myself like the Most High.

The consequence of Satan's sin is found in Genesis 3:1-5. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'' The woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.' The serpent [cf. Rev 12:9; 20:2] said to the woman, 'You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"

Satan's tactic was to question God's Word, change God's Word, and flat-out contradict God's Word. His scheme was successful; Adam and Eve sinned. And their sin was pride. Paul tells us that Eve was "deceived" (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14b) but Adam sinned willfully (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22; 1 Tim 2:14a). Since humanity's original sin, every person has inherited and personally practiced Adam's prideful sinful nature (Ps 51:5; Eph 2:1-3).

4. **A biblical definition of pride:** Independence from God. "I can be like God. I can make my own decisions, my own judgments, and my own laws and rules."
5. **What are the consequences of pride?**
 - Pride is hated by God (Prov 6:16-19; 8:13; 16:5).
 - Pride will not be tolerated by God (Ps 101:5b; 138:6).
 - Pride leads to conflict (Prov 13:10).
 - Pride leads to dishonor (Prov 11:2; 29:23).
 - Pride leads to destruction (Prov 15:25; 16:18).

6. What can we do about our pride?

- *Acknowledge your pride to God and others.* James Davison Hunter says, “We Americans generally want to think of ourselves as good people. That, in many respects, is where the trouble begins.” Instead, we must acknowledge our propensity toward pride. The Lord gives this promise: “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa 66:2b). Paul was able to write a verse in which he states for all to read: “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Tim 1:15).
- *Humble yourself before God and others.* Peter writes, “You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Pet 5:5-6).

In Luke 18:9-14 Jesus told the following parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt. “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- *Practice submission wherever appropriate.* Paul taught that we are to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph 5:21). He also commanded us to submit to all governing authorities, including our employers (Rom 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2; Eph 6:5; cf. 1 Pet 2:13-18). If a husband and father models submission, it will be easier for his wife and children to do the same.
- *Recognize God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas 1:17).* Paul says it like this: “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor 4:7) This notion will keep us humble in our speech and attitudes. It has been said: “A chicken lays one egg and cackles about it, while a salmon lays ten thousand eggs and doesn’t say a word.”¹ May this keep our words in check.

7. Questions

- What are some evidences of pride in your life? When you see them, how do you feel?
- What’s the difference between “sinful” pride and being proud of the accomplishments of your children and grandchildren?
- How do you identify pride in yourself? Is it acceptable if it doesn’t show externally?
- What are some events in your life that have helped you deal with the issue of pride?

“Give me humility, in which alone is rest, and deliver me from pride, which is the heaviest of burdens.”

Thomas Merton, monk and poet

“Pride is a poison so very poisonous that it not only poisons the virtues; it even poisons the other vices... And we all do in fact know that the primary sin of pride has this curiously freezing and hardening effect upon the other sins.”

G. K. Chesterton

“A lot of people like to pass me off as a devil worshiper. I think that could only be true if I considered myself to be the devil, because I tend to be narcissistic and believe in my own strength and my own identity.” Marilyn Manson

Overcome Fatal Distractions

Lesson 2: Anger

1. **What is anger?** Anger is a hostile emotion against someone or something.
2. **What does anger do to us?** At times, anger can feel like an inner fire. It hits you in the gut. You see red and feel hot and sweaty. Your stomach churns, your blood pressure rises, and your breathing rate increases as if you're laboring under a heavy weight. Outwardly, your body responds to the internal activity with a flushed appearance. You perspire, your nostrils may flare, and your jaw tightens. Many people describe their experience of anger as their "blood boiling." Note: A recent study of men, mostly in their fifties, found that those who had uncontrolled anger were *twice as likely* to have a stroke as opposed to those who were "able to defuse their anger."²
3. **What are destructive expressions of anger?** Examples include denial or repression; half-hearted confession; and volcanic eruption.
4. **What does the Bible say about anger?** The primary Hebrew term for anger describes the face of an angry person with nostrils flared (Gen 4:5; 39:19; Exod 4:14). Another Hebrew word speaks of anger as an outburst of fury that burns, overflows, and consumes everything in its path like a molten wall of lava (Ezek 22:21, 31). Interestingly, the first explicit mention of anger in the Bible shows its potential to kill (Gen 4:1-8; cf. Jas 4:2). Jesus expounds on this and declares, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

The Bible, however, does not always paint a negative picture of anger. The vast majority of biblical references to words like anger, rage, wrath, and fury refer to the anger and wrath of God. These passages, which speak of God's own anger with His enemies, or even with His own people, far outnumber those that tell us to avoid anger (see below). What the Bible shows us is that anger is neither right nor wrong *until there is a motive*. Anger can be productive and loving, just as it can be destructive and selfish.

5. **How can we express anger in a constructive way?** The wording of Ephesians 4:26-27 does not support the assumption that anger, in and of itself, is sinful. The four commands found in these verses make the translation clear. The apostle Paul commands us to "be angry." God knows that anger is an important and necessary emotion for a healthy person living in a fallen world. The preceding verse (4:25) sets up the context of truth-telling in relationships. We are to "put off falsehood and speak truthfully" to our neighbors (NIV). Being honest about our anger, therefore, is something we cannot avoid. The command is this: Be angry about how your sin harms you and others, and how others' sin harms them and you. Paul realized the potential for devastating harm that can come from unbridled rage. That is his reason for giving three qualifying prohibitions that follow this call to be angry.
 - **First, don't sin.** The command is not to avoid anger, but to avoid *sinful* anger. If we don't keep antagonistic emotions on a tight leash, they will cease to be useful in restraining sin, and instead will begin to multiply it. Anger toward those who possess more than we do rationalizes stealing (4:28). Anger stirred up by a bad conscience enables us to deny the truth, twist it, and say all kinds of unloving things about others (4:29). Our anger can grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30), and if we resist His gentle prodding our anger can degenerate into the sin of bitterness (4:31). Bitterness siphons off passion for life. It displaces faith and love. And once faith and love are gone, the downward spiral to additional sins of cynicism and malicious living follows (4:31).

