**Lesson 3: Materialism vs. Eternalism**

**Your handling of money and possessions reveals your perspective and sense of destiny.**

***TEACHER NOTE:***

*You will notice in this lesson that many of the points in the “Think” and “Talk” sections refer to a specific scripture, in addition to the many footnoted verses found elsewhere. We did this to encourage your own study of the points being made, to help you facilitate a more engaged discussion for this particular lesson. In addition, listing them gives you the option, depending on your teaching style, of asking participants to look up passages during the session.*

In the context of Biblical stewardship, “materialism” may be defined as a preeminent focus on the possession of goods or property and/or the influence, power, self-sufficiency, and self-satisfaction that typically accompanies wealth. The strong lure of material possessions frequently results in giving control over your life to something that should not wield that power. In this way, the affection and attention – indeed, the worship – of such things suggests a very real and widespread epidemic of idolatry, particularly in American culture**.** **(i)** To believe our church circles are immune is to suspend common sense and a discerning heart.

Central to the materialistic mindset dwells the yearning pursuit of (often temporary) personal pleasure, comfort, gain, or glory. Greed and consumption drive decision-making. Generally speaking, there is little thought given to spiritual consequences, impact, or legacy. Material thinking derives from and feeds a carnal sprit: selfishness, unquenched thirst for “more,” lust, unhealthy or impure cravings. We are warned repeatedly of the folly and consequences of living “in the flesh.” **(ii)**

“Eternalism,” on the other hand, shall be taken to mean a responsible, humble view of our brief, limited existence **(iii)** held in contrast with His eternal, complete perspective, especially with regard to money and our true net worth. An attitude marked by thanksgiving, worship, and a deep appreciation for the Father’s generosity signifies the believer who embraces an “eternalist” view. Such a lifestyle reveals devotion to the One “from whom all blessings flow.” **(iv)**

A committed disciple of Christ doesn’t “do” to “get.” However, as students of the Word, we certainly must comprehend sowing and reaping, and therefore the promised benefit of His blessings – both physical and spiritual, both now and for eternity. **(v)** How and when we blesses our obedience is up to Him; it is not for us to dictate or presume. Rather, it is for us to *anticipate* it by faith, simply because He is faithful and loves to give good gifts to His children. **(vi)** If we, who are fallen, enjoy lavishing gifts upon our own, how much more does His consistent generosity reflect His love for us?

Our culture remains saturated with an expectation of, with various means to achieve, prestige and social standing as benchmarks of success. Counter to such a worldview, the believer must adhere to patterns and habits that help him/her deny the flesh and energize the spirit. Fasting, among other disciplines modeled by Jesus, offers a natural process by which we may experience supernatural outcomes.

Our response to material wealth shows the maturity of our Biblical understanding. And when we understand the way our character is molded, a simple truth prevails. What we feed will thrive; what we starve will die.

**THINK ABOUT IT: We must flee from, and starve, a lifestyle of “materialism.”**

Why? Because materialism:

* blinds or distracts us from holy priorities. (John 9.40)
* causes anxiety and stress over unimportant goals. (Col 3.2)
* corrupts by encouraging a false sense of self-sufficiency. (Prov 3.5)
* confuses by trying to find meaning outside of scripture. (Ps 112.1)
* promotes coveting and a sense of never having enough. (Phil 4.11)

**TALK ABOUT IT: How does “keeping up with the Jones” keep us in spiritual chains?**

**Teacher Notes:** Make sure your group understands what is meant by the phrase in quotes. Alternate phrasing includes “gettin’ the Jones’es,” or “Jones-ing,” etc.

