

Consumerism and Sustainability

Buy, buy or bye, bye?

We are all consumers – we eat, clothe ourselves, use electricity, and use many other resources and services as we live our lives. God has made the world with resources for us to use and has created us with abilities to be productive and to exchange what we produce with one another. That is all part of being human. But when does that consumption become something destructive rather than positive, and unsustainable rather than fruitful? What about the effects of marketing and fashion and ‘retail therapy’ and convenience? What about the waste we also produce and the effect of our consumption on the very planet we have been given responsibility for? Huge questions, on which the Bible is not silent.



Pray for clarity to see whatever God wants to reveal to you during this study



John Wesley earned £30, lived on £28 and gave £2 away. The next year he earned £60, lived on £28 and gave away £32. The next year he earned £90, lived on £28, gave away £62. The following year he earned £120, lived on £28, and gave away £92.

Was he: a. Mad c. Eccentric e. Misguided
 b. Boring d. Inspired f. ???



Excess

Read: Esther 1: 1 – 8 King Xerxes holds a banquet.

Note the excesses of this protracted feast.

What examples do you see of excessive consumerism in our world today?



Personal Effects of Consumerism

Note any undesirable personal effects of consumerism that these passages reveal; especially any negative impact on a person's spiritual life.

Ecclesiastes 5: 11

Haggai 1

Mark 4: 18 – 19

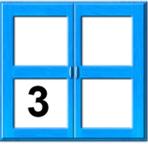
John 6: 26 – 27 and noting v.66

1 John 2: 15 – 17

Luke 12: 13 – 21

In Luke 12: 15 Jesus says “Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (TNIV) or “Real life is not measured by how much we own.” (NLT)

If real life is not measured by consumer items or possessions, what then are the components of a meaningful life?



Sufficiency

These passages encourage a different way to approach our use of material things.

Proverbs 30: 8 – 9 The Prayer of Agur
What are the reasons given in this prayer for seeking to have not too much and not too little?

We regularly say in The Lord's Prayer "Give us this day our daily bread". (as in Matthew 6: 11)
What are the implications of this prayer?



Matthew 6: 25 – 34
How does Jesus suggest the attitude of Christians to material things is to be different to that of unbelievers?

Philippians 4: 11 – 13
What is the secret to Paul's contentment?



If, as Christians, we applied these attitudes, how would our lives be different to how we live now and to how those around us live?

What are the difficulties or barriers to living in such a way?



Sustainability

Genesis 2: 15 Humans in Eden.

What responsibility was given to human beings?

What does that responsibility mean for humankind today?

Nahum 3: 16 describes the activity of merchants.
In what ways is this effect seen in our day?

Leviticus 25: 1 – 7 The Sabbath Year.

What does this passage suggest about sustainable use of resources?

'The Story of Stuff'

View this 20 minute animated presentation on consumerist society by economist Annie Leonard on www.storyofstuff.com

This plain-language presentation gives an overview of the materials economy and opens up discussion on the process of unsustainable consumerism and its effects on the world.

What issues are raised for us as Christians by what is presented in 'The Story of Stuff' ?



What has this study revealed about the nature of God?



What new thought or understanding has come to you during this study?



What issues, questions or practical implications for your local church, your church denomination, or the wider Christian church, are raised by this study?



(This section may be used for personal reflection alone or may be shared within the group)

If you suddenly had a windfall of a large amount of money (say \$10,000), what would you do with it? Why would you use it that way?

If you were to regularly pray the prayer of Agur, what changes do you think might result in your life?

What can you do, personally, to help alleviate the effects of unsustainable consumerism on the world?



Spend some time as a group praying over what you have discussed, asking God to bring into focus how you may respond to his Word in an ongoing way.



More Bible passages and discussion questions for further study:

Read:

Genesis 41: 15 – 36 Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams of famine.
Exodus 16 Israelites in the desert collect manna and quail.

In one case the instruction is to store up supplies for a coming famine, in the other the instruction is to trust God to provide for each day.

As Christians how do we balance prudent husbanding of resources with trusting in God's ongoing provision?

A related subject to consumerism and sustainability is God's provision.

What do the following passages reveal about what God provides for people and why he provides it?

Deuteronomy 2: 7 God's provision of the needs of Israelites
Acts 14: 16 – 17 Provision for all nations
Ezekiel 36: 16 – 38 God's promise to restore and provide for Israel again.



Notes on some of the passages referred to in this study:

Esther 1: 1 – 8 King Xerxes ruled the Persian Empire from 486 – 465 BC.

Haggai 1 Haggai was a prophet who preached around 520BC. In this short book Haggai makes clear how God is active in the world.

Mark 4: 18 – 19 These verses are part of Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower, in which Jesus details the different ways that people may respond to God's word and what influences those responses.

Mark 6: 26 – 27 Jesus is referring here to those who followed him after the feeding of the 5000, which is recorded earlier in the same chapter. V.66 indicates the disillusionment of those who had seen Jesus as a miracle worker and provider, but not as Lord.

Luke 12: 13 – 31 The man who asked Jesus to arbitrate over an inheritance was regarding Jesus as a rabbi; rabbis often fulfilled such a role. Jesus declines to pass judgement on that man's case but instead uses his interruption as an opportunity to speak more generally on the subjects of greed, possessions and our relationship with God. Jesus uses the Parable of the Rich Fool to make his point.

Proverbs 30: 8 – 9 While most of Proverbs was written by Solomon, the author of this chapter is a man named Agur, about whom little else is known.

Nahum 3: 16 Nahum is a short book that is a prophecy against the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and was at that time a hub of great empire; a place of wealth, power, imposing buildings and a great library. Nineveh was destroyed when invaded in 612BC.

Leviticus 25: 1 – 7 The Sabbath Year is part of the whole Sabbath and Jubilee system which we will look at more fully in a later study.

Exodus 16 The Israelites lived on manna for the 40 years that they spent in the wilderness after leaving Egypt and before entering the Promised Land.

Acts 14: 16 – 17 Paul healed a lame man in a place named Lystra. The people then treated Paul as a god. He spoke to assure them that he was only human but that the Living God cares for the and provides for them.

Ezekiel 36: 16 – 38 Part of a section of Ezekiel that promises God's restoration of Israel.