

The High Calling

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The Urge to Splurge

By Stan Key

At the risk of being accused of ruining the spirit of Christmas, this edition of *The High Calling* is devoted to the sin that is more visible at this time of year than any other: the urge to splurge (greed, covetousness, materialism). To talk about such issues during this happy holiday may make some of us feel uncomfortable, even angry. Of course, this is exactly how King Herod felt when Jesus was born at the first Christmas. This baby threatened the status quo, and Herod was so troubled he tried to kill him! For those who are not ready for his coming, Jesus is always perceived as a trouble-maker and

a disturber of the peace! Our intention in sending this little magazine is not to spoil your Christmas but to help cleanse it of its worldly pollution.

Let's be honest and acknowledge the fact that, for many, Christmas is the season when we suddenly realize we don't have enough stuff. We become consumers and find our self-identity in what we purchase either for ourselves or for



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Finding Fulfillment

By Kevin Brown



Kevin Brown (MBA, PhD) is an Associate Professor of Business at Asbury University. His graduate background incorporates economics, philosophy, and theology—and his research seeks to explore the interplay between these fields. Brown is married to Maria and they have three children: Cambel, Ada, and Oliver.

Tis the season for stories, and not simply the story of God's son born into the world. The most prevalent holiday narrative has less to do with religion, tradition, or family—and more to do with stuff. We acquire to become. This, of course, is the promise of consumerism. With the next purchase, I can achieve the knowledge, status, competency, joy, fulfillment, meaning—indeed, *identity*—that seems to elude me now. In other words, my “good life” is just a click, call, or swipe away.

But don't miss this: consumerism, as theologian William Cavanaugh has pointed out, is not material attachment to anything. It is dis-attachment—from everything. Nothing satisfies. Consumerism's promise of deep and abiding gratification is insidiously corrupted by the insatiability and alienation it reinforces. Our “solution”—ironically—amplifies the very problem

it was aimed to address. “Nearly all men die of their medicines,” writes the French playwright Moliere, “and not their maladies.”

The belief that we will realize fulfillment through the pursuit, purchase, and use of *stuff* is our modern-day delusion. It is a mirage of hope that vanishes at our grasp—leaving us disappointed and wanting. And yet, in our moments of dissatisfaction, a new mirage emerges with new prospects and promises. “This time will be different,” we tell ourselves. Of course, our voice is not alone. It is estimated that nearly \$200 billion dollars of advertising will be spent this year—carefully crafted messages that burrow into our imaginative space and color our perception of what is good, right, and true.

We press on with the conviction that our best life is just around the corner, even though it manages to escape us time and time again. Promises of novelty lapse with Sisyphean regularity, leaving us to echo the Rolling Stones' most famous refrain: “I can't get no satisfaction.” We do, indeed, long to be satisfied, whole,

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The Blessed Poor

By A.W. Tozer (1897–1963)



A.W. Tozer was an American pastor, preacher, author and spiritual mentor. The following article is a slightly edited abridgement taken from his devotional classic *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1982). The chapter is entitled "The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing" (21–31) and is a commentary on the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:3).

There is within the human heart a tough, fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets things with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns *my* and *mine* look innocent enough in print, but their constant and universal use is significant. They express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do. They are verbal symptoms of our deep disease. The roots of our hearts have grown down into things, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. God's gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.

The way to deeper knowledge of God is through the lonely valleys of soul poverty and abnegation of all things. The blessed ones who possess the Kingdom are they who have repudiated every external thing and have rooted from their hearts all sense of possessing. These blessed poor are no longer slaves to the tyranny of things. They have broken the yoke of the oppressor; and this they have done not by fighting but by surrendering. Though free from all sense of possessing, they yet possess all things. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

This New Testament principle of spiritual life finds its best illustration in the Old Testament. In the story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22) we have a dramatic picture of the surrendered life as well as an excellent commentary on the first Beatitude.

Abraham was old enough to have been his grandfather when Isaac was born, and the child became at once the delight and idol of his heart. From the moment he first stooped to take the tiny form awkwardly in his arms, he was an eager love slave of his son. And it is not hard to understand. The baby represented everything sacred to his father's heart: the promises of God, the covenants, the hopes of the years, and the long messianic dream. Abraham's heart was knit closer and closer with the life of his son, till at last the relationship bordered upon the perilous. It was then that God stepped in to save both father and son from the consequences of an uncleansed love.

"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen 22:2). The sacred writer spares us a close-up of the agony that night on the slopes near Beersheba when the aged man had it out with his God, but respectful imagination may view in awe the bent form wrestling convulsively alone under the stars. Possibly not again until One greater than Abraham wrestled in the Garden of Gethsemane did such mortal pain visit a human soul. This was Abraham's trial by fire, and he did not fail in the crucible.



God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where He knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. He said in effect, "It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversity that existed in your love. Now you may have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (see Gen 22:11–19).

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others—"I consume, therefore I am." Our urge to splurge defies all rational explanation. As David Ramsey put it: "We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like."

