



SERIES: THE KINGS QUEST FOR MEANING IN THE REAL WORLD
Lesson #3: "Looking For Purpose in Possessions"

Opening Events and Prayer

Icebreaker: You'll hear many people, especially as we enter the political arena, talking about people chasing or pursuing the "American Dream." What exactly is the "American Dream"? Is it largely become financial in modern America? Why or why not? Is that good? (You may have to limit discussion on this topic as it has potential to become wide-ranging and consumptive of class time)

Alternative Icebreaker: Use the beginning of the Veggie Tales video Madame Blueberry to introduce the topic. Run from 01:45 (one minute forty-five seconds, just before the dialogue begins) to 3:16. The scene begins with Bob the Tomato attempting to introduce the show as Larry the cucumber zips around in his "Soo-Vee" (SUV) Action Jeep. Or for fun have 2 people in class read the dialogue following dialogue takes place: (Sheet attached at the end)

Bob: Wow! What is that thing?

Larry: It's my new "Soo-vee" Action Jeep! I've been wanting it just forever! And Now It' finally
mine!

Bob: Wow, you must be pretty happy to get a cool toy like that.

Larry: Oh Yeah! Well, almost. There's just one more thing I need to be really happy.

Bob: What's that?

Larry: The Camper.

Bob: The what?

Larry: The "Soo-vee" Action Camper. You just hook it up to my Action Jeep and I'll be ready
for a weekend of wilderness fun!

Bob: So once you get the camper, then you'll be happy?

Larry: I don't know. There's also the dirt bike.

Bob: The dirt bike?

Larry: And the jet ski and the Action Glider...

Bob: Larry, how much stuff do you need to be happy?

Larry: I don't know. How much stuff is there?

- *What's going on with our friend Larry? He has a problem with contentment.*

Goal: This week we are going to see what Ecclesiastes has to say when we consider the question: Can one find contentment and clarity in stuff and money?

What does Solomon try in this area? – Read Eccles. 2:4-9



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Solomon ran a Thriving agribusiness. He had groves of flourishing trees, he dug reservoirs (probably full of fish) to water his vineyards, and fruit trees. He had more livestock than anyone in the area. He built mansions for himself and his family. He bought male and female slaves and, as a result, others were born enhancing his physical property. While the idea of human property is repugnant to us, you could consider our hunger for acquiring of businesses, household goods, cars, or boats as more modern considerations. He collected silver and gold. He had investments that paid big dividends and he made lots of money. He acquired the treasures of kings and provinces. Perhaps the "treasures" are referring to the capture of additional land along with the art and artifacts of those he conquered, the spoils of war. Solomon was a collector of sorts; he collected the stuff others had. Solomon was constantly expanding his kingdom through war and clever politics. He became greater than all before him. He clearly had the most toys.

Questions: What does Solomon discover in this area?

Read 2:10-11 - What he acquired was enjoyable, but fleeting.

He saw that all this as merely a temporary diversion from life's deeper realities. In his experience, he realized that none of this remained permanent. It all gets used up over one's life time under the sun, or someone else comes along to take it from you, or it's left behind when you die.

Read 4:4-6 - The pursuit of these things is really driven by envy.

Comparison and competition drive the train when it comes to people thinking that money and things can buy them what they most crave in life. It's all "keeping up with the Joneses." Once the Joneses get a new car, your old reliable begins to look a bit shabby. This desire for things and money is another of the insatiable appetites that man wrestles. When is enough stuff, enough stuff?

*Solomon says he also notices a couple responses: **One**, the fool, sees that Mr. Jones has an insurmountable lead in material goods and decides to give up and pity himself saying, in effect, "Woe is me, I'll never have what would make me happy. I'm a victim of circumstances beyond my control and will always be kept down." This leads to a ruined emotional life and, should he completely give up, the ruination of his family.*

***Two**, the workaholic, operating by the he-who-dies-with-the-most-toys-wins philosophy, strives tirelessly and gets lots of temporary, ultimately not satisfying stuff for all his hard work. In the final analysis, he dies with no toys because the toys stay behind. That's two handfuls with toil, a meaningless pursuit*



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Solomon preceded his second observation with the idea that the wise man recognizes, at some point, he must stop pursuing Mr. Jones. In fact, he realizes that following Mr. Jones will, in turn make him a stressed out, overworked, angry man who always feels like he doesn't quite measure up. This man comes to some tranquility or contentment in life.

Question: What are some of the toys we overwork and suffer relationships to obtain?

Read 5:8 - 17; 6:1-2; 7:7 - The desire for wealth is a consuming desire that often leads to character compromise.