- **Second, don't nurse anger.** "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" commands us to deal with our anger as soon as we are aware of it. Don't stuff it inside and brood over it. It will only fester. Take it out of the dark and expose it to the light. This command probably reflects the Old Testament practice of paying off debts and returning borrowed goods prior to sunset so as not to cause undue hardship on the other person (Deut 24:13-15). Likewise, we are commanded to deal with anger promptly so that we will avoid undue relational hardship.
- **Third, don't give Satan a place.** "Do not give the devil an opportunity" reflects a progression in Paul's series of commands. Satan knows how to exploit anger that is selfish. Once he has us nursing and justifying our selfish anger, he knows we are not far from hatred, vengeance, a refusal to forgive, and violence.

6. **What about God's anger?** God's anger is not an aberration of love but an extension of His love. The Old Testament writers confirm the love-anger link with the statement, "You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ps 86:15; cf. Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Ps 103:8; 145:8). Yes, God is angered by our individual sins, but He is patient with us. He is more enraged with those whose consistent pattern of living is one of rebellion and coldhearted disobedience. The problem is not with anger as an emotion in and of itself. If it were, God couldn't get angry and still be holy. The root problem is in the source.

God's anger burned against Moses when at first he refused to accept God's plan for him to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exod 4:14). God was angry with those who took advantage of widows and orphans (22:22-24), with those who were against His people (15:7), and with idolatrous people who chose idols over Him (32:8-10). God's wrath will one day be poured out on all who are faithless and disobedient (Eph 5:5-6; Col 3:5-6). God the Son also expressed anger (John 2:14-15; Matt 21:12-13/Mark 11:15-17; Mark 3:5). In Matthew 23, Jesus displayed His Father's anger against the hypocritical Pharisees. He was angry with them for their meticulous attention to things that really didn't matter to God (like tithing spices) while blatantly neglecting the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness (23:23). He called them "snakes" and "a brood of vipers," warning them that unless there was an inner change of heart they would not escape hell (23:33). That's righteous anger! The things that anger God too should anger us. Psalm 97:10: "Hate evil, you who love the LORD, Who preserves the souls of His godly ones."

7. **How can I avoid my tendency to be angry?**
- Acknowledge your anger to God (Jer 17:9).
 - Ask God to help you overcome your anger toward Him and others (Job 40:8; Isa 45:9a).
 - Ask your wife, children, or others close to you for forgiveness (Jas 5:16; Eph 4:31-32).
 - Change your belief system (Col 3:1-3).
 - Meditate on Scripture (Gal 5:22-23; Phil 4:8).
 - Learn to get angry slowly (Prov 29:11; Jas 1:19-20); i.e., count to ten (Eccl 7:9).
 - Guard the volume of your voice (Prov 15:1).
 - Look out for the interests of others (Phil 2:4).
 - Rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom 12:15).
 - Recognize life is hard (John 16:33; cf. Gen 3:14-19).
 - Lower your expectations and deprive your selfish desires (Jas 4:1-3).
 - Realize anger can adversely affect you (Ps 37:8; Acts 8:22-23; Heb 12:14-15).
 - Spend time with believers that exercise self-control (Prov 22:24-25).
 - Trust God and let Him deal with people (Prov 19:11; Rom 12:19).
 - Practice habitual forgiveness (Matt 6:14-15; Eph 4:31-32).

8. **Other suggestions:** Use moments of solitude in your life to reflect prayerfully on your anger. Examine your motives. Ask yourself questions like these:
- What did I feel angry about today?
 - Where is my anger coming from?
 - Why did I feel so threatened that I believed my anger was a justifiable defense?
 - Why is my anger so intense over something so small?
 - Is my anger for the benefit of another or is it directed against another?
 - Did my anger further God's interests or my own interests?
 - Did I provoke anger in someone else today?
 - What people or situations have made you most angry this week? Why? What can you do differently in the future?
 - How do you usually deal with your anger?
 - Why do you think anger is felt most intensely toward those we know best and love most?

“People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.” Will Rogers

“A man who is angry on the right grounds, against the right persons, in the right manner, at the right moment and for the right length of time deserves great praise.” Aristotle

“Getting angry can sometimes be like leaping into a wonderfully responsive sports car, gunning the motor, taking off at high speed, and then discovering the brakes are out of order.” Maggie Scarf

“He who can suppress a moment of anger may prevent a day of sorrow.” Tyron Edwards

“Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.” Ben Franklin

“He who angers you, controls you.” Anonymous

Overcome Fatal Distractions

Lesson 3: Envy

- 1. What is envy?** Envy can be summed up in two short sentences that were uttered by a thief when he held up a pharmacy in Gulfport, Mississippi, more than a decade ago. He held a gun to the pharmacist's head, demanding money and drugs and shouted: "You've got it! I want it!"³ Envy is a desire to possess things, people, and honors that are not rightfully ours. It is wanting what rightfully belongs to someone else or what has rightfully been earned by someone else.⁴ Envy begrudges the blessings and success of others. It asks, "Why them?"
- 2. What is the tragedy of envy?** The tragic truth is that envy and happiness cannot coexist. Lust and happiness can coexist...so can gluttony and happiness. But envy and happiness are mutually exclusive. Billy Graham said, "Envy takes the joy, happiness, and contentment out of living." *Psychology Today* once conducted a survey of 25,000 people and the editors found that envy is the root cause of poor self-esteem.⁵ As wise Solomon wrote centuries ago: "A tranquil heart is life to the body, but passion [envy] is rottenness to the bones" (Prov 14:30). The above realities ought to disturb us enough to address this sin in our lives. For it has been said, "Envy shoots at others but wounds itself. Jealousy runs in circles, and it always seems to come back around to us."⁶ Again, Solomon said it well, "Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy?" (Prov 27:4)
- 3. How does the Bible use the term envy?** The two Hebrew words that have been translated "envy" and "jealous" are *kana* (envy) and *quana* (jealous). The words jealous and envy are often used interchangeably, even in the Scriptures. Both have the idea of burning or becoming inflamed. But there's a significant difference between the two. If you are envious (*kana*), you become inflamed against someone; and if you are jealous (*quana*), you can be inflamed *for* or *against* someone, so jealousy has both a positive and a negative meaning. The Bible speaks about God being a jealous God (Exod 20:5) who is jealous for our devotion (Jas 4:5). Thus, when jealousy is used of God, it is a positive trait. However, envy is always considered a negative response. In the New Testament, the word "envy" (*ophthalmos*) literally means "to look against, to eye with evil intent" (Mark 7:21-22). Shakespeare called it "the green sickness" and Sir Francis Bacon said that it takes no holidays.⁷
- 4. What damage has envy caused?**
 - Envy caused Cain to kill Abel (Gen 4:8; 1 John 3:12).
 - Envy caused Sarah to despise Hagar (Gen 21:9-10).
 - Envy caused the Philistines to stop up Isaac's well (Gen 26:12-15).
 - Envy caused Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery (Gen 37:4-11, 19-20; Acts 7:9).
 - Envy caused Miriam and Aaron to oppose Moses (Num 12:1-10).
 - Envy caused Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to rebel against Moses in the wilderness (Num 16:1-3).
 - Envy caused Saul to seek to kill David (1 Sam 18:8-9, 29).
 - Envy caused the religious leader to crucify our Lord (Matt 27:18).
 - Envy caused the apostles to be cast into prison (Acts 5:17-18).
- 5. Where does envy tend to strike us?** Humans tend to seek four "p's": possessions, power, popularity, and performance. In each of these four areas, envy can rear its ugly head.
 - Possessions (Gen 26:13-14; Exod 20:17; Ps 37:1; 73:3-5, 12, 16-17; Rom 7:7)
 - Power/Position (Gen 37:11; Num 16:3; Ps 106:16)
 - Popularity (Ezek 35:11; Matt 27:18/Mark 15:10; Luke 15:11-32; 1 Cor 3:1-3)
 - Performance (Gen 30:1; Phil 1:15-16).

6. **How can I beat down “the green-eyed monster?”**

- Renounce envy as sin (Rom 1:29; Gal 5:20; Jas 3:16; 5:16).
- Commit to walk properly (Rom 13:13; Titus 3:3).
- Pursue God (1 Pet 2:1-3).
- Cultivate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-26).
- Celebrate your rival’s success (Prov 23:17; Rom 12:15a).
- Learn to pray for your rival’s success (Matt 5:44-45a).
- Remember that envy is a waste of time and thought (Eccl 4:4).
- Avoid divisive discussions (2 Cor 12:20; 1 Tim 6:4).
- Reaffirm God’s goodness to you (Jas 1:17).
- Practice contentment (1 Cor 13:4; Phil 4:11-13).
- Do not compare yourself with others; concentrate on God’s plan for your life (John 20:20-22).

7. **Questions**

- How would you define envy? In what ways do you agree or disagree with the above definitions?
- Why is envy so dangerous? How can it affect friendships? How can it affect the envious person?
- How can comparing ourselves with others relate to envy? How can contentment lessen a person’s feelings of envy?
- Who do you envy? Why do you envy this person? How can you begin to be a blessing to this person?
- In which of the four “p’s” do you tend to struggle the most with envy? What does this tell you about yourself? How can you take steps to overcome this?
- Do you think it’s easier for most people to be thankful for something good that happens or something that was potentially bad that didn’t happen?

“Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies.” Gore Vidal

“As a moth gnaws a garment, so doth envy consume a man.” St. Chrysostom

“If there is any sin more deadly than envy, it is being pleased at being envied.” Richard Armour

“The jealous are troublesome to others, but a torment to themselves.” William Penn

“Envy always gripes when others are blessed.”⁸ Kent Crockett

“The man who keeps busy helping the man below him won’t have time to envy the man above him.”

Henrietta Mears

“Covetousness is simply craving more of what you have enough of already.” Haddon Robinson

“Envy is an open door to bitterness.” Eleanor Doan

“Envy is the daughter of pride, the author of murder and revenge, the begetter of secret sedition, the perpetual tormenter of virtue. Envy is the filthy slime of the soul; a venom, a poison, a quicksilver, which consumeth the flesh and drieth up the bones.” Socrates

Recommended Reading: K. Erik Thoennes, *Godly Jealous: A Theology of Intolerant Love* (Scotland: Mentor, 2005).

Overcome Fatal Distractions

Lesson 4: Slothfulness

- 1. What is a sloth?** The sloth is a lazy, bumbling creature that hangs by its claws for days at a time. It's an animal the crocodile would laugh at because it does absolutely nothing. For the most part, they eat, sleep, and occasionally mate. If threatened, they emit a low, mournful cry, but this hardly ever happens since they seldom come to the ground and rarely are in danger.
- 2. What is sloth?** Sloth is the easiest of all the seven deadly sins to commit. Sloth boils down to what we *don't* do. No effort at all is required to commit the sin of sloth. In Proverbs 19:24, Solomon contrasts the sin of sloth with the sin of gluttony (one of the seven deadly sins): "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, but will not even bring it back to his mouth." The sluggard is so lazy that he won't even bring his fork to his mouth! Maybe sheer laziness is the key to breaking the sin of gluttony.⁹
- 3. What are examples of sloth?**
 - Laziness on the job (Prov 6:6-11; 10:26; 15:19; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16)
 - Procrastination (Prov 19:15; Eccl 11:6)
 - Failure to complete projects (Prov 12:27)
 - Failure to plan for the future (Prov 13:4; 20:4-5)
 - Temporal priorities (Matt 6:33; see Charles Hummel, *The Tyranny of the Urgent*)
 - Lack of exercise (1 Tim 4:8)
 - Idle or fruitless conversation (1 Tim 1:6-7)
 - Disorder and disorganization (Eccl 10:18)
 - Watching an excessive amount of TV
 - Consuming hobbies
- 4. What is the mentality of sloth?**

Slothfulness does not take into account the uncertainty of life.