Though Herod perceived Jesus as a threat even as a baby, it was when he grew to be a man that Jesus really began to be a nuisance. One of his most troubling statements is found in Luke 12:15, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." If you can imagine those words being posted on the marquee in front of the local mall during December, you begin to understand how radical these words are. To make sure that his hearers didn't miss the point, Jesus told them a story:

The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" And he said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16–21)

In this parable, God does what my mother taught me never to do: he calls someone a name. "You fool," he says to the rich farmer. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us not to call anyone a fool (Greek, *moros*: a worthless scoundrel). In this parable, a different word is used (*aphron*) to describe the greedy farmer. The term

literally means "without reason" and describes someone who is lacking sanity. We might call such a person "mindless," "empty-headed," or perhaps "pea-brained." But what would provoke Jesus to use such a strong term to describe this farmer who many might think of as being prudent and industrious, a hard-working, visionary entrepreneur.

The context makes it clear that Jesus is not condemning the farmer's shrewd business practices but his "covetousness" (Lk 12:15). It was inordinate desire, misplaced love, and worldly obsession that were the problem. The issue was his heart; his greedy lust for more. As is clear throughout the Bible, money itself is not the problem, but the *love* of money is the root of all manner of evil (1 Tim 6:10). Jesus uses the best word he can find to describe this greedy farmer: "brainless." Desiring more and more stuff is not only sinful, it is really dumb!

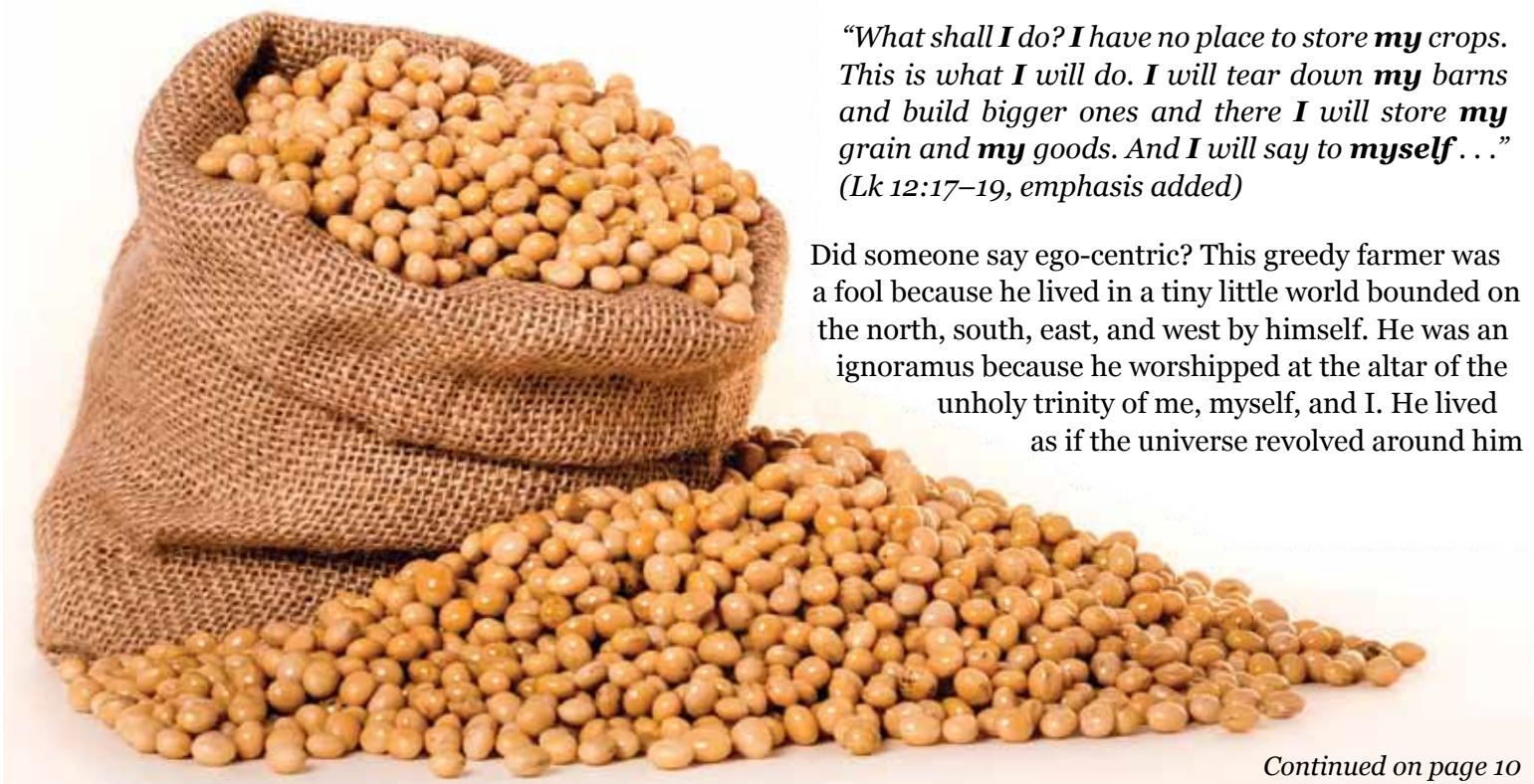
A closer look at the parable reveals three characteristics of this foolish farmer that Jesus wants to highlight.