In Solomon 's view, injustice to the poor should be no surprise at all, as the bureaucrats/bosses/politicians from the lowest to the highest, each pursuing their own personal gain, skims their little piece out of the poor man's pie all the way up to the king himself. Could it be that all those little pieces add up to the poor man remaining poor? He may be the better off!

After a good meal one feels good for a time, but will you become hungry again? When you get that new thing the newness wears away. When you get that promotion, no sooner have you moved into your new office than you notice the fellow up the hall has a nicer one. The man who wants one thing, really just wants one thing more and that, to our author, is senseless with everyone being harmed in the process because it all requires more maintenance, more protective measures to keep it, and someone is always there to take it from you. Wealth, in a way, is self consuming.

While acquiring lots of stuff is materialistic, never forget that saving or hoarding is also a materialistic pursuit. Now, we're not talking about routine savings for emergency, or college for kids, but more specifically hoarding, saving to have or possess or to feel secure. It's about the person who says, "I'll be secure once I've saved my pile of dough." Or the person who neglects others and is most concerned with keeping his collection in pristine condition, securely tucked away. It's like buying a toy for your kids and not letting them take it out of the box to play with because it's collectable and the value would be diminished. Solomon is pointing out that hoarded goods are of no value except for the hoarder to look at, when the true purpose God provides things is for their use to benefit people. It's like Dave Ramsey teaches in Financial Peace University, you don't build wealth to have wealth, you build wealth so that you can more effectively give.

The person always focused on the pursuit of stuff and money sees their marriages relationally deprived, their kids are parent-deprived, their churches are volunteer-deprived, their lives are joy-deprived.



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In the mindless pursuit for more, people often get caught up in character compromise. (as in 7:7) Money can corrupt in amazing ways. We buy the idea that everyone has their price! We can become ruthless and manipulative.

Personal illustration from the lesson writer, Derek Pottinger: One of the most difficult things for me to witness on my first deployment to Iraq was when our Battalion Pay Agent, a Staff Sergeant, would come out to the Joint Security Stations (small bases where about 120 American Soldiers lived with 20 – 50 Iraqi Army Soldiers) to pay the sheiks who ran the Sons of Iraq checkpoints in our area of operations. SSG O would come out with a backpack full of \$100 bills and hand \$50,000 to a sheik so that he could pay roughly 300 tribe members, previously involved in the Suni insurgency, to run traffic checkpoints along the roads where we operated. In essence, many we were paying had formerly engaged in hostile acts towards our forces and we had simply bought them off. We were appealing to this appetite for money and while some of the money certainly put food on the table for Iraqi children, one never saw a skinny sheik or one without the trappings of luxury.

Solomon says the one who works hard and appropriately regards wealth and things, is blessed with, not just sleep, but sweet sleep. He can enjoy life. His life makes sense and he finds contentment. On the other hand, he makes it clear that he who dies with the most toys often loses on three levels: 1) He can't take any of it with him. 2) His life, itself, becomes lost in frustration, affliction, and anger. 3) In the process, he loses the grip on his moral compass.

Read 10:19 - Some believe money is the answer for everything

This verse presents an interpretational challenge. Not only is verse 19 difficult to connect to the verses around it, but does the teacher mean that money really is the answer for everything? Or does he mean that some mistakenly live that way?

It seems most likely he is demonstrating the absurdity of adopting the view that money is the answer to everything. In a sense he is playing off the two lines that begin the verse, feasting, laughter, wine and revelry, if these things are the things that really matter in life, then money can buy what matters in life. It's like the 1990's Lexus ad campaign with the tagline "Whoever said, 'money can't buy you happiness' wasn't spending it right." We've already seen that pursuing contentment and clarity in life through pleasure is absurd and if that is the kind of lifestyle that money can buy, I think Solomon is suggesting we look at it differently. In essence, only a fool would believe that money was the answer to everything.

- **Discussion questions:**

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- *If one views wealth and stuff properly, will they have a "price" or a point where they are willing to compromise their character?*
- *Does this say that money and money management skills are unimportant?*

Is stuff and money inherently bad?

Some people make the claim that money is the root of all evil. In other words, if you traced the flow of money and stuff back to its fountain head, you'd find something or someone that had evil intentions. Most people who make this claim also feel it is biblical: see 1 Timothy 6:10. Is it?

1 Timothy 6:10 is the ONLY place in the bible where the words money and evil appear in the same verse, yet there is a key phrase in that verse, "The love of". The love of money, the pursuit of money to find contentment and clarity in life, is as we've seen, a rendezvous with ruin. It is also "a" not "the" that is used, meaning one of the paths. Money can be the motivating factor in many evil acts, it's true for why most IEDs get implanted in Iraq. It's not the money or even the things money can buy that are evil, it is, like with pleasure, the motives in the heart that brings these things to their evil ends.

