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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# Have You Ever Had Too Much Chinese Food?

Monday, May 22, 2017

Have you ever had too much of a good thing? For you, it might be cookies, ice cream, candy, or other sweets. It could also be television or video games. For me, it is the single greatest type of cuisine: Chinese food. When I'm staring at a plate of Chinese food, no matter how full I might already feel, I feel the need to finish it. I convince myself that if I don't finish the food, I'll be missing out. I also know that it's quite easy to place said food back in the container, and then in the refrigerator, to enjoy as leftovers the next day. However, I also tell myself that it simply won't be as good the next day, and so finishing it is the only option. Thirty minutes later, I lie down on the couch, and that uncomfortable, overly full feeling sets in, as does my regret.

Yes, too much of a good thing can be a bad thing.

This past weekend, Ben Snyder closed out our series, *Heroic*, by talking about the villain of more, which he defined as, "When the more we pursue costs more than it's worth." Certainly, this definition applies to my overeating of Chinese food.

But what does this look like in other areas of life? Too much Netflix, video games, certain foods, caffeine, etc., can cost us more than they're worth. If you watch too much Netflix or play video games too often, this can cut into relational time, and of course, time that we should be spending in prayer, reading, etc. If you eat too much of certain foods, you run the risk of major health issues; and if you drink too much caffeine, this can hurt your sleep patterns, which can cause a whole host of other health problems.

Simply put, "more" isn't always a good thing.

In the story, we read this past weekend, we saw a clear example of how more can be a dreadful thing. In Acts 5, we come across a story from the time the Christian church began. The people in the church operated as a family. They pooled their resources and gave as much as they could to support one another and the mission of the church. Enter Ananias and Sapphira.

## Acts 5:1-6

<sup>1</sup>But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property.

<sup>2</sup>He brought part of the money to the apostles, **claiming** it was the **full** amount. With his wife's consent, **he kept** the rest.

<sup>3</sup>Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. <sup>4</sup>The property was yours to sell or not sell, **as you wished**. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!"

<sup>5</sup>As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. <sup>6</sup>Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

What's important to note is that Peter tells Ananias that he didn't have to sell the property and give the money to the "church." This was something that if he decided to do, it would've been out of his free will. So, there was no point in holding back some of it. He could've said, "I sold my property, and I want to donate a certain percentage of my profit to you." This would have been acceptable and generous! Instead, he lied about giving it all to them. It seems that Ananias wanted more recognition for his generosity and also wanted more money. For Ananias, it was more important that people thought he was generous than it was for him to be honest.

What does this mean for us? Of course, the circumstances aren't the same, but there is still something to be gleaned from this text. Like Ananias, when we pursue more of something, we are placing a high value on that thing - whatever that thing might be. We have to ask ourselves the question, *"Does this cost more than it's worth?"* If we can quickly answer no, then obviously we shouldn't be pursuing that "thing." However, most of the time it's not as easy to give an answer. Instead, we can look at goodness, faithfulness, and self-control like personal assistants in helping us to bring the villain of more into the light.

What is true goodness? What do we want our lives to look like? For Christ-followers, though we may want a good job, a healthy family, and other worthy pursuits, the ultimate goodness is knowledge of and closeness with God. Nothing compares to the goodness of knowing God. If that is the chief goal of our lives, then we should use that as the filter through which we run all of the "more" we are chasing. If more Netflix, Chinese food, video games, golf, etc., detracts from your relationship with God, then it certainly is not worth pursuing. The same applies to a healthy family, a healthy life, etc. Whatever is included in your definition of "goodness" should be the filter you use to answer the question "does it cost more than it's worth?"

Then, we can look at what we can actively do now to help us to reach the goodness we desire (faithfulness). If we desire closeness with God, we know that we should be practicing basic spiritual disciplines like reading, praying, fasting, etc. If we desire a healthy family, we should practice the disciplines of eating together, praying together, and forgiving together.

Finally, we can look at self-control. When we exhibit self-control, we ask the question, "What appetites left unchecked have the potential to wreck my life?" The good news is that we can apply this question to any "more" we are pursuing.

Ultimately, we have a choice. We can, like Ananias, choose to pursue the more in our lives - which eventually becomes a villain - or, we can pursue goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

What more are you pursuing?

Does the more you're seeking cost more than it's worth?

What appetites left unchecked have the potential to wreck your life?

What can you do today to bring the villain of more into the light?