First, a fool lives by the motto "*More, more, more.*" This farmer really believed that if only he had more stuff (grain, barns, profit), he would be happier. Really? Think about it. The Greed Monster is never satisfied. Like drinking salt water, the more you drink, the thirstier you become. What foolish imbecility it is to believe that more stuff will satisfy the longings of our souls. Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to *me* and drink" (Jn 7:37, emphasis added).

Second, a fool lives by the motto "*Me, me, me.*" Eleven times in three verses the farmer in the parable uses the first-person singular pronoun:

"What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. This is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones and there I will store my grain and my goods. And I will say to myself..." (Lk 12:17–19, emphasis added)

Did someone say ego-centric? This greedy farmer was a fool because he lived in a tiny little world bounded on the north, south, east, and west by himself. He was an ignoramus because he worshipped at the altar of the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I. He lived as if the universe revolved around him



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The Forgotten Commandment

By David A. Seamands (1922–2006)



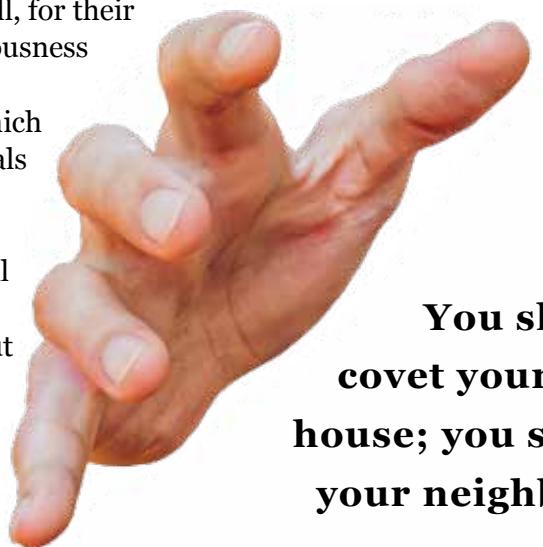
Former missionary to India, pastor, and best-selling author, Seamands was a master of applying Biblical truth with pastoral compassion and psychological astuteness. This article is taken from his book *God's Blueprint for Living: New Perspectives on the Ten Commandments* (Bristol Books, 1988.). It is a slightly edited abridgement of chapter 12 which deals with the tenth commandment: "You shall not covet" (131–139).

Nothing like this commandment exists in any other set of ancient laws. It goes beyond regulating outward acts to prescribing inner attitudes. It is certainly the most comprehensive of all the commandments. Perhaps it appears last because the sin it prohibits, covetousness, is the most treacherous of all.

We need victory at this point more than any other. Covetousness makes people greedy and causes them to steal. Covetousness drives people to sacrifice the lives of others, even to kill, for their own ends. Covetousness gives rise to that unbridled lust which plunges individuals into adultery. Covetousness endangers mutual trust and causes people to lie about themselves and each other, to gain money, power, prestige, or praise. The tenth commandment is comprehensive.

It is also difficult to explain. What does it really mean to covet? Does covet mean to desire something? Certainly not. Without desires we wouldn't have human life as we know it. Our desire for food makes us hungry and we eat. That's how we maintain our bodies. Our desire for sex is an essential part of love and marriage. We desire approval and respect. That's what makes us wash our faces and comb our hair. Without desire we wouldn't have life.

So does coveting mean desiring something that we don't have? Not exactly. For example, many people attend college because they desire an education, something they don't have; but this is not coveting. Almost everything we call progress, improvement, or civilization has come from a desire for something we don't have. Desire is even



**You shall not
covet your neighbor's
house; you shall not covet
your neighbor's wife...**

important in spiritual matters. Paul says in I Corinthians 12:31, "...eagerly desire the greater spiritual gifts."

Buddha, however, taught that desire itself is the source of all the evil in the world. He said if we could eliminate all desire we would eliminate evil. Ridding ourselves of desire is supposed to lead us right into Nirvana. That belief has led even some Christians to a false asceticism and a quest for a sort of glorified nothingness. But Jesus did not come to give us nothing; rather he offers us abundant life.

To covet is to desire inordinately, or to desire the unlawful. It's not wrong for a man to desire a house, wife, or car. But it is wrong for him to covet his neighbor's house, wife, or car. This kind of desire is different because a desire for someone else's belongings plants the seeds of a willingness to hurt, kill, lie, or steal in

order to fulfill the desire. Covetousness is desire that runs rampant over the rights of others and even over one's own reason. It is desire run amuck which will injure or destroy to get what it wants.

Covetousness is normal desire gone wrong. It is a perversion of God-given desires. It is the spirit that says, "I want this and I will get it whatever it costs me. I must have it, whatever the consequences."

A practical substitute for the word "covet" might be "greed," provided we understand this can mean more than simply greed for money. We can be greedy for power, sex, approval, authority, praise, status, and so forth. Covetousness may be hard to define, but we know it when we see it.

Anyone who has reared children knows how early in a child's life covetousness emerges. When we lived in India I remember giving my son Steve a good, expensive knife. It was something he wanted and needed there, and he was happy as a lark with the gift. Then one day he came into the house crying. "What's wrong, Steve?" I asked. Tearfully he told me his playmate had been given a knife with two blades on it.

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Remember Lot's Wife

By J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)



J. C. Ryle was an Anglican clergyman who served for 20 years as the Bishop of Liverpool. His book *Holiness* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan, 2001; originally published in 1877) has been called a distillation of true Puritan theology. The following article is a slightly edited abridgment from chapter 10, "A Woman to Be Remembered" (195–216).