 - Proverbs 27:1: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."
 - James 4:13-14: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."

Slothfulness does not take into account the urgency of life.

 - Isaiah 55:6: "Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near."
 - Psalm 119:60: "I hastened and did not delay to keep Your commandments."
 - Ecclesiastes 12:1: "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no delight in them.'"
 - Psalm 39:4-5: "LORD, make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; surely every man at his best is a mere breath."
 - Psalm 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom."
 - Psalm 144:4: "Man is like a mere breath; his days are like a passing shadow."
- 5. What are the consequences of sloth?**
 - Sloth can limit our love (Mark 14:34-37; Rom 12:10-13; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:8).
 - Sloth can weaken our resolve (Mark 14:37-38; 1 Pet 5:8-9).

6. Where are you spiritually slothful?

- Discipleship (Col 1:28-29; 2 Tim 2:2)
- Bible reading (Ps 19:7-11; 1 Pet 2:2)
- Prayer (Eph 6:18; 1 Thess 5:17)
- Accountability (Prov 27:17; Heb 10:24-25)
- Love (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14-18)
- Evangelism (2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 Thess 2:1-12)
- Financial Giving (Luke 6:38; 16:10-12)
- Spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 14:12)

7. How can you get rid of sloth?

- Confess your sloth (Ps 139:23-24; 1 John 1:9).
- Adopt Jesus' kingdom mentality (Luke 9:59-62).
- Redeem your time (Eph 5:15-17): "Your time is your treasure; spend it carefully."¹⁰
- Recognize opportunities for faithfulness (Matt 25:1-46).
- Listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings (1 Kgs 19:12).
- Surround yourself with hard workers (Prov 13:20; Eccl 4:9-12)
- Set measurable, achievable, and profitable goals: "To fail to plan is to plan to fail" (Ps 37:23)
- Seek accountability (Prov 27:17).

"Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow! Alas, tomorrow never comes! It is in no calendar except the almanac of fools."

Charles Spurgeon

"I resolve to live with all my might while I do live. I resolve to never lose one moment of time and to improve my use of time in the most profitable way I possibly can. I resolve never to do anything I wouldn't do if it were the last hour of my life." Jonathan Edwards

"If you don't learn a strong work ethic from your Mother; you probably won't ever learn how to work."

Blythe Stanton

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."

Thomas A. Edison

"If you want your dreams to come true, don't oversleep." Paul Lee Tan

"There is not a thing on the face of the earth that I abhor so much as idleness or idle people."

George Whitefield.

"Good leadership hinges on making the best choices with one's time." Henry & Richard Blackaby

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Anonymous

Overcome Fatal Distractions

Lesson 5: Lust

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources reports that more than 17,000 deer die each year after being struck by motorists on state highways. According to Paul Shelton, state wildlife director, the peak season for road kills is in late fall. Why? The bucks are in rut in November. “They’re concentrating almost exclusively on reproductive activities,” he said, “and are a lot less wary than they normally would be.” Deer aren’t the only ones destroyed by preoccupation with sex.¹¹ We live in a sexually saturated society.

1. **What is lust?** In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’ [Exod 20:14; Deut 5:17]; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus is making the point that adultery is not just an act; it has to do with the heart. When Jesus talked about looking at a woman “with lust for her,” He was not simply talking about sexual desire. That was given to us by God and is portrayed in the Bible as a good gift (Gen 2:24-25; 1 Tim 4:3-4; Heb 13:4).

By the word “lust,” Jesus did not refer to sexual desire or the normal attraction between men and women. Nor was He suggesting that every look of appreciation equates adultery. The word “lust” (*epithumeo*) is the same word in Greek that is sometimes translated “coveting.” It is a desire that focuses on a woman with the view of possessing her or having an immoral relationship with her. It is a deliberate stare with purpose or intent (i.e., “I want this woman!” See 2 Sam 13:1-22). Anyone who purposes in the heart (mind) to commit adultery has already committed it in God’s eyes.¹² Thus, the NET renders Jesus’ words: “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman *to desire her* has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (italics mine).

Jesus’ words incriminate every man. It is one thing for a husband to say that he has never committed adultery. Many men have fulfilled the seventh commandment of the Law of Moses: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14). But in this context, Jesus brings in to play the radicalism of the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exod 20:17). In other words, if you have ever violated your marriage through flirting with another woman or through looking at pornography, you are guilty of coveting (i.e., adultery). The apostle Paul understood the difference, because he viewed himself as righteous until he grasped fully the significance of the command not to covet. Then he saw the depth of his own sinfulness (Rom 7:7-13). The arrival of the kingdom of heaven in Jesus’ ministry enables His disciples to have the kind of marriage that God originally designed.¹³

2. **What does the Bible say about sexual sin?**
 - Sin provides fleeting pleasure (Heb 11:25).
 - Sexual sin is especially deadly (1 Cor 6:13-20).
 - God’s will for your life is sexual purity (1Thess 4:3-8).
 - God’s expectations are high (Eph 5:1-16; 1 Pet 1:13-16).
3. **What is God’s response to sexual sin?**
 - Psalm 103:13-14: “Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”
 - Hebrews 4:15-16: “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (see also John 8:1-11).

4. **What are the consequences of lust?** No one has articulated the consequences of sexual sin better than Randy Alcorn. The following excerpt is from his article *Deterring Immorality by Counting Its Cost: The Exorbitant Price of Sexual Sin*. I encourage you to adapt this for your use. I have done so and keep a laminated copy in my day timer.