*Heavenly Father, thank you for your mercy and your grace. So often, I pursue things that aren't worth what I'm giving up for them. So often I place so many other things before my relationship with you. Help me to love you and hold you above all else. Help me to resist the temptations in my life and to live a life pleasing to you. I ask this in Jesus' name, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, amen.*

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

# Stuff: You Can't Take It with You. Or Can You?

Tuesday, May 23, 2017

Last October, my wife and I were blessed with the opportunity to be part of a mission team from CedarCreek and Rock City churches that traveled to Choluteca, Honduras. The week in Honduras generated many memorable experiences, including our participation in constructing two homes for families in need. But looking back, there is little doubt about the most indelible memory from our visit: The perpetual smiles we saw on the faces of the local children.

The poverty in Honduras is crushing. We're all familiar with televised images from impoverished nations – the sort that are so painful to view that our immediate reaction is to turn the channel to escape the sadness of what we are watching. Witnessing true poverty up close is different. It's so profound that you don't just see it, or even feel it; you can almost taste it. Most of the families in the areas we visited live in homes with dirt floors and only the most primitive of possessions. Electricity and running water are nothing short of dreams for most of the residents. A solid roof and walls represent far more reasonable – but not always achievable – desires.

The local children commonly wander the neighborhood shoeless (out of necessity, rather than choice). And a good number of them live in single-parent homes where it is not uncommon for young children to effectively raise their even younger siblings while older family members pursue work in hopes of providing even the most basic needs. Access to education is limited, a privilege that all too few enjoy; and health concerns abound due to the environment and living conditions.

And yet, the smiles of these children endure.

What makes the smiles so striking is that they are worn amid the most trying of circumstances. These children who have so little concerning worldly comforts and possessions seem happier and more content than many of us who possess far greater material wealth. They are eager to greet and hug visitors and to play when the opportunity exists.

A particularly vivid illustration of this contentment was on regular display throughout our time in Honduras. Each day, as we worked at the residential construction sites, we watched wistfully as a young boy galloped across a nearby clearing. He ran in circles, chasing an old bicycle tire that he was propelling along the ground with a pair of sticks he held in his small hands. Watching this, one could not help but think that he could not have been happier if he had a Hoverboard or the latest video game that so many in the U.S. covet.

In concluding the Heroic series this past weekend, lead pastor Ben Snyder addressed the “Villain of More.” Like the other villains in the Heroic series, the unquenchable desire for more is all too familiar to many of us. As Ben noted, we know we have an issue with “more” when it becomes evident that the cost of pursuing it exceeds its worth.

The experience in Honduras followed my wife and me home. Along with affirming our belief in the value of mission work that is supported by churches like CedarCreek, the trip affected our

view of how much is enough. Spending time in fellowship and friendship with those who have so little made us question why we've acquired – and continue to acquire – so much.

### **1 Timothy 6:6-10**

<sup>6</sup>Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. <sup>7</sup>After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. <sup>8</sup>So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

<sup>9</sup>But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup>For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

In speaking about the above scripture, Andy Stanley, senior pastor of Atlanta-based North Point Community Church, shines a light on the emptiness found in chasing “more.” Stanley juxtaposes this desire with the wealth, or “great gain” that comes with true godliness and contentment.

Great gain, Stanley says, is about *godliness*, or surrendering our life to God to become what he wants us to become, and *contentment*, or being satisfied with what we have. “If great gain is just about stuff, then when we die and leave it all here, that means we had no gain because we didn't send anything on ahead,” Stanley says. He adds that if we keep chasing “more,” we won't do anything of any real value other than just acquire stuff.

None of us wants our legacy to be that of a selfish acquirer of stuff.

Often, we want more because we aren't content with what we have. But as Socrates said, “He who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have.”

Just imagine how much easier it would be to fight the villain of “more” if we were as content as those children in Honduras.

Contentment is its own reward. As Paul tells us, it is also protection against ruin. Later, in 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul provides us an attractive alternative when he writes, “But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.”

Instead of chasing after the riches of “more,” Paul instructs us to be content with being rich in good deeds.

It may sound like a caveat – and perhaps it is to some degree – but none of this is to suggest that we should refrain from all discretionary purchases, or necessarily dedicate ourselves to living without. We should, however, take care to invest the appropriate amount of attention to valuing what we already have. In doing so, we can help prevent the want for more from becoming the driver in our life. For when we focus on God and the gifts he has afforded us, we know we are surely on the road to a richer and more contented life.

When were you the most content in your life?

If you had only the bare essentials, could you be content?

Do you find it difficult to draw the distinction between needs and wants?

What can you do to be more mindful of times when you are confronted by the villain of more?

Do you have a friend or spouse who can help “keep you in check” when your desire for more rises to an unhealthy level?

What can you do to be more content in your blessings?