There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than that which our Lord gave in Luke 17:32, "Remember Lot's wife." This woman professed religion. Her husband was a "righteous man" (II Pet 2:8). She left Sodom with him on the day when the city was destroyed but, against God's express command, she looked back; and she was turned into a pillar of salt (see Gen 19). Jesus never told us to remember Abraham, or Isaac, or Sarah, or Ruth. But he singles out this woman whose soul was lost forever and cries to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

Think of the religious privileges which Lot's wife enjoyed. She had a godly man for her husband and Abraham was her uncle by marriage. The faith, the knowledge, and the prayers of these two righteous men could have been no secret to her. She outwardly conformed to her husband's ways and allowed herself to be passively towed along in his wake. But all the time her heart was wrong in the sight of God. The world was in her heart, and her heart was in the world. In this state she lived and in this state she died.

The history of her sin is told in once brief sentence: "But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt" (Gen 19:26). The sum and substance of her transgression lies in these three words: "She looked back." Does that sin seem small? There was far more in that look than strikes you at first sight. That look was a little thing but:

- *It revealed her true character.* Little things will often show the state of a man's mind even more than great ones, and little symptoms are often the signs of deadly diseases. The apple that Eve ate was a little thing, but it proved she had fallen from innocence.
- *It told of her willful disobedience.* The command of the angel was straightforward and unmistakable: "Do not look back" (Gen 19:17). But she refused to obey. The Bible teaches us that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (I Sam 15:23). When God speaks plainly in his Word, our duty is clear.
- *It told of her proud unbelief.* Lot's wife seemed to doubt whether God was really going to destroy Sodom. She appeared not to believe that there was any danger or any need for hasty flight.

- *It gave evidence of her secret love of the world.* The heart of Lot's wife was in Sodom though her body was outside. She had left her affections behind when she fled from her home. Her eye turned to the place where her treasure was. This was the crowning point of her sin. I believe this is the point Jesus particularly intends to make when he tells his disciples to "remember Lot's wife." Jesus wants us to know that Lot's wife was lost by looking back at the world. Though she professed religion, she never gave up the world.

The lesson Jesus wants us to learn from Lot's wife is the immense danger of worldliness. The Bible is clear: "Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jam 4:4). "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I Jn 2:15). Oh that we may have an eye to see and a heart to understand!



"... many a gallant ship
launches forth . . ."

I believe there never was a time when warnings against worldliness were so much needed by the church of Jesus Christ as they are today. Lot's wife was no murderer, no adulteress, no thief—but she "looked back." There are thousands of baptized believers in our churches today who may not be guilty of immorality or infidelity but they are in love with the world. It is sad to see how many a gallant ship launches forth on the voyage of life with every prospect of success and then, springing this leak of worldliness, goes down with all her freight in full view of the harbor of safety. It is saddest of all to observe how many flatter themselves it is all right with their souls when it is all wrong, by reason of this love of the world.

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Our True House of Worship

By James K. A. Smith



James K. A. Smith is professor of philosophy at Calvin College. His recent book *You Are What You Love* (Brazos Press, 2016) helps us to recognize that while Christians may desire to change the culture, they are often unaware of how the culture is changing them. The following article is a slightly edited abridgement from chapter two, "You Might Not Love What You Think: Learning to Read 'Secular' Liturgies" (40–46).

One of my quiet moments of parental success was the day our oldest son, then a young teenager, asked me, "Dad, can you drive me to the temple?" I knew what he meant immediately. We had recently had a discussion in which I tried to impress upon him that the local mall is actually one of the most religious sites in town—but not because it is "preaching" a message or touting a doctrine. No one meets you at the door of the mall and gives you their statement of faith that lists the sixteen things the mall believes. The mall doesn't "believe" anything, and it isn't interested in engaging your intellect. (Its targets are lower.) But don't think that means the mall is a neutral space. And don't think that means the mall isn't religious. The mall is a religious site, not because it is theological but because it is liturgical. Its spiritual significance (and threat) isn't found in its "ideas" or its "messages" but in

its rituals. The mall doesn't care what you *think*, but it is very much interested in what you *love*. Victoria's secret is that she's actually after your heart.

So you need to readjust your eyes to see this familiar place. Put on a liturgical lens and look at your local mall again. Read its spaces, its practices, its rituals. What might you see?

Upon approach, the architecture of the building has a recognizable code that makes us feel at home no matter what city we're in. The large glass atriums at the entrances are framed by banners and flags; familiar texts and symbols on the exterior walls help the foreign faithful quickly and easily identify what's inside. As we enter, we are ushered into a narthex of sorts intended for receiving, orienting, and channeling new seekers as well as providing a bit of a decompression space for the regular faithful to "enter in" to the spirit of the space. For the seeker, there is a large map—a kind of worship aid—to help orient the novice to the location of various spiritual offerings and provide direction into the labyrinth that organizes and channels the ritual observance of the pilgrims.