Some would suggest that being poor is the way to go. They cite the Bible's clear theme that God looks after the poor and often the account of the Rich Young Ruler's encounter with Jesus as proof positive that God prefers his people poor and they should just give away everything. For one, this is a distorted view of God's attitude towards the poor. God favors the poor because, as Solomon has clearly stated, no one else seems to. Yet God made them and he loves them equally as much as anyone else.

Question: What would happen to the poor if every Christian took a vow of poverty?

God's people weren't always poor, Job was the wealthiest man in the East, Abraham was exceedingly wealthy, Jacob's years of Labor for his crafty uncle Laban became a wealth-building program, Paul, while not wealthy, worked hard to finance missionary journeys around the ancient world, Solomon was undeniably wealthy. So again it's not the wealth that's at issue.

Question: Why did Jesus ask the Rich Young Ruler to give up his wealth?

The motive for Jesus to ask the Rich Young Ruler is that the young man was in love with it. Jesus never asked anyone else to give up all their wealth. The Rich Young Ruler went away sad not because he had great wealth but because he simply loved it more than he did Jesus. He



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could have asked the rich Zacchaeus to do that, but he seemed satisfied with the "wee" man's generosity.

- **Discussion Questions:**
 - Why do people claim that money is evil based on 1 Timothy 6:10? How else might making the same mistake elsewhere cause equally severe misinterpretations?
 - What does the 1 Tim 6:10 problem teach us about Bible study?

Read 11:1-6 - How should one look at wealth and possessions?

All these passages we are considering focus on "the insatiable cravings of humans to satisfy their appetites for wealth and material goods...In the face of a world consumed by greed and which accepts the stark reality of the brevity of life, Solomon calls on humans to enjoy life by accepting the simple things that God gives." (Bland, D. p. 338) So how can we enjoy these things properly.

Live generously

Solomon says we must cast our bread upon the waters and give to seven, even eight. He is suggesting that when you give, as opposed to saving or hoarding, you recognize God's future provision. The place to begin is to recognize that all we have is a gift of God. It ultimately belongs to him and he merely shares it with us as part of his care for us. As he gives we should give as well. Wouldn't it be great to give a special Christmas gift to one of our missionaries completely out of the blue? In the final analysis, whatever God gives is yours to share and bless others with.

Live without worry

We spend a large amount of time planning what to do with finances. I am all for planning, as Dave Ramsey says, "When it comes to money, adults follow a plan, children follow their emotions." However, sometimes finances become our focus to a degree that we attempt to assure our needs are met through our carefulness and strength.

It's like the man Jesus refers to in Luke 12. God provided him an abundance of crops. Rather than make use of that abundance to help those around him in need, he chose to tear down his existing barns and build bigger ones. He did this so he could say, "You have ample goods laid up for many years." The point being rather than live a life dependent on God's provision he made for his own provision because of worry. Worry often leads to selfishness, the habit of looking out for yourself first. We might think we have the foolproof plan, but when we lean wholly on that plan, it's likely to fall through. Instead, God wants

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us to lean on him, since he's the only one that knows what is to come, he alone can provide you with a future.

Take care of those things entrusted to you

Since, God is the provider and owner of all things, we are obligated to take care of them. When we fail to take care of those things God has provided for us, it limits our ability to be generous because they're destroyed or squandered and we no longer have them to give or share. Additionally, as we do not know when "famine" may come making what God's provided last may be the manner of his provision in the future.

Question: What are some of the unexpected “famines” you have lived through?

Use what you've been given now.

Solomon uses a farming analogy in verse 4 of chapter 11. He says the farmer can't afford to wait for perfect conditions. Life, just like farming, involves risk. Life requires you to use what you've been given to make it successful. Look at what God's put before you right now, what he's provided for you this instant and start enjoying it and sharing the richness of life with those around you. Don't hope endlessly for the someday. Remember that life is swiftly going by. Verse 6 clearly continues the Farming analogy saying, "Plant it now! Get something in the ground! Make a difference! Before life passes you by."

- **Discussion Questions:**
 - Considering the source of money and stuff, what does that imply about how you should use them? What's your theology of wealth?
 - Where does financial and retirement planning fit in to all this?
 - Where would you like to be more generous or worry-free or open to using what you've been given right now?
- **For further investigation:**
 - How does Solomon's message square with the stewardship message we find elsewhere in Scripture?
 - Consider Ananias and Sapphira versus Barnabas in Acts 4/5. What can we learn about generosity from this passage? If Ananias and Sapphira had not attempted to deceive, but openly and honestly gave the same amount as they do in Acts 5, how do you think God would have judged their generosity?



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- How should we properly understand Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6 regarding money and possessions?

VEGGIE TALES SCRIPT:

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