

CHAPTER 9 STUFF



This study guide offers a suite of resources for teachers, small group leaders, or parents to generate discussion and reflection. This guide is not intended to be a structured 'lesson plan', but aims to provide questions, discussion starters, Bible passages, videos, and challenge questions that can be shaped into a structured experience.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

You might use one or more of these to foster engagement in a discussion about stuff:

- > How would you describe your relationship to things?
- > Can you imagine always having to wear out-of-date clothes? How would that feel?
- > Does going shopping and buying a new thing give you a boost of happiness?
- > Is it possible that the more that consuming things becomes part of your identity, the more you might tend to 'consume' other people?
- > Is consumption always wrong?
- > Does my lifestyle tread lightly on the planet or are you leaving an unjustly large footprint?

BIBLE PASSAGES

This resource is not intended to be a Bible study. However, discussion and reflection on one or more of these passages, and how they might inform a view of the topic of the chapter, is encouraged. It would be good to direct questioning towards, "What was the original context?", "What was the author's purpose?", and "How does the passage add to a big picture view of stuff?":

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? *Mark 8:36*

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." *Luke 12:15*

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. *1 Timothy 6:17*

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." *Hebrews 13:5*

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, 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. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. *1 Timothy 6:6-10*

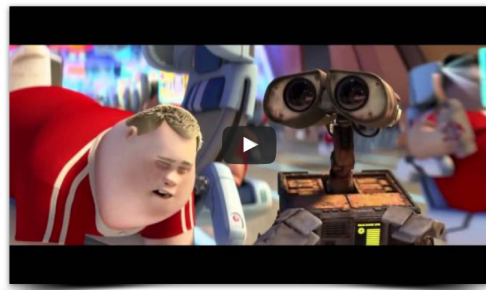
Do not make any idols. *Exodus 34:17*

STIMULUS VIDEOS

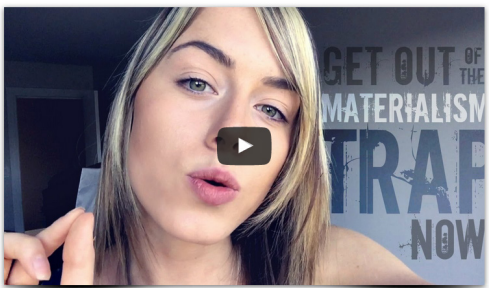
You might use one or more of these videos to generate engagement. Or you might use one at the end of the discussion with the focus being to critique the assumptions within the video. You might follow the viewing with questions like “What feelings did that video give you?”, or “Would this video be helpful to show young children? Why or why not?”, or “What do we learn about our culture in this video?”:



Consumerism trap: Y-Fone 5
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNbgQxmcYQY>



Human dystopia: Wall-E
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1BQPv-iCKU>



Get out of the consumerism trap NOW
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qk1i7UGBz1Q>



Big
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_39b8e5PXWw

All videos can be found at www.thefrogandthefish.com/videos

EXTRACTS FROM THE BOOK

It might be that reading one, or both, of these extracts from *The Frog and the Fish* could be a helpful addition to your discussion time:

“To understand why the emphasis on consuming became a theme of our culture, we need to explore how the success of a country tends to be defined. Economists, politicians, and the ‘captains of industry’ tend to measure the success of a nation by the amount of stuff and services that are being made, sold, and then consumed by the people. A nation’s health is not typically assessed by measures of community volunteering, mental well-being, justice, family stability, creativity, or sustainability, but by measures of consumption. Within this view of the world, the storyline of consumption needs to be

told, and retold, by those that produce all the stuff, so the story can then be embraced by the people. The result is a highly effective industry of storytellers formed to tell this story—and they certainly tell it extremely well.

This hasn't always been the case. It wasn't that many generations ago that thrift and restraint were seen as self-evident virtues. However, along came the steam engine and its big brother, the Industrial Revolution. We were now able to make truckloads of stuff really quickly and cheaply. We then needed people to buy all the new stuff. As flocks of people left their semi-subsistence rural lives to move to cities and work in the new stuff-making-factories, an industry of storytellers—advertisers and marketers—grew to tell the story of our 'need' for all the stuff."

The Frog and the Fish, Chapter 9, pg. 89

"The more that we subconsciously identify as consumers as a fundamental way of understanding who we are, the more we tend to 'consume' in other aspects of life. We have already spoken about the go-between effect that communication technologies can have in relationships. When this is combined with a mindset of consuming—I am free to choose what I want when I want—then social media facilitates a tendency to consume relationships. Ultimately, this is the consumption of people. I will choose who I want to relate to, when I want to relate to them, how much I will give, and I will discard the 'goods' when they no longer suit me. As consuming is such a strong theme of our cultural story, we can tend towards consuming people as we might consume things—without even realising. Have you ever noticed this happening? Has it happened to you? Dare I ask, have you ever treated anyone else this way? To consume people and relationships is completely at odds with the creator's design for humans to flourish. People have immense value not as commodities but by being designed, made, and loved as distinct individuals made in God's likeness. Treating others, and being treated yourself, as anything less is completely counter to the good news of the biblical view of life."

The Frog and the Fish, Chapter 9, pg. 92

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

Perhaps the aim of your discussion/reflection with your group is to present a biblical perspective on the topic of the chapter. It might be that challenging the culturally shaped assumptions currently held needs to compliment this. You might use one or more of these questions to help achieve this:

1. Can consumption ever be a good thing?

God has given us a rich and diverse creation to enjoy. Consuming and experiencing this richness is good.

2. When and how does consuming become consumerism?

When humbly, thankfully, and wisely consuming the goodness of the creation turns into a mindset that believes that the consuming of stuff will bring security, happiness, acceptance from others, it has become consumerism: something that we worship.

3. Can you identify a 'consumerism' story being told by your culture?

The worship of the never ending consumption of stuff is a strong theme in Western culture. This can result in us viewing other aspects of life through a consumer lens.

4. Why do I sometimes feel like I have to consume?

You are not defined by your consumption. Even though advertising has been shaping you from an impressionably young age to believe that your identity is that of consumer, you don't need to believe this lie. Have the courage to say, "No" and recognise that your identity is found in a much deeper understanding of life and this world.

5. Can you think of times when consumerism may shape us to even consume people?

People should never be consumed. The consumerism story may shape us subtly into a pattern of treating others as stuff. This is a long way from God's good design for people and relationships.

6. Can consumerism shape our relationship to people?

Consumerism draws us into a contract mindset—I do this, or give you this, then you do this, or give me this. Commitment to people, relationships, community results in a richer life for you and others. Seek to nurture a commitment rather than a contract view of life.

7. What impact might unlimited consumerism have on the world?

The earth's resources are not finite. At the rate we are consuming, the world's resources will run out, and its capacity to absorb our pollution will come to an end. This is somewhat self-evident. Ignoring this is perhaps a great injustice to others now and to future generations.



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