The design of the interior is inviting to an almost excessive degree, with windows on the ceiling open to the sky but none on the walls open to the surrounding moat of automobiles. The sense conveyed is one of vertical or transcendent openness that at the same time shuts off the clamor and distractions of the horizontal, mundane world. This architectural mode of enclosure and enfolding suggests sanctuary, retreat, and escape. The pilgrim is also invited to escape from the mundane ticking of the clock—time to inhabit a space governed by a different time, even a sort of timelessness. We lose consciousness of time's passing and so lose ourselves in the rituals for which we've come. The worship space is governed by a kind of liturgical, festal calendar, variously draped in the colors, symbols, and images of an unending litany of holidays and festivals.

The layout of this temple has architectural echoes that hearken back to medieval cathedrals—mammoth religious spaces designed to absorb all kinds of religious activities happening at one time. And so one might say that this religious building has a winding labyrinth for contemplation, alongside of which are innumerable chapels devoted to various saints. We'll be struck by the statues and icons (mannequins) that embody for us concrete images of the good life. These are the ideals of perfection to which we will learn to aspire.

This temple offers a rich, embodied visual mode of evangelism that *attracts* us. This is a gospel whose power is *beauty*, which speaks to our deepest desires. It compels us to come, not through dire moralisms, but rather with a winsome invitation to share in this envisioned good life.

As we pause to reflect on some of the icons on the outside of one of the chapels, we are thereby invited to consider what's happening *within*—invited to enter into the act of worship more properly, invited to taste and see. We are greeted by a welcoming acolyte who offers to shepherd us through the experience, but also has the wisdom to allow us to explore on our own terms if we so choose. Having a sense of our need, we come looking, not sure what for, but *expectant*, knowing that what we need must be here. And then we hit upon it; we find that which will provide fulfillment.

After time spent searching in what the faithful call “the racks,” with our newfound holy object in hand, we proceed to the altar that is the consummation of worship. Behind the altar is the priest who presides over the consummating transaction. When invited to worship here, we are not only invited to give; we are invited to take. And so we make our sacrifice, leave our donation, but get in return something with solidity that is wrapped in the colors and symbols of the saints and the season. Released by the priest with a benediction, we make our

way out of the chapel to continue contemplation and be invited into another chapel.

The point to all this is to try to appreciate how a worldview is “carried” in everyday rituals and practices. How do we learn to be consumerists? Not because someone comes along and offers an argument for why stuff will make me happy. I don't *think* my way into consumerism. Rather, I'm covertly conscripted into a way of life because I have been *formed* by cultural practices that are nothing less than secular liturgies. My loves have been automated by rituals I didn't even realize were liturgies. These practices are loaded with their own teleological orientation toward a particular vision of the good life, a rival version of the kingdom, and by our immersion in them we are—albeit unwittingly—being taught what and how to *love*.

We could repeat such “liturgical” readings of cultural practices for an entire array of everyday rituals. When you put on these liturgical lenses, you'll see the stadium in a whole new way, as a temple of nationalism and militarism. When you look at the university with liturgical eyes, you'll start to realize that the “ideas” and “messages” of the university are often less significant than the rituals of frat parties and campus athletics.

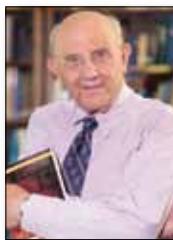
**“The most powerful liturgies
are attuned to our embodiment;
they speak to our senses;
they get under our skin.”**

When we stop to worry about smartphones just in terms of content (*what* we're looking at) and start to consider the rituals that tether us to them throughout the day, we'll notice that the very form of the practice comes loaded with an egocentric vision that makes *me* the center of the universe.

And so on, and so on. You will begin to appreciate that all sorts of things we do are, when seen in this light, doing something *to* us. It's not just the messages or ideas or information being disseminated by these cultural institutions that have import for discipleship; it is the very form of the practices themselves, their liturgical power to (de)form. Liturgies work affectively and aesthetically—they grab hold of our guts through the power of image, story, and metaphor. That's why the most powerful liturgies are attuned to our embodiment; they speak to our senses; they get under our skin. The way to the heart is through the body, you could say. *