- Grieving my Lord; displeasing the One whose opinion most matters.
- Dragging into the mud Christ's sacred reputation.
- Loss of reward and commendation from God.
- Having to one day look Jesus in the face at the judgment seat and give an account of why I did it.
- Forcing God to discipline me in various ways.
- Following in the footsteps of men I know of whose immorality forfeited their ministry and caused me to shudder. List of these names:
- Suffering of innocent people around me who would get hit by my shrapnel (a la Achan).
- Untold hurt to Nanci, my best friend and loyal wife.
- Loss of Nanci's respect and trust.
- Hurt to and loss of credibility with my beloved daughters, Karina and Angela. ("Why listen to a man who betrayed Mom and us?")
- If my blindness should continue or my family be unable to forgive, I could lose my wife and my children forever.
- Shame to my family. ("Why isn't Daddy a pastor anymore?"; the cruel comments of others who would invariably find out.)
- Shame to my church family.
- Shame and hurt to my fellow pastors and elders. List of names:
- Shame and hurt to my friends, and especially those I've led to Christ and discipled. List of names:
- Guilt awfully hard to shake-even though God would forgive me, would I forgive myself?
- Plaguing memories and flashbacks that could taint future intimacy with my wife.
- Disqualifying myself after having preached to others.
- Surrender of the things I am called to and love to do-teach and preach and write and minister to others. Forfeiting forever certain opportunities to serve God. Years of training and experience in ministry wasted for a long period of time, maybe permanently.
- Being haunted by my sin as I look in the eyes of others, and having it all dredged up again wherever I go and whatever I do.
- Undermining the hard work and prayers of others by saying to our community "this is a hypocrite-who can take seriously anything he and his church have said and done?"
- Laughter, rejoicing and blasphemous smugness by those who disrespect God and the church (2 Samuel 12:14).
- Bringing great pleasure to Satan, the Enemy of God.
- Heaping judgment and endless problems on the person I would have committed adultery with.
- Possible diseases: gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, and AIDS (pain, constant reminder to me and my wife, possible infection of Nanci, or in the case of AIDS, even causing her death, as well as mine.)
- Possible pregnancy, with its personal and financial implications, including a lifelong reminder of sin to me and my family.
- Loss of self-respect, discrediting my own name, and invoking shame and lifelong embarrassment upon myself.

To read more of Randy's writings on purity visit http://www.epm.org/resources-sexual_purity.html

5. What can we do about our lust?

- Acknowledge your potential for failure (Prov 16:18; Eccl 7:26; Jer 17:9; 1 Cor 10:12).
- Confess your sin *when* you fail (Prov 28:13-14; Ps 32:3-5; 51:1-17).
- Accept God's offer of forgiveness for sexual sin (John 4:1-42; 8:2-11; cf. Luke 7:36-50).
- Pursue fellowship with God (Ps 26:2-3; 139:23-24).
- Choose to break free (Ps 101:2-4) and make a daily decision to deny yourself (Luke 9:23).
- Make a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1).
- Condition your mind (Prov 23:7; Col 3:1-3).
- Resolve to maintain a clear conscience (Acts 24:16).
- Remind yourself of your identity in Christ (1 Cor 6:20; Eph 2:6). See *Who You Are in Christ*.
- Request help in time of temptation (Matt 6:13; Luke 18:1).
- Resist the devil (Jas 4:7).
- Take the way of escape (Prov 22:3; 1 Cor 10:13; 1 Pet 2:11).
- Run! (Gen 39:12; 1 Cor 6:18; 2 Tim 2:22).
- Recall God's mercy in saving you (Rom 12:1-2).
- Memorize Scripture (Ps 119:9, 11; Matt 4:1-11). See <http://www.strategicrenewal.com>
- Guard your eyes (Job 31:1-4; Rom 13:14).
- Watch your company (Prov 13:20; 2 Cor 6:14).
- Attend church weekly (Heb 10:24-25).
- Join a men's small group and establish accountability (Prov 27:17).
- Refrain from flirtatious comments and gestures (1 Tim 3:2; see what not to do in Prov 7:6-27).
- Consider the consequences (Gal 6:7-8; Jas 1:15). See Alcorn's worksheet.
- Monitor your media intake (Phil 4:8).¹⁴
- Maximize your marriage (Prov 5:15-23; 1 Cor 7:5).
- Feed the Spirit, not the flesh (Gal 5:16, 24-25; Titus 2:11-14).
- Cultivate contentment and thanksgiving (Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18).
- Sign up for accountability software through www.xxxchurch.com
- Download the free "40 Reasons" screensaver at <http://www.strategicrenewal.com>
- Keep pictures of your wife and family near the computer.
- Do not travel alone if you can help it.
- Do not spend alone time with another woman.
- Guard yourself when you are most susceptible (e.g., depressed, bored, etc.).
- Do not entertain the question, "What would it be like?"

The following quotes have been taken from Charles Mylander, *Running the Red Lights: Putting the Brakes on Sexual Temptation* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1986). I *highly* recommend this book if you can find a used copy.

"Sexual release can only be so good; everything else is in your mind. If the Christian man can get it in his head that sexual release can only be so good, and God's intended release is his wife, then it doesn't matter how big chested she is or isn't. The release will feel the same. It's what is in his mind that gives him satisfaction or a feeling of discontent."

"It is sheer nonsense to think that in Christ I cannot control my physical passions. All my unhealthy urges and longings died with Christ. I'm raised up to a new life of righteousness, With Christ's supernatural power I can set my mind on the Spirit rather than the flesh. I once again give every part of my body for His use—my eyes, my brain, my tongue, even my glands. I now see all my feelings and emotional needs as a call to prayer rather than a summons to self-indulgence."

“Every Christian spends some time in his own kind of lion’s cage (lust, pride, resentment, apathy, weight, money)...The truth is that we won’t come to maturity in the Christian life until we begin obeying God at our point of greatest struggle.”

“A pure mind is not a mind free of temptation. A pure mind chooses to act in the right way when temptation strikes.”

“If a man continues living a double life, God will expose the sin. Even then His intent is mercy rather than judgment.”

“Sin flourishes in the dark, it thrives in secret. But it withers and dies in the light of Christ and through confession to a fellow believer.”

“A believer does not slip into sin because he cannot avoid it. Rather, he does so because he inwardly cherishes a hidden love for it. The truth is, he loves this sin more than he loves Jesus Christ...A Christian can never conquer the one sin that gets him down until he loves the Lord Jesus more than that sin. Then he will repudiate his sin and turn to Jesus, his greater love.”

Additional Quotes

Martin Luther: “God uses lust to impel man to marriage.”

