

## Consumer or consumed? Part 2 – Loving God in a Material World

Last week...[Psalm 62: My soul finds rest in God alone...](#)

Consumer culture is one of the most powerful systems of formation in the contemporary world. We are immersed in it. We swim in it. It is our water.

Marketing and advertising **sow dissatisfaction/seek to create identity**

St. Augustine: **“You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”**

Hunger and desire

**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matt. 5:6)**

Jesus offers himself as the **only satisfaction of such hunger:**

**“Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)**

We are desiring and loving creatures. God has made us to be lovers and worshipers.

Our heart is like a compass. And our compass points us in the wrong direction. Consumerism and the deceitfulness of wealth points us in the wrong direction.

We lose true north. We need to recalibrate. Our heart. Our loves. Our desires.

The siren call of consumerism and the worship of something greater

You worship what you love and you do not always love what you think...

## Colossians 3:12-14

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues **put on love**, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

In this passage, Paul is writing about *virtues* and what it takes to become more like Jesus. To live a more Christlike life.

He describes virtues such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience – and ultimately, love.

The image he uses is one of putting on clothes... “clothe yourselves with” these virtues.

Put them on.

And tie them all together with the greatest virtue which is LOVE.

Love is like the belt that ties and holds all the others together...

So what is a virtue? It’s a term that we don’t use much any more.

A virtue, put simply, is a **good moral habit**.

The opposite – a vice – is a bad moral habit.

Good moral habits are character traits that become woven into who you are.... So that you are the kind of person who is inclined to be compassionate, forgiving, loving and so on.

You can acquire or put on these virtues – these good moral habits. We learn virtues by imitation and by practice.

If you are what you love and love is a virtue – **then love is a habit.**

**You can learn to love.**

**Learning to love God (and others) takes practice.**

Your heart is a compass. True North is your worship and enjoyment of God.

Consumerism and our other misdirected desires take us off in the wrong direction. We follow maps that mislead us.

We need to recalibrate the compass of our hearts – to redirect our disordered loves.

We need to learn to love God aright.

We need to put on love – the virtue of love.

A virtue is a good moral habit. **Love is a habit.**

When you have acquired a moral habit – a virtue – it becomes second nature.

What does that mean? Why do we call things “second nature”?

Our “first” nature is the hardwiring of our biological bodies and operates without our thinking about it.

At this very moment, you are not choosing to breathe. You are not thinking about breathing. 99.9 % of the time, you breathe, and blink and digest your breakfast without thinking about it. Nature simply takes care of this.

The habits in our life that become “second nature” operate in the same way: they become so woven into who you are that they are as natural to you as breathing and blinking.

You don't have to think about these things – they come naturally.

**Example of learning to drive** and then everything becoming “natural”.

Initially everything is a conscious deliberate decision. But after a while – you no longer think about it.

It is the same with the good moral habits – the virtues of compassion and forgiveness and gentleness – and LOVE.

We learn and acquire virtues by imitation and by practice.

Our loves and our longings are created over time through our practices and our rituals – the things we do repeatedly.

You can change your desires.

You can recalibrate your heart and your disordered loves.

You can put on love.

But you can't just think your way to new desires and new hungers.

You have to change your practices – your rituals – your habits.

**Your habits change your hungers.**

**What starts as discipline turns into desire.**

So how do we do this?

Think of some of the effects of consumerism – the water we swim in.

Dissatisfaction. Wanting more. Wanting better. Fear of missing out. Seeing everything as a commodity – something to be used.

Attitude to church. Attitude to finance. Attitude to giving and generosity.

Unhealthy relationship with social media. With food. With sex and relationships.

Lack of commitment.

Restlessness. Hunger.

We need habits to change our hungers.

We need to recalibrate the compass of our heart.

We need to put on love.

## **Habits of detachment and attachment**

### **Detachment**

Consumerism means we become attached to things, to material possessions, to money, in a way that we hope will bring us joy and contentment and identity and security.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about our life in Christ, our walk with God, being choked up and strangled by **“the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things.”** (Mark 4:19)

Disciplines of detachment help us to loosen our grip on such things and – more importantly - to loosen their grip on us.

Initially they start as disciplines, but with time and the work of God's Spirit, they become desires and ultimately will change our hearts and our loves and our longings.

They recalibrate the compass of our heart to true North.

### **Three habits of detachment:**

#### **Generosity and giving**

Consumerism says that the best thing in life is to receive and to have and to accumulate and to store and to keep.

To consume.

*The world tells you you will be happiest when you get.*

Jesus says that the best thing in life is to give away, and to let go, and to share, and to lay down.

To be consumed.

*Jesus tells you you will be happiest when you give.*

Jesus says **"It is more blessed to give than receive"**.

