

Less-Stress Living
July 31, 2016

I will remember that moment, when I signed my first mortgage. It was not much money by today's local housing costs. But it felt like I was signing my life away. I mean that. It was a feeling. Many of you have told me the same thing of your first experience with a mortgage.

Excuse me. I have just got to do something with all of this weight I'm carrying around. It really interferes with the important things in life. You might ask me, "Well, why do you keep carrying it around?" The truth is, it is awfully hard to give it up. Let me show you what I have in here. (Open back and start pulling stuff out and explaining what each is)

leftover hobby materials, childhood knick knacks, home made root beer bottle capper, bicycle pump, sleeping bag, tools, old TV remote.

Every time you buy some thing, it costs you time as well as money. It takes time to decide to buy it and which model to get. It takes time to shop for it, time to learn how to operate it. If you have to do some kind of regular maintenance, recharging, or cleaning, that is more time required. It might require time and money to repair it at some point. If you decide to replace it then the shopping starts all over again.

Now, there are things we need. But there are a lot more things available that we do not need. Yet we choose to buy some of these anyway. And both the things we need and the things we don't need contribute to the weight that we carry around on our minds, and in our hearts. This weight of required time and attention is added stress to my life.

This weight is bad for two main reasons. **The stress that comes with possessions hinders me from enjoying life.**

I am never really done with things that need doing. Something is always calling for attention. I am never caught up on my To Do List, and that is stressful. It is not stressful like the stress you have if you are in danger of getting laid off from your job. It is more like the stress of a low-grade headache. It doesn't prevent me from doing what needs doing, but is still bothersome and reduces my sense of happiness.

Secondly, **The stress that comes with possessions hinders me from focusing fully on what is important.**

I just never have enough time for all my relationships, shopping for things I do need, chores, repairs, updates, organizing, cleaning, hobbies, emails, and on and on and on. I can't keep up with it all... and that weighs down my spirit. It is actually disheartening, even depressing at times. Can I get an amen?

I can't keep carrying the weight of all this stuff on my soul. But isn't this (hold up bag) what life is about? Isn't happiness found in things?

Jesus said, "No." He said...

Luke 12:15 (NIV) Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Now, I know you don't think of yourself as a greedy person. But aren't you planning to buy something that you don't need? Is there the thought in your mind, "I'm going to get one of those one day"? I struggle with money and materialism. I bet you do, too. Simply put, you want more. Maybe you only want a little more or one thing more, but you want more. You are convinced, deep down where you make your choices, that if you had more, you would be happier and life would be better. Right now, it may only be that next thing that you've been wanting to buy. But after you get that one, they'll be another one. Won't there?

There probably will be, because we think things will bring happiness. But the truth is that... **No thing will satisfy your soul.**

You know this. For example, you finally get that thing you have been wanting and your joy in it starts shrinking soon afterward. And then you start looking for the next thing on your wish list. Maybe it is electronics, home furnishings, a car, a trip, etc. You know that things don't bring real happiness... yet you are caught in the trap of pursuing them.

I remember a time when I was poorer in things, but happier in spirit. When I first got married, my wife and I lived in a small, one bedroom apartment in an old house. And despite the fact that we didn't have much, we were pretty happy. We were both working, busy in church, and going to seminary full time, but we were happy. I had enough time to do all the things I was doing. I had enough time for God. I had enough time for my family. I had enough time for school. I had enough time for church. I had enough time just for me. I didn't feel like I was missing anything, even though I didn't have much in the way of possessions. We had two luxuries. We had a small, black and white TV sitting on a plastic milk crate. No remote, no cable. We had no stereo or CD player or DVDs or videos or computers. We also had a window unit air conditioner just in the bedroom.

But I didn't feel deprived of anything, even though I didn't have as much stuff as my parents had. I didn't feel like I had too little. In fact, I felt like I had too much. We had been given a bunch of wedding presents, most of which were still in boxes, lined up on one wall of our living room. None of that stuff was anything we really needed. In fact, some of those gifts we gave to other students when they got married.

Today I have a lot more possessions, and stress, and less happiness than before. There were five things I was focused on in those days. And these four things brought me all the joy and peace and happiness I needed. I'll tell you what they were in a few moments.

But let me get you thinking in that direction. What activities do you complain about not having enough time to do? Aren't those activities some of the things that bring you the most joy, the most happiness, the most satisfaction in your life? And yet, you don't have time to do them (pick up pack) because of all the other possessions in your life. Isn't that true?

We have fallen for the lie that of advertising. The advertisers of the world pretend that possessing whatever it is they are selling will make us truly happy and fulfilled. But things don't do that. **Things won't make me happy.**

Our relationships, with God and others, are much more satisfying than possessions. Relationships bring us the most happiness. You know that. Deep in your heart, in your soul, you know that. But we need to be reminded, because the lure of things (pick up backpack) is strong. They keep calling out to us. They call to us from the store windows and advertising. They want us to believe that our lives would be complete if only we could obtain more things.