“Our lusts are cords that bind us.” Charles Spurgeon

“Lust always points in only one direction. Always you want more.” Anonymous

“Lust is the craving for salt by a man who is dying of thirst.” Frederick Buechner

“Lust is the ape that gibbers in our loins. Tame him as we will by day, he rages all the wilder in our dreams by night. Just when we think we’re safe from him, he raises up his ugly head and smirks, and there’s no river in the world flows cold and strong enough to strike him down. Almighty God, why dost thou deck men with such a loathsome toy?” Frederick Buechner

“What makes sex online far more compelling than any shrink-wrapped smut [is] instant gratification in endless variety—you never get to the end of the magazine and have to start looking at the same pictures again. With old porn, once you view it, you’ve consumed it. You’ve chewed the flavor out of the gum. This can’t be done on the Net. The gum never runs out of flavor. A new piece of flesh waits behind every old one, and expectation bids you to go further. Much further. Because as long as there’s more to come, you’ll keep coming. This is all so new. No stimulus like this ever existed before.” Greg Gutfeld, “The Sex Drive,” *Men’s Health* (October 1999), pp.119–120.

“You can get a large audience together for a striptease act that is to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now, suppose you went to a country where you could fill a theater simply by bringing a covered plate onto the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so that everyone could see just before the lights went out that it contained a lamb chop or a bit of bacon. Would you not think that something had gone wrong in that country and their appetite for food?”
C.S. Lewis

“In all my reading and experience, I have never known of one sexually-disoriented person who had a warm, loving and affectionate father.” Dr. Ross Campbell

“He that lies with the dogs riseth with fleas.” George Herbert

“Immorality is the cumulative product of small indulgences and minuscule compromises, the immediate consequences of which were, at the time, indiscernible.” Randy Alcorn

“What is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.” Ernest Hemingway

“Don’t put yourself in a position to see how good your resistance is. When you feel temptation coming, get out of there!” Jim Elliot

“There are several good protections against temptations, but the surest is cowardice.” Mark Twain

“How little people know who think holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, it is irresistible! If even 10 percent of the world’s population had it, would not the whole world be converted and happy before a year’s end?”

C.S. Lewis

“The greatness of a man’s power is the measure of his surrender.” William Booth

“My temptations have been my Masters in Divinity.” Martin Luther

Conclusion

In his book *Finishing Strong*, author Steve Farrar tells of a study conducted by Dr. Howard Hendricks of 246 men in full-time ministry: “Professor Hendricks was able to find nearly 250 men who without a doubt were committed to Jesus Christ. Yet the thing they had in common was that within 24 months of each other they got involved in sexual immorality. In other words, here are nearly 250 men who got suckered into the ambush of another woman.

After interviewing each man, Dr. Hendricks discovered four correlations between all 246 men:

1. None were involved in any kind of personal group.
2. Each had ceased to invest in a daily personal time of prayer, Scripture reading, and worship.
3. Over 80 percent of them became sexually involved with another woman as the result of counseling the woman.
4. Without exception, each of the 246 had been convinced that moral failure “will never happen to me.”¹⁵

Overcome Fatal Distractions

Lesson 6: Gluttony

“The abdomen is the reason why man does not easily take himself for a god.” Friedrich Nietzsche

1. **What is gluttony?** Gluttony is taking into your body *more* than your body needs. Gluttons are those who live to eat and drink rather than eat and drink to live.¹⁶ Unlike other deadly sins gluttony cannot be hidden. It is observable at the time of indulgence and it also results in poor health and serious health risks.
2. **How pervasive is gluttony?** Poll results show that 80 percent of people older than 25 are overweight based on the body mass index (BMI), a national guideline computed through a combination of weight and height. That figure has risen from 71 percent in 1995, 64 percent in 1990 and 58 percent in 1983. Thirty-three percent of adults are 20 percent overweight—more than double the number in 1983 when the figure was 15 percent. Results showed that 16 percent of U.S. adults in 1990 were 20 percent overweight and 22 percent in 1995 were 20 percent overweight.¹⁷

In the United States, in one day the average person eats the amount of calories that most people around the world eat in a week. The average caloric intake for the world as a whole is 436 calories per person per day. The average caloric intake per person in the US is 3,576 calories per day. The average American adult consumes 129 lbs. of sugar a year, and the average American teenager eats or drinks 400 lbs. of sugar a year. We also eat an average of 52 tsp. of fat and 6 to 7 tsp. of salt a day!¹

Medical experts estimate that about 10% of overweight people have genetic or physiological factors related to their weight. The other 90% are overweight because they eat more calories than they burn as body heat. For most Americans, it’s a matter of discipline, poor eating habits, and not enough exercise. In short, we’re living beyond our seams.¹⁸

3. **What does the Bible say about gluttony?** The Bible describes two types of excess: (1) *Food*: Proverbs 30:21-23: “Under three things the earth quakes, and under four, it cannot bear up: Under a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is satisfied with food. Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.” Proverbs 23:1-3: “When you sit down to dine with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are a man of great appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for it is deceptive food.” (2) *Drink*: Proverbs 20:1: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.”
 - Gluttony was directly related to the death of Eli’s sons (1 Sam 2:12-17).
 - Gluttony caused the Jews to lust after Egypt and to long to return there (Num 11:4-6).
 - Gluttony was a cause for death under the Law of Moses (Deut 21:18-21).
 - Gluttony led the prodigal son to “squander” his inheritance (Luke 15:13-14).
4. **What are the consequences of gluttony?**
 - Poor health
 - Finances (Prov 21:17; 23:21).
 - Relationship with others (Ezek 16:49)
 - Relationship with God (Isa 22:12-13; Luke 16:19; Phil 3:18-19)

5. **What is the biblical prescription for gluttony?**

- God made us (Gen 2:7)
- God sustains us (Matt 6:26)
- God took on a bod (John 1:14)
- God dwells within us (1 Cor 6:19-20)
- God wants us to glorify Him with our bodies (Rom 12:1)
- God will resurrect our bodies (1 Cor 15:40, 49)