God vs Mammon

By Herbert Schlossberg

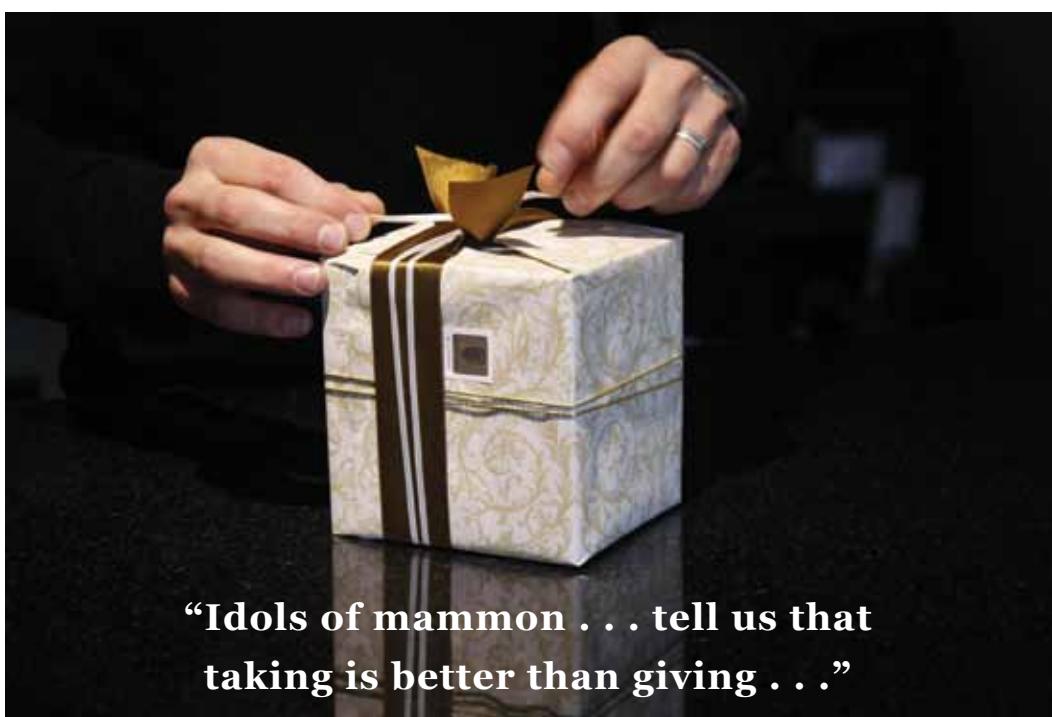


Herbert Schlossberg has taught history at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, and served as academic dean of Shepherd College in West Virginia. The following article is an excerpt from chapter 3 ("Idols of Mammon," 88–139) of his book *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Thomas Nelson, 1983).

When Jesus told his disciples they could not serve both God and mammon, the reason he gave was that the two were rival loyalties and that if one were loved the other would be despised (Matt 6:24). This admonition came in the midst of a portion of the Sermon on the Mount that warned against the preoccupation with wealth and material possessions. It did not say, as some varieties of the ascetic tradition teach, that material things are bad, but rather that they must not be sought as ends in themselves, as if they had everlasting life

idolatry (Col 3:5; Eph 5:5). This vice is a strong desire to have the possessions of others. So disastrous is it that the last of the Ten Commandments prohibits it, the only prohibition in the second table that concerns an attitude rather than an action. It often accompanies envy, which is a discontent at or resentment of another's good fortune.

It is the constant claim of ideologies of the left that capitalism has not satisfied people. That is perfectly true, because it is not in the nature of economic systems to satisfy anyone. Economic ideologies ranging across the entire political spectrum promise a cornucopia of material prosperity that will wipe away all tears. In so doing, they become idolatrous. The Christian position from the beginning has been that people are satisfied by becoming reconciled with God, not by acquiring wealth.



"Idols of mammon . . . tell us that taking is better than giving . . ."

and significance. Instead, the disciples were to seek the kingdom of God first, and whatever material goods they needed would be given to them as well.

The mammon described here as the rival of God, therefore, is the idolatrous elevation of money and the material possessions it will buy as the goal of life. Like all idolatries, it finds ultimate meaning in an aspect of the creation rather than in the creator. And like all idolatries it finds outlet in destructive pathologies that wreck human lives.

Those whose loyalty is to mammon quite naturally cast anxious eyes on the property belonging to others, and that is why the apostle called covetousness a form of

Idolatries of mammon are in fundamental disagreement with the warning of Jesus that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk 12:15). The ethical injunction that has to accompany such a position is contentment; therefore, the apostle says that "if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (I Tim 6:8). And again, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have" (Heb 13:5). That is why Marx called religion the opium of the people; he rightly saw that Christian faith is antithetical to the envy, the grasping for more, on which his revolution depends.

What of those who reject that counsel? "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (I Tim 6:9). People who are thus described naturally disagree, too, with the statement of Jesus that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Idolatries of mammon are unanimous in their insistence that it is more blessed to receive than to give; their ethic therefore is one of taking.

The prophets did not prescribe a technical fix for the economic desolation that comes from greed and idolatry. Only repentance and faith would serve. Idols of mammon invite us to place our hopes on wealth, tell us that taking

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and complete. But by what? Or, perhaps more accurately, by whom?

Often, critiques of consumerism concentrate on the goods and services we buy. “Stuff”—however—is not the obvious culprit. Goods have use-value and can be shared and enjoyed in edifying ways. The dilemma arises with the belief that material objects can fulfill what Pascal described as a “God-shaped hole.”

Perhaps no author has written about unfulfilled desire in such a timeless, compelling, and influential way as St. Augustine. Indeed, Augustine knows something about endlessly searching for enduring satisfaction, leaving no stone of worldly pursuits unturned. And yet, such pursuits left him wanting. *Restless.*

If we are created by a loving and deliberate creator, then the belief that we can be satisfied in the absence of our creator is a deception. We erroneously accept the narrative that material objects can fill a spiritually reserved space; that accumulation correlates with satiation; and that identity is bound up in whatever products, images, or brands we adorn ourselves in.

What if we were made for something else? Someone else? Hear afresh Augustine’s most famous affirmation: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

This is why Augustine claimed that virtue was “ordered love.” It is not the eradication of desire that is needed, but its redirection, and therefore, its fulfillment—desiring what is truly desirable, loving what is truly lovely, and pursuing that which is truly worthy of our pursuit. Moreover, “turning the soul” towards our creator does not come back void. It is the place where our deepest and realest appetites are satisfied. Referring to the “Holy Tempers” described by Christ in the beatitudes, Wesley reframes Christ’s invitation, “Behold, I show you the thing which your soul longeth for.”