**Suggested Answers:**

* **“**Obsessing over possessing” makes us vulnerable to temptation and distraction
* Our perceived or convinced “need” for [ X ] clouds our judgment on spending
* Spurs self-centeredness that pulls our gaze from legitimate need
* Our willingness to go into debt to enjoy a specific product, activity, or experience shows lack of self-control and maturity

**THINK ABOUT IT: We must pursue, and feed, a lifestyle of “eternalism.”**

Why? Because an eternal perspective produces a life more abundant. **(vii)**

* We are more blessed in giving than receiving. (Acts 20.35)
* We gain all by losing all. (Luke 17.33)
* We store up “treasure in Heaven.” (Matt 6.20)
* We release faith through the planting of seed. (James 2.18, Matt 17.20)
* We protect, trust, hope, and persevere. (1 Cor 13.7)

**TALK ABOUT IT: Fasting helps us control our appetites by withholding from our flesh. How then do we “feed” our hearts to reflect eternal vision and values?**

**Suggested Answers:**

* By setting our minds on things above (Col 3.23)
* By seeing Him as He is, not how we think He needs to be (1 John 3.2)
* Through fellowship with the Father (John 5.19)
* By being transformed in His presence (Exod 34.29)
* By being transformed in the renewing of our minds (Rom 12.2)

**Concept Summary:** Mother Mary Angelica, founder of the Eternal Word Television Network, put it this way: *“It is not so much the possession of things… it is the burden these things impose—the fear of loss, the greed for more, the power they exert, the glitter that is so bright for so short a time.”***(viii)**We neutralize these urges when we submit to His Lordship through the acknowledgement that it’s all His in the first place.

**THINK ABOUT IT: We cannot serve two masters. (ix)**

Deut 8 recounts how Israel’s destiny – and ours **(x)** – includes an “ability to produce wealth” that is interconnected with our obedience AND the responsibility we bear to acknowledge God as source of that ability.

Luke 12.15-21 provides valuable insight into the consequences of choosing the wrong master. The rich fool “forgot God” (contrasted with the “remembering” of Deut 8.19) and instead presumed a posture of self-sufficiency. His selfishness and arrogance led to laziness, all of which prompted God’s judgment of his heart.

**TALK ABOUT IT: What are the consequences of a “divided heart” when it comes to finances?**

**Suggested Answers:**

* Practical: limitations on ministry impact and reach
* Spiritual: limitations on intimacy with the Father
* Lukewarm – not God’s favorite temperature **(xi)**
* Propensity for making poor or ill-informed decisions
* Lack of focus and diligence in taking action or following through

**Concept Summary: T**he issue at hand is *not* one of whether or not you should have riches, but rather what we do with them when they are released to us – and what they can do to us (see 1 Tim 6:10) when our heart is unguarded. **(xii)**

***TEACHER NOTE****: The passage in 1 Tim is often misquoted; if you reference this verse as part of your discussion, please read it with your group carefully. Money is not the root of all evil, but rather the “love of money is the root of various forms of evil.”*

**Personal/Family Application**

**DISCUSS** Read and learn about fasting (food, stuff, behavior, activities) as displaced by prayer, Bible

**DECIDE**  What will you give up for a time/season/forever? What will take its place? What do you expect to gain?

**DO!**  Set goals; be faithful & disciplines; do it cyclically; celebrate the outcomes.

**(i)** Exod 20.2-3

**(ii)** Gal 5.19-21

**(iii)** 1 Pet 1.24

**(iv)** [Thom­as Ken](http://cyberhymnal.org/bio/k/e/ken_t.htm" \t "_blank), Man­u­al of Pray­ers for the Use of the Schol­ars of Win­ches­ter Col­lege, 1674

**(v)** 3 John 1.2

**(vi)** Matt 7.11

**(vii)** John 10.10

**(viii)** Excerpted from [“In the Shadow of His Light”](http://www.ewtn.com/library/mother/maxshado.htm)  by Mother Mary Angelica, EWTN, 1973

**(ix)** Matt 6.24, Luke 16.13

**(x)** Rom 8.15, 1 John 3.2

**(xi)** Rev 3.16

**(xii)** Prov 4.23