6. **What can we do about our gluttony?**

- Confess your overindulgence (Prov 25:28; Phil 3:19).
- Feed on Christ (John 4:13-14; 7:37-38).
- Eat only until you are full (Prov 25:16; Phil 4:5). Richard Krell: “Moderation in all things.”
- Do not regularly frequent buffets.
- Avoid your weaknesses (e.g., Do not have boxes of Lucky Charms in your cupboard, 1 Cor 6:12).
- Practice discipline at home (Eccl 10:16-17).
- Socialize with those that have self-control (Prov 28:7).
- Read the Scriptures several times a day (Josh 1:8; 1 Pet 2:2).
- Make fasting a way of life (Matt 6:16-18).
- Memorize a verse on self-control (Ps 119:9, 11).
- Discipline yourself to attend church weekly and give of your time, treasures, and talents.
- Keep a prayer journal that monitors your progress (Psalms).
- Find a cardiovascular activity that you like and exercise 3-5 times a week (1 Tim 4:8).

7. **Questions**

- Do you ever eat so much that you don't feel like doing anything but laying around?
- Is it easy for you to eat rich and tasty desserts even after you are full?
- Are you more concerned about your next meal then about the next time you read your Bible?
- Are you more concerned about getting out of the office and to a restaurant before the noon rush then you are about getting to church on time next Sunday?

“One thing you can always be sure of—there are more people going on diets tomorrow than are going on diets today.”

“Let Christ stay throughout the meal. Don't dismiss Him with the blessing.” Eleanor Doan

Victor Buono cleverly summed up the book of Genesis this way:

*Paradise was very nice
for Adam and his madam
until they filched the fruit and took the fall.
They lost their place and fell from grace
and you can bet we can't forget
that eating is the oldest sin of all.¹⁹*

Overcome Fatal Distractions

Lesson 7: Greed

On September 26, 2005, wildlife researcher Michael Barron was making his way through Florida's Everglades National Park when he stumbled onto a gruesome demonstration of the consequences of an oversized appetite. In the preceding days, a 13-foot long Burmese python had attacked and subdued a six-foot long American alligator. Apparently, the python gained the advantage during the initial phases of its assault, wrapping the alligator in its powerful, constricting body. Amazingly, it was even able to swallow the massive reptile whole! However, victory was short-lived, as the snake's abdomen burst while it attempted to digest its prey. When Mr. Barron discovered the remains of the two combatants several days later, the python's stomach still covered the alligator's head, shoulders, and forelimbs, but the gator's hindquarters were protruding from the snake's midsection. Neither animal survived.²⁰

- 1. What is greed?** Greed is an insatiable desire to acquire more than I legitimately need. It is an obsession for more because I never have enough. John Rockefeller epitomized this. When a reporter once asked the elder Rockefeller, "How much money does it take to satisfy a person?" The billionaire snapped back, "Just one dollar more."
- 2. What biblical characters fell to greed?**
 - Greed tempted Eve to desire and acquire forbidden fruit (Gen 3:1-6).
 - Greed fueled Lot's desire to take the lush Jordan plain (Gen 13:5-13).
 - Greed led Esau to sell his birthright to Jacob (Gen 25:27-34).
 - Greed seduced the prophet Balaam to curse God's people (Num 22:4-35).
 - Greed motivated Solomon to disobey God's command against accumulating (Deut 17:16-17).
 - Greed brought death to Achan and his household and disaster to Israel (Josh 7:1-26).
 - Greed caused Delilah to betray Samson to the Philistines (Judg 16:1-20).
 - Greed led Samuel's sons to take under-the-table bribes (1 Sam 8:1-3).
 - Greed brought judgment upon King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kgs 21-22).
 - Greed turned Gehazi into a leper (2 Kgs 5:20-27).
 - Greed persuaded the rich young ruler to turn away from following Jesus (Matt 19:16-29; Mark 10:17-30; Luke 18:18-30).
 - Greed caused a wealthy man to miss out on paradise while Lazarus attained it (Luke 16:19-31).
 - Greed motivated the moneychangers to set up their tables in the temple (Matt 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47; John 2:13-16).
 - Greed was at the heart of Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Matt 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6).
 - Greed caused Ananias and Sapphira to withhold money and lie (Acts 5:1-11).
 - Greed compelled Simon Magnus to attempt to buy the Holy Spirit's power (Acts 8:18-21).
- 3. What does the Bible say about greed?**
 - Proverbs 11:24-26, 28: "There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it...He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like the green leaf."
 - Proverbs 23:4-5: "Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens."

- Proverbs 30:7-9: “Two things I asked of You, do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God.”
- Ecclesiastes 5:10, 12: “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity... The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.”
- Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”
- Luke 12:15: “Then He said to them, ‘Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.’”
- 1 Timothy 6:7-10, 17-19: “For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs... Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”
- Hebrews 13:5-6: “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU’ so that we confidently say, ‘THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?’” (Cf. Deut 31:6, 8; Ps 118:6)

4. **How serious is the sin of greed?**

- Greed comes from the unregenerate nature and defiles the person (Mark 7:21-23).
- Greed is an expression of a depraved mind and is worthy of death (Rom 1:28-32).
- Greed is linked with idolatry, fornication, and homosexuality (1 Cor 6:9-10).
- Greed of any kind should not even be named among believers (Eph 5:3-4).
- Greed amounts to idolatry (Col 3:5-7).

5. **What are the consequences of greed?**

- Pride (Ps 10:2-3; Prov 18:11)
- Unbelief (Eph 4:17-19)
- False teaching (2 Pet 2:1-3, 14)
- Short-sightedness (Ps 39:6)

6. **What can we do about our greed?**

- Repent of your greed (Prov 28:13; Jas 5:16).
- Acknowledge God owns everything (Ps 24:1).
- Trust God to meet your needs (Isa 55:10; Phil 4:19).
- Cultivate contentment (Phil 4:11-13; 1 Thess 5:18).