Heavenly Father, I thank you for all that you have provided me and ask that you grant me the wisdom to appreciate that it is just enough for me. Help me to live a life that is far richer in deeds than in possessions. And help me always to remember that godliness and contentment provide unparalleled wealth. Amen.

This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular contributor and editor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

# Wanting “More” Isn’t Just About Stuff.

Wednesday, May 24, 2017

I love Pandora. I can select a song or an artist, and the Pandora magicians pull together a cast of songs that work amazingly well together and fit my mood. I can be worshipping with the musicians from Bethel Music gathering my courage to be brave and escape the bathroom to see what my newly potty-trained two-year-old is up to. And then I hear "O, O, O, O'Reilly's Auto parts," and I'm transported from striving to be brave to thinking I might need some auto parts to fix my perfectly functioning van. Or when my son this past Christmas heard "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," and immediately said, "No, it's 'We wish you a merry *gift card*.'" Thank you, Applebee's, for taking a classic Christmas song and making it more about getting stuff.

We live in a culture where we never have enough. We are bombarded with advertisements while we listen to the radio, watch television, read a magazine, attend sporting events, and now even while we pump gas. We cannot get away from the message that everyone has more than we do, and we need more. I am a reasonably content person. I don't need a lot of stuff, but when I see a new book come out, or even better, a beautiful old one, I want it. I want to fill my bookshelves with books that hopefully someone will read (preferably me); but even if I don't, at least I have that pretty book on my shelf. It makes me feel good. I like my books. It's not like I'm buying shoes or clothes or purses, so it's relatively innocent and cheap. But it still shows a side of me that wants more. When we constantly want more, we are revealing the true condition of our hearts, that Jesus is not enough.

Sometimes it's not stuff that we want - it's knowledge. Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived. He had everything anyone could want: money, possessions, hundreds of wives and children, fame, and wisdom that left the Queen of Sheba speechless; however, he concluded that it was all meaningless. In Ecclesiastes 2:11-12 he cries out,

“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;  
I refused my heart no pleasure.  
My heart took delight in all my work,  
And this was the reward for all my labor.  
Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done  
And what I had toiled to achieve,  
Everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;  
Nothing was gained under the sun.”

This is a far cry from the words he wrote in Psalm 72 when he was prophesying about the coming Messiah, when hope and justice were filling his heart. Verses 12-13 state,

“For he will deliver the needy who cry out,  
the afflicted who have no one to help.  
He will take pity on the weak and the needy  
and save the needy from death.”



And yet even though these two passages appear entirely distinct, they are marvelously connected. Solomon knew that Jesus, the coming Messiah, was the only thing that would truly satisfy. But, he kept seeking more and more until he was a wealthy, yet bitter old man with too many wives & children and no hope. Jesus, and only Jesus, is enough. It's not what faith in Jesus gets you. It's not about us; it's always about him.

In Matthew 16 Jesus is telling his disciples that following him will not be easy. They will suffer for their faith and may even be killed for their belief. He encourages, reminding them that their bodies are temporary, yet their souls are eternal. When we grab after things on this earth (be it things, people, relationships, knowledge, or money), we risk forfeiting our souls in exchange for something that will not last and will leave us empty. When we accept that only Jesus can satisfy, we can join and boldly sing:

Enough for me that Jesus saves, This ends my fear and doubts;  
A sinful soul I come to Him, He'll never cast me out.  
I need no other argument; I need no other plea,  
It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.

### **Matthew 16:24-26**

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup>If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. <sup>26</sup>And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

What does Jesus say his followers must do? When we give up our lives, what do we gain?

What does it mean that Jesus is enough? What would that look like in your life right now?

Ask Jesus to help you live like he is enough. Pray for the strength to fight the temptations to allow things or people to try and fill the void that only Jesus can fill. Allow him to fill those empty places, and help you live like nothing else is needed.

This post was written by Julie Mabus, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

# Pinterest and Personal Time.

Thursday, May 25, 2017

Pinterest is so fun. If you're not familiar, it's a website that allows you to search for a wide variety of crafts, activities, recipes, clothes, hair ideas, home improvement projects; the list goes on. You can "pin" these ideas to save for later. I've had many a successful Pinterest craft, but I've also had plenty of Pinterest fails. (Search online for "Pinterest fails" if you're in need of a good laugh. It compares the original, perfect idea, to pictures of people's hilariously unsuccessful attempts.) My four-year-old daughter is usually the guinea pig for my attempts. I've made costume pieces and created activities, usually with unintended high expectations for her reaction. Usually, she is surprised and happy, and we create fun memories. But now and then, she is less than impressed, and I am let down because of the time I've put into making it unique. But why am I doing these things? Is it for the reaction? What am I expecting her to say? "Wow, you did great, Mom! You really followed those directions well, even though I didn't ask you to do this." Hmm. Really what I am doing is trying to show her how good of a mom I am. ("Look at all the effort I put into this, you should be happy!") As silly as that sounds, it's true. What she wants, though, is a relationship with me. She wants time with me, even if it's doing something simple like playing Barbies or coloring.

