



LifeGroup Study
2023-11-05
YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE
You Might Not Love What You Think
Leader Notes

OVERVIEW:

Welcome back to our LifeGroup study, You Are What You Love. Today's study is called "You Might Not Love What You Think". We are constantly being shaped by cultural liturgies (rhythms, practices, rituals). Everything from how we order stuff on Amazon to the design and experience of the mall are shaping us. Rather than being shaped by our culture, Jesus invites us to be shaped and formed by Him. In our LifeGroup study we'll look at a warning from Jesus about the shaping influences of our culture. We'll also look at his invitation to devote ourselves to his shaping influence in our lives, the kingdom of heaven.

ICEBREAKER: If I Could Save Just One Thing

You've heard of the scenario (hopefully you'll never experience it) of your house ablaze with fire. Everyone (people and pets) is safely out of the house and now you have opportunity to grab just one thing to rescue from the flames. What would you take with you? Why would it be the one thing you would prioritize to save? **Share your story with the group.**

STUDY:

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 tangible, visceral, repeated practices carry a story about human flourishing that we learn in unconscious ways. 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. - Smith, James K.

1. Using James Smith's insight in the above quote, or drawing from Pete's teaching this past Sunday, **how would you define "cultural liturgies"?**

LEADER NOTES: James Smith writes, "To be human is to be a liturgical animal, a creature whose loves are shaped by our worship." A cultural (secular) liturgy is a habit we engage in that shapes our loves and what we ultimately worship.

2. One of the key questions we are wrestling with this week is, "What are the things that I'm doing, doing to me?" This week Pete drew our focus to consumerism and the habits we develop around acquisition and consumption of things.
How do you see these habits at work in shaping who we are in our western society?

LEADER NOTES: "Consumerism" can be defined as buying into a false idea of human flourishing. It is the belief that I will be happy/satisfied/fulfilled, through the acquisition of things. None of us agrees with this belief at surface level, yet we find ourselves drawn into ways of living that move us toward this belief. Our western society, in many ways, is built around consumerism. Through everything from marketing flyers to online messaging to the mall we are constantly encouraged to acquire and consume. Without even realizing it, we form habits in our lives that supports a consumeristic direction (telos).

3. A common "telos" (life direction/end point) for us is "the good life". We might also define this as human flourishing. Imagine you were to go to Conestoga Mall Saturday afternoon and ask people, "How would you define 'the good life'?" **How do you think people would define it?**

LEADER NOTES: There are common visions of "the good life" that we have in our culture. Some may define "the good life" as economic stability – when I have my debts paid and bills covered then I'll be living the good life. Others may define it as relational harmony – if my relationships were restored and healed then I would experience the good life. Still others may have describe the fulfillment of a dream or goal as "the good life" – when I get the cabin by the lake, then I'll be living the good life.

JESUS' TEACHING ON THE GOOD LIFE (HUMAN FLOURISHING)

In His teaching, Jesus gives us a clear and compelling picture of “the good life” (human flourishing). For the rest of this study, we’ll look at two parables Jesus taught to point us to his kingdom as the place where we will truly flourish.

A Warning - The Parable of the Rich Fool

4. READ: Luke 12:13-21

What is the context of this parable? What happens to lead Jesus to teach this parable?

LEADER NOTES: At the beginning of this passage we find that there was a crowd of people around Jesus. In Luke 12:1 we read that “many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another.” Then someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” (vs. 13). This man’s request leads Jesus to teach the parable.

5. In verse 15 Jesus says to the crowd, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” NIV

What does it look like to “be on guard against all kinds of greed”?

LEADER NOTES: To be on guard is first of all to be aware that there is a potential threat. In this warning, Jesus tells us we need to be aware of the threat of greed and how it can shape our lives. To be on guard is also to actively defend against the threat. Rather than allowing the threat to destroy us, we are on guard to fight back the threat.

Jesus says, “ ... life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

What is the principle for here for us today?

LEADER NOTES: The man who asked Jesus about dividing the inheritance (vs. 13) seemed to have misplaced priorities. Rather than responding to Jesus’ teaching his focus was on his inheritance - the acquisition of things. The principle for us is that rather than living for things, Jesus calls us to focus our attention and energy on his kingdom.

6. Jesus ends the parable by saying - ²¹“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” **What does it mean to be rich toward God?**

LEADER NOTES: In 1 Timothy 6:17-19 we read, ¹⁷“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. ¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

An Invitation – The Parables of Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

READ: Matthew 13:44-46

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

7. Many of Jesus’ teachings begin with these words, “The kingdom of heaven is like ...”.
Why do you think Jesus focused so much of his teaching on the kingdom of heaven?

LEADER NOTES: The kingdom of heaven is all about God’s rule and authority in our lives. Jesus wanted his hearers to understand the great value of the kingdom of heaven. This is a kingdom worth their life’s devotion. He also wanted them to know his kingdom is radically different than earthly kingdoms. In Jesus’ day, evidence of the power and splendor of the Roman kingdom would have been all around – but Rome, like all other earthly kingdoms, fell. Jesus’ kingdom is the greatest kingdom, the only one that is forever and all-powerful.

8. In both parables, the one who finds the treasure sells all their possessions to acquire what they had found. **Why would Jesus frame the parables in this way?**

LEADER NOTES: Jesus wanted his followers to know that his kingdom has more value than any earthly possession. This is why in both parables, the one who found the treasure and the one who found the pearl, sold everything they had to buy what they had found.

9. **How do these parables speak to us about our “telos” – that vision of the good life that we strive toward?**

LEADER NOTES: James Smith writes, “To be human is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life, some picture of what we think counts as “flourishing”. And we *want* that. We crave it. We desire it. That is why our most fundamental orientation to the world is love.” Jesus’ parables remind us that his kingdom is worthy of our first love, our highest commitment. With God’s help and by his power we can cultivate our heart to want his kingdom above all else.

10. One way we can cultivate our heart’s orientation toward God’s kingdom is through growing our gratitude for what He has given us. This in turn fosters contentment. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 says, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” NIV. **How might the habit of gratitude grow our heart for God’s kingdom?**

LEADER NOTES: Gratitude (giving thanks to God) grows our heart for God’s kingdom because it acknowledges that God is our provider. Gratitude reminds us that he is the giver of all good things.

Giving thanks to God is a regular reminder that he loves us and is watching over us. Gratitude is a powerful habit to form our hearts toward God's kingdom!

11. What practical steps might you take to push back against the pull of consumerism in your life?

LEADER NOTES: Pay attention to where your stuff comes from. Are there more ethical options? Pay attention to how you think about buying/shopping. What thoughts are going through your head at the mall? Do you subtly believe that you're one purchase away from happiness?

12. What is a key takeaway for you from this week's study?

PRAY:

Thank God for his kingdom! He is King of your heart, and his kingdom will endure forever. Thank him for providing all you need because he is your loving heavenly Father.