- Ask God to enlarge your heart (Luke 12:34).
- Give generously to God (Luke 19:8-9; Acts 20:35; 2 Cor 9:7).
- Practice an attitude of generosity with your time, talents, and treasure (Matt 25:14-30).
- Refuse to allow goods to become gods (Exod 20:17).
- Release your grasp on your possessions (Heb 10:34).
- Give your possessions away (Luke 6:38; 14:33).
- Live within or below your means (Luke 16:10-11).
- Limit your advertising intake. You do not need the greed they are promoting.
- Use credit cards wisely and commit to paying your debts on time (Prov 22:7, 26-27; Rom 13:7-8).
- “Deprive” your children some of their wants.
- Ask yourself on a regular basis, “Have I put my money and things ahead of God?”

7. Questions

- Do I think that the more things I possess the happier I will be?
- How can I know when “enough is enough?” When should I stop striving to prepare for my future and build up more security for my family?
- Why is it so difficult to live within a budget? What are the benefits of living within a budget?
- Whom do you admire for that way he/she handles money? What does that person do that you would like to emulate or do better?
- How content are you? When do you struggle the most with contentment? Why do you think this happens?
- In what ways do your kids struggle with peer pressure when it comes to material things? How do you generally respond?
- How has God faithfully met all of your needs?

When L.L. Bean, founder of the great mail-order catalog and store in Freeport, Maine, died in 1967 at the age of 94, *The New York Times* obituary described an interview with a reporter that went something like this. Reporter: Mr. Bean, why don't you expand? Bean: We are expanding. We're testing some synthetic red suspenders in the next catalog. Reporter: No, Mr. Bean, I mean really expand. You have the Bean boot and great merchandise. Why don't you get some venture capital and really expand—become the Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward of the sporting goods business? Bean: Son, I eat three square meals a day. I can't eat four.²¹

“Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. Hoarding is idolatry.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Money is like manure. If you spread it around, it does a lot of good, but if you pile it up in one place, it stinks like hell.” Clint W. Murchison

“Whoever says, ‘Money can't buy happiness’ doesn't know where to shop.” Donald Trump

“When a man says money can do anything that settles it: he hasn't any.” Edgar Watson Howe

“Who is rich? He that rejoices in his portion.” Benjamin Franklin

“Contentment makes poor men rich; discontentment makes rich men poor.” Benjamin Franklin

“My problem lies in reconciling my gross habits with my net income.” Errol Flynn

“Nothing will content him who is not content with a little” Greek proverb

“Too many people spend money they haven’t earned, to buy things they don’t want, to impress people they don’t like.” Will Rogers

Minimum amount boxer Mike Tyson earned in the nine years before filing for bankruptcy in August 2003: \$300,000,000. Harper’s Index (January 2004)

“The real point of materialism is not how much we have, but what has us. It’s not what we hold, but how tightly we hold it. Not what we have, but how we got it. The test of materialism is whether our goods have made us proud or grateful, self-sufficient or God-sufficient.” Joseph Stowell

“Contentment comes not so much from great wealth as from few wants.” Epictetus, AD 100

“Once the longing for money comes, the longing also comes for what money can give: superfluities, nice rooms, luxuries at table, more clothes, fans and so on. Our needs will increase, for one thing brings another, and the result will be endless dissatisfaction. This is how it comes.” Mother Teresa

“The more you have the less you can give, and the less you have the more you can give.” Mother Teresa

“It is more blessed to give than to receive, and therefore less blessed to receive than to give.” Thomas Chalmers

“What some people mistake for the high cost of living is really the cost of high living.” Doug Larson

“Covetousness is simply craving more of what you have enough of already.” Haddon Robinson

Notes

- ¹ Kent Crockett, *Making Today Count for Eternity* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2001), 131.
- ² Jerry & Kirsti Newcombe, *A Way of Escape: Experiencing God's Victory Over Temptation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 110.
- ³ Newcombe, *A Way of Escape*, 75.
- ⁴ Ed Young, *Fatal Distractions* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 64, 51.
- ⁵ Young, *Fatal Distractions*, 55.
- ⁶ David Jeremiah, *Slaying the Dragons in Your Life* (Nashville: Word, 2001), 191
- ⁷ Jeremiah, *Slaying the Dragons in Your Life*, 191.
- ⁸ Kent Crockett, *I Once Was Blind But Now I Squint* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2004), 61.
- ⁹ Newcombe, *A Way of Escape*, 183, 188.
- ¹⁰ Jeremiah, *Slaying the Dragons in Your Life*, 157.
- ¹¹ Ed Rowell, ed. *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000),
- ¹² See Haddon W. Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1991), 133.
- ¹³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 261.
- ¹⁴ The most recent research of the RAND Corporation (the nation's largest independent health policy research organization) shows that youth who view a significant amount of television with sexual content are twice as likely to have sex than those who watch little of such programming. In their words: "This is the strongest evidence yet that the sexual content of television programs encourages adolescents to initiate sexual intercourse and other sexual activities," Rebecca Collins, a RAND psychologist who headed the study, said in the release. "The impact of television viewing is so large that even a moderate shift in the sexual content of adolescent TV watching could have a substantial effect on their sexual behavior." See *Pediatrics, the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*, volume 114, number 3 (September 2004); submitted by Bill White to Preaching Today.com
- ¹⁵ Steve Farrar, *Finishing Strong* (Sisters: Multnomah, 1995).
- ¹⁶ Ed Young, *Fatal Distractions* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 134.
- ¹⁷ "Poll: Most Americans older than 25 are overweight," *CNN.com/Health*: March 5, 2002.
<http://archives.cnn.com/2002/HEALTH/03/05/obesity.poll/>
- ¹⁸ Newcombe, *A Way of Escape*, 161.
- ¹⁹ Newcomb's, *A Way of Escape*, 161.
- ²⁰ Denise Kalette, "Alligator, Python, Battle to the Death in Everglades," *Orlando Sentinel* (10-6-05); submitted by Sam O'Neal, St. Charles, Illinois.
- ²¹ PreachingNow Vol 4., No. 31: 9/13/05.