We make these same mistakes with our spiritual lives. We tend to let things get in the way of our relationship with Jesus. Sometimes it's things that truly move us away from him like sin-condoning TV shows. Sometimes it's things that are distracting and non-purposeful like social media. However, more deceptively, it can also be the things that are rooted in good intentions. In Philippians 3, Paul describes how well he followed the Jewish law. He was circumcised and was a member of the Pharisees (who strictly followed Jewish law). He goes on to describe how his thinking has changed.

## ***Philippians 3:7-8***

*I once thought these things were valuable, but now consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ.*

Paul realized that though his previous actions were with good intentions, they are worthless compared to what Jesus has done for us and that no human effort can be relied upon.

Jesus doesn't want anything fancy. He doesn't need us to show him how religious we are or how perfect we are. He wants you, the real you, and all of you. We don't need to give him a polished, perfected person before we pursue him.

He wants you now, and he wants to know you and for you to know him.

What in your life (righteous or otherwise) is distracting you from bettering your relationship with Jesus?

What do you need to do to get rid of this?

Paul understood that because of Jesus, the Jewish laws were no longer something he needed to concern himself with. He even called them “worthless.” What are some modern-day examples of “churchy” distractions that deceive people into thinking their actions aide their salvation instead of crediting only Jesus?

*God, please help me to recognize what is distracting me from my relationship with you. Help me to shift my focus onto you and less on my human efforts. Allow me to live righteously without its pursuit becoming a distraction from my actual relationship with you. Amen.*

This post was written by Ashlee Grosjean, a regular contributor the LivingItOut Bible Study.

# What Does Your Portfolio Look Like?

Friday, May 26, 2017

We all make decisions in life about what we will invest our time, talents, treasures – ourselves – in. We need to choose wisely. Luke 12: 15 says, “Life is not measured by how much you own.” That statement can apply to money, possessions, or material goods in general. As for me, I spent my early professional years attempting to amass degrees and certifications and knowledge and a name, at one time lecturing nationally. What I did not invest in was my relationship with my wife. As a result, I lost her, along with the prospect of children and a family. I was too focused on the wrong things - selfish, self-serving things. God chopped my legs out from under me and got my attention. He has been lovingly building me up into who he always wanted me to be since then. I wish I would have paid attention earlier, but I love what he has been doing with me since then.

So, if life is not about things, what is it about? God placed us here with a purpose in mind. He put us here to serve him *right where we are!* So, what does that look like? Today’s scripture tells us that the things of this world will deteriorate or be taken away. Things are temporal. People’s souls, however, are eternal. If you want to invest in something that will last, invest in those God has placed in your life. Love your family, your spouse, your kids, your parents, your crazy aunts and uncles and cousins, your neighbors. Invest in their lives. Spend time with them, learn who they are, and love them for that.

Every family has idiosyncrasies. Such crazy quirks can make us want to disown our family members at times. A better approach would be to accept these peculiarities, even embrace them. Laugh and admit, "Hey, this is just who we are!" God's family is no different. The outrageous, insane virtue as members of his family is that we love lavishly, crazily, with abandon, expecting nothing in return. Shower those you have been given with limitless attention and unconditional love. Invest in them. By doing this, you are serving God and allowing him to love others through you. This will not only benefit the people in your lives in the here and now, but it will follow you into eternity. What are your treasures? If you are not happy with your choices, ask God to change you and help you finish strong.

Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Contrast the ultimate end of worldly treasures with those we store in heaven.

Why does this verse link your treasure with your heart?

**Prayer:**

### **His Plan For Me**

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ  
And He shows me his plan for me;  
The plan for my life as it might have been  
Had He had His way, and I see  
How I blocked Him here and I checked Him there  
And I would not yield my will,  
Will there be grief in my Savior's eyes'  
Grief, though He loves me still?  
He would have me rich, but I stand there poor,  
Stripped of all but His grace,  
While memory runs like a hunted thing  
Down paths I cannot retrace,  
Then my desolate heart will well-nigh break  
With tears I cannot shed.  
I'll cover my face with my empty hands  
And bow my uncrowned head.  
Lord of the years that are left to me  
I yield them to thy hand.  
Take me, make me, mold me  
To the pattern Thou hast planned.

-Martha Snell Nicholson

This post was written by David Vernier, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.