When you give your time.

When you give your home and hospitality.

When you give yourself, your talents, your gifts...

When you give your friendship.

When you give your money.

When you give yourself.

That's when you will be happiest.

Paul writes:

“Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”  
(2 Cor. 9:6-7)

When you and I sow sparingly, give little, keep our resources to ourselves – we will reap little as well...

Conversely, when we are generous, when we give much – time, effort, money – we will also receive much back...

That is simply what the Bible says. And it is true.

God loves “a cheerful giver”.

Not a reluctant giver. Not someone who gives because they have been guilted into it. Not a miserable giver.

Think of [Scrooge and Dicken's Christmas Carol](#). Think of the darkness and the misery of Scrooge at the beginning of the story as he counts his money endlessly and hates to give anyone anything. He turns away those in need. He rejects approaches of friendship and family. He is miserable and alone.

He has his money and his mansion. But he is miserly and he is miserable.

And then think of the end of the story, the joy he gets as he opens his windows to the world and his heart and his life and his wallet to others. The joy of giving the Cratchet family a big Christmas dinner

and helping them in their need, the joy of spending time with his nephew and family, the joy of giving things away.

The contrast is amazing.

The model of the tithe. A starting point. Learned this as a child.

Prophet Malachi – not tithing – robbing God.

What are some of the ways that we can begin to practise giving and generosity?

Generosity finds expression in words and actions , as well as in standing orders and gifts and direct debits.

Are you generous with your dinner table and your home?

Are you generous with your time and your attention?

If year on year we are not becoming more generous people, we cannot be understood to be growing in Christ.

This is a discipline of detachment. If we practise these things, what at first is a discipline will become a desire. Your habits will change your hungers and your heart.

## **Simplicity**

This is where we impose on ourselves limits to the stuff that we own. We counteract the message and the notion that we need better and more stuff all the time to make us happy.

Do we really need it? And do we really need it now?

As a nation, we are more in debt than ever...

And we are more wasteful than ever.

## G.K. Chesterton

**“There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.”**

Many Christians have discovered down the ages the joy of simplicity.

**“A meal of bread and water in contented peace is better than a banquet spiced with quarrels.” (Proverbs 17:1 – TM)**

The world is lying when it tells us that more stuff will make us happier.

We are richer, we have more choice, we consume more than ever before... but it has not made us happier. It has made us more dissatisfied and more restless.

Ryan Nicodemus and his experiment to simplify his life – packed everything into boxes. If he needed it he unpacked it. If not he got rid of it.

Simplicity is a discipline of detachment that will help to recalibrate the compass of your heart.

## Fasting

Fasting is another foundational discipline in detachment. In fasting, we stop consuming, an essential for physical life, and we remind ourselves, as Jesus did when he fasted that **“man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)**

Fasting reminds us that we entirely depend on God.

Fasting breaks our worship of food or of other things we consume.

Do we eat to live or do we live to eat?

We may also fast other things than food.

Social media fast. Alcohol. Anything else that we spend time and money on – to delight ourselves in and to feast on God and to detach ourselves from our false loves.

We cease consuming. We fast.

Fasting is a discipline of detachment that will recalibrate the compass of your heart and will reorder your loves and desires.

So – put on love. Like a belt that ties all these virtues together.

Love is a virtue. A virtue is a good moral habit.

You can learn to love God.

You can practise loving God.

Consumerism has sold us false maps and pointed the compass of our hearts in the wrong direction.

We need to recalibrate the love of our hearts.

Three disciplines of detachment to start to do this.

Initially this may feel like a lot of effort - we will be labouring and making much effort – but if we persist, they become second nature – they will transform the hungers of our heart.

We will be putting on love and we will be becoming more like Jesus.

Instead of being consumers – we will be consumed by the love of God.

**Community group questions and discussion points:**

1. Read Colossians 3:12-14. What image is Paul painting here?
2. Paul is discussing various “virtues” (= good moral habits), the most important of which is love. What do you think of Geoff’s statement that “you can learn to love God” and that “learning to love God takes practice”?
3. What are some of the things in your life that turn your compass from “true north”?
4. How do we “put on love”? What are the two main ways that Geoff mentioned to develop these virtues in our life?
5. If consumerism means we are attached to things in an excessive way – we need to practise habits of detachment. What are the three habits of detachment that Geoff talked about?
6. In what ways do you think it is more blessed to give than to receive?
7. Read 2 Cor. 9:6-7. What does this passage teach us about giving and generosity?
8. How might we simplify our lives and the stuff we become attached to?
9. What is the point of fasting and what are some of the things that we could fast from?
10. Personally, how are you going to “put on love” as a virtue in your life? What one thing will you change or do as a response to this message?