It is our desires, our appetites, that constitute our humanity as much as, or more than, any of our other faculties. But it is *what* we desire, *what* we love, that will characterize the kind of humans we are. May our lives be full and fulfilled, because our loves are “ordered” to that which is truly loveable and worthy of our pursuit. #

“It is not the eradication of desire that is needed, but its redirection, and therefore, its fulfillment—desiring what is truly desirable . . .”

Hymn to Bellygod

By Stan Key

“For many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly . . .”

(Philippians 3:18–19).

*Oh for a thousand tongues to taste,
The flavor and delight;
Of eating fruit forbidden me,
My god says it’s alright.*

*Though some will think my actions strange,
Call my religion odd;
I will not blush to bow my knee
To worship Bellygod.*

*He validates my appetites
And never tells me “No,”
He gives me everything I want,
That’s why I love him so.*

*At times I get a glimpse of what
This worship does to me;
I slurp and burp and gorge myself
To praise my deity.*

*A wise man warned me, “Oh take care,
This god for which you crave;
He is a demon in disguise,
He has no power to save!”*

*But I’ll not listen to such talk,
I’m settled in my choice;
The god I want is in my gut
I’ll hear no other voice.*

*This Bellygod who dwells within
Is very good to me
He only makes just one demand:
My life and liberty.*

*Perhaps you’ve noticed what is clear
And very plain to see;
This worship giv’n to Bellygod
Is really giv’n to me.*

The Blessed Poor *continued from page 2*

Now, at last, Abraham was a man wholly surrendered, a man utterly obedient, a man who possessed nothing. He had concentrated his all in the person of his dear son, and God had taken it from him. God could have begun out on the margin of Abraham's life and worked inward to the center. He chose rather to cut quickly to the heart and have it over in one sharp act of separation. In dealing thus, he practiced an economy of means and time. It hurt cruelly, but it was effective.

I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds, and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe and by his side. He had everything, *but he possessed nothing*. This is the spiritual secret. After that bitter and blessed experience I think the words *my* and *mine* never again had the same meaning for Abraham. The sense of possession which they connote was gone from his heart.

There can be no doubt that this possessive clinging to things is one of the most harmful habits in life. Because it is so natural, it is rarely recognized for the evil that it is. But the Christian who is alive enough to know himself even slightly will recognize the symptoms of this possession malady and will grieve to find them in his own heart. If the longing after God is strong enough, he will want to do something about it.

But this great truth of possessing nothing cannot be learned as we learn the facts of physical science. This truth must be *experienced* before we can really know it. We must, in our hearts, live through Abraham's harsh and bitter experiences if we would know the blessedness which follows them. The ancient curse will not go out painlessly; the tough, old miser within us will not lie down and die in obedience to our command. He must be torn out of our heart like a plant from the soil; he must be extracted in agony and blood like a tooth from the jaw. He must be expelled from our soul by violence, as Christ expelled the money changers from the temple.

If we would indeed know God in growing intimacy, we must go this way of renunciation. And if we are set upon the pursuit of God, he will sooner or later bring us to this test. So we will be brought one by one to the testing place, and our whole future will be conditioned by the choice we make. *



The Urge to Splurge *continued from page 3*

and existed just to make him happy. This attitude is not only sinful, it is really stupid.

Third, a fool lives by the motto, "Now, now, now." In the closing line of the story, Jesus diagnoses the farmer's real problem: he was not "rich toward God" (Lk 12:21). In other words, he invested only in this present world, not in the Kingdom of God. To prefer stuff that is worldly and temporal over treasures that are spiritual and eternal is the height of economic idiocy. Little did the farmer realize that this very night his soul would be required of him. He lost his soul because he chose short-term happiness rather than long-term joy. He chose a barn on earth rather than a mansion in heaven—a fool's bargain if there ever was one!

The gospel of Jesus offers us two primary antidotes to covetousness, two weapons with which the Greed Monster can be dealt a death blow:

1. *Learn contentment.* Life's greatest joys come not when we finally get what we don't have but when we learn to be content with what we *do* have. "For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content" (I Tim 6:7-8).

2. *Give, give, give.* Invest in God's kingdom by pouring out your lives and your resources

for others. Do what the Rich Young Ruler refused to do and you will be blessed indeed. "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you" (Lk 6:38). *

God vs. Mammon *continued from page 8*

is better than giving, tempt us to covet what our neighbor has, convince us that we have been wronged because we do not possess as much as we desire, and, finally, pervert the sense of justice that alone can preserve peace. If we continue to worship them, the unrest and discontent that mark our society now are only a sample of the destruction that is to come. *

The Forgotten Commandment *continued from page 4*

Covetousness is a mirage that produces wretchedness because it fixes our gaze on something we do *not* have so that we don't praise God for what we *do* have.

Greed is idolatry, Paul writes in Colossians 3:5. God created our hearts to be satisfied only by fellowship with him. Anything less will not truly satisfy us. Covetousness is idolatry because it places a substitute for God in our hearts. Therefore, the tenth commandment brings us back to the first commandment because covetousness puts a false god in the place of the true God in our lives. Greed seeks first the kingdom of things, not the kingdom of God.