But this is a lie. Things won't make you happy. Things haven't made me happy. In fact, as I have been trying to say, too many things hinder our happiness. (Pick up bag)

So what can you do?

1. Stop believing the lies of the advertisers.

Talk back to the TV and say, "I neither need nor want what you are selling." Trust me, saying it out loud gives you more power to resist. Then for even more power to resist turn it into a prayer. "God, I know that thing won't make me happy like the joy I find in you. Give me strength to refuse to desire and pursue that thing."

2. Simplify your life.

I urge you to start getting rid of the all the stress producing possessions you can. Your life will be lighter, less stressful, and more satisfying. Start by asking God for help. Then, go home today and get rid of something you don't need and is weighing you down.

You can find help online. There are some videos on YouTube on minimalism, which is about living a simpler lifestyle. You can find help to reduce the amount of things in your life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shpwxuZYNmQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgBpyNsS-jU>

Get rid of something you don't really need that requires regular attention. Get rid of something that you really don't need that often needs repairs. Get rid of something that makes you feel guilty.

For example, get rid of the materials for one of those hobbies that no longer holds your interest. You know the ones. You have some unfinished project, that every once in a while calls out to you, "Don't forget about me. You need to do something with me. You need to finish me."

I say to you, don't finish it. Throw it away. Reduce the weight on your soul. Don't say to yourself, "I'll just hold onto it until the next yard sale." If you do that, you haven't reduced its hold on you. At least box it up, and mark it for the yard sale. Or better, take whatever is of value and give it to Goodwill and recycle or throw away the rest. Only then will you be free of it.

3. Give more of you to God.

Your most important priority must be God. He is the source of all our happiness, joy, and peace of mind.

Matthew 6:33 (RSP) Make it the priority of your life to live in a growing relationship with God, living with Him, for Him, in obedience to Him, and He will meet your every need.

I said that when I was poor, I was happy. I didn't have a lot of stress in my life caused by things. I was focused primarily in those days on five things. One was my relationship with God. I spent 30-60 minutes, most days, in concentrated prayer. I spoke last Sunday about such a time of prayer for you.

4. Give more of yourself to your family and friends.

Jesus taught us not to focus on possessions but rather on people. Our relationships with others are the second most important source of happiness in our lives. Make your relationships a priority.

And know that...**"Things won't build relationships."** You don't have to spend money or buy things to build relationships. Relationships don't take money or things. They take time and attention. They take listening and talking and sharing, and dreaming together, and asking questions. They take working together and playing together. Do, together, activities that build your relationships and gain more satisfaction from them.

5. Serve God's purposes in His church.

When I was poor, I was serving in the church. Both of us were teaching and serving on committees. We were active in serving God in His church. This was our source of friends and great satisfaction. It will bring joy to you to make a difference in the lives of other Christians. This is God's plan.

6. Serve God through your school and/or job.

I was a full time seminary student and a part time janitor in those days. I was learning to serve God in both activities. And that made them more joyful.

I was poor in the things of the world. But I was happy in these five activities. Now my life is full of things, and the stress of them has brought less happiness. I bet the same is true in your life.

So don't focus on pursuing things that create more stress in your life. Instead, focus on the relationships and activities that will bring true joy to your life.

An old story illustrates this. A wealthy businessman was upset to see a fisherman sitting beside his boat, playing with a small child one afternoon. "Why aren't you out fishing?" asked the businessman.

"Because I caught enough fish for one day," replied the fisherman.

"Why don't you catch some more?"

"What would I do with them?"

"You could earn more money," said the businessman. "Then with the extra money, you could buy a bigger boat, go into deeper waters, and catch more fish. Then you would make enough money to buy nylon nets. With the nets, you could catch even more fish and make more money. With that money you could own two boats, maybe three boats. Eventually you could have a whole fleet of

boats and be rich like me."

"Then what would I do?" asked the fisherman.

"Then," said the businessman, "you could really enjoy life."

The fisherman looked at the businessman quizzically and asked, "What do you think I am doing now?"

If you keep running after more things, you will actually have less happiness. Focus on the things that God designed to bring life happiness.

Start with a right relationship with God. Because of our sin we all have a messed up relationship with God. God is displeased with us, despite the good things we do for others or the religious things we do. Our sin stands in the way of a right relationship with God.

Unfortunately we cannot solve our sin problem on our own. But God solved it for us by sending His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus died for our sins. God proved this by raising Jesus from the dead and making Him Lord of all the world.

Today, you can be forgiven of your sins if you will put your trust in Jesus as your Rescuer and turn away from your sin, turning your life over to Jesus as the Lord of your life.