Because of the universality and the treachery of the sin of covetousness, this commandment is different from every other commandment in the Decalogue. All the others deal with specific actions: "Don't do this," or "Do that." Only this tenth commandment forbids a state of mind and heart. No matter how pious our outer life may be, if we yield inwardly to covetousness, we are guilty of breaking the commandment. It goes to the heart.

Jesus taught that the cure for covetousness, the way to change this great imbalance in the human heart, is to let the Holy Spirit restore our hearts to their intended balance. That happens only when we completely surrender ourselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Only when we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness will other things be given to us (see Lk 12:31). To accomplish this change we need a new birth, a conversion, a change of outlook, and a change of values. Since covetousness is a sin of the inner life, our supreme need is to be set right within our hearts.

Are you a slave to your desires? Or are you the master of your desires? The only way to change, to become a master, is to be mastered by Jesus Christ. The only answer to covetousness is a total surrender to God and a total infilling and cleansing of his Holy Spirit. "Rejoice in the Lord always," writes Paul (Phil 4:4). That's the answer to covetousness. Find your delight in God, surrender your will, power, success, money, and recognition to Christ. Let him be your master. This cure is described in I Timothy 6:6 as: "godliness with contentment." We gain victory over covetousness when we are content in Jesus Christ. *

**"Only when we seek first
the kingdom of God and his
righteousness will other things
be given to us (see Lk 12:31)."***

Remembering Lot's Wife *continued from page 5*

They began like Jacob, David, and Peter but they are likely to end like Esau, Saul, and Judas. They began like Ruth, Hannah, and Mary, but they are likely to end like Lot's wife.

The Scripture describes the death of Lot's wife in a few, simple words. God struck her dead so that she "became a pillar of salt" (Gen 19:26). To die by the direct interposition of an angry God—this is a fearful end indeed! For Lot's wife, it was a hopeless end. She went to hell. This is why Jesus wants us to remember her. It is good to be reminded that God punishes those who willfully sin against him. Though Lot's wife is dead, she still speaks to us.

Dear reader, are you halting between two opinions? Are you disposed to go back to the world? Are you lukewarm in your faith? Do you secretly cherish some besetting sin? Are you resting in your religious privileges thinking that your Christian heritage and spiritual friends can save you? Are you professing faith in Jesus while at the same time clinging to the world? Are you sitting in an evangelical church Sunday after Sunday yet refusing to part with your favorite sins? If you are such a person, I have only one thing to say: Remember Lot's wife! *

The Flies and the Honey Pot

From Aesop's Fables

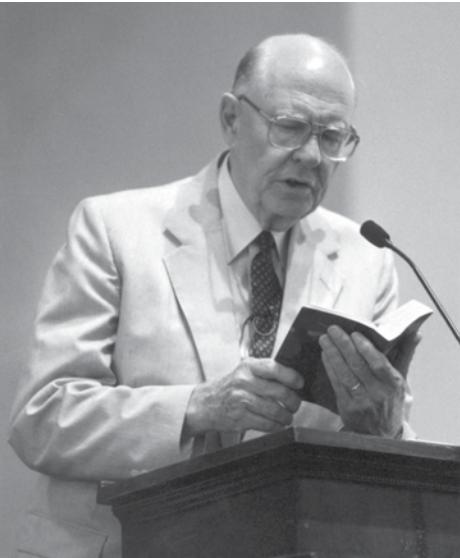
The following poem is taken from *Aesop's Fables (The Book of Virtues, Ed. William J. Bennett, Simon & Schuster: 1993, 48)* and reminds us how greed is self-destructive. Jesus promoted the virtue of childlikeness (not childishness) because he knew that only children are able to understand such a story.

*A jar of honey chanced to spill
Its contents on the window sill
In many a viscous pool and rill.*

*The flies, attracted by the sweet,
Began so greedily to eat,
They smeared their fragile wings and feet.*

*With many a twitch and pull in vain
They gasped to get away again,
And died in aromatic pain.*

*Moral
Of foolish creatures that destroy
Themselves for transitory joy.*



An Opportunity to Express Thankfulness

By Charlie Fiskeaux

All of us experienced Dr. Dennis Kinlaw in our own personal ways: as an evangelist, teacher, ministry leader, administrator, visionary, personal friend, or founder of the Francis Asbury Society. For me—and perhaps others—he personified the evangelist with a primary message that our hearts can be undivided and our lives can be *wholly devoted to God*. Certainly, my life is different because our paths crossed and, for this, I am very thankful. Perhaps as you reflect upon your interactions and conversations with Dr. Kinlaw, you too find a spirit of thankfulness welling up within your spirit.

During this season, what better way to give thanks for Dr. Kinlaw and his ministry than to express your appreciation with a gift to the Kinlaw Legacy Fund that will enable speaker-evangelists to continue proclaiming the message that, with the Holy Spirit's in-filling, our hearts can be undivided and our lives can be *wholly devoted to God*.

Gifts of all types are appreciated, including present gifts of cash, investments, or tangible assets and deferred gifts through one's estate or will.

THE *Kinlaw Legacy* FUND

Persons interested in making non-cash or deferred gifts should contact President Stan Key. *

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