

OUR OBSESSION WITH STUFF

We live in a land of abundance. Linda Kulman wrote in *U.S. News and World Report* sometime back these prophetic words:

We are a nation that believes in having it all. In 1950, American families owned one car and saved for a second. In 2000, nearly one in five families owned three cars or more. Americans shell out more for garbage bags than 90 of the world's 210 countries spend for everything. Indeed, America has double the number of shopping malls as it does high schools.

In 1900, the average person living in the United States wanted 72 different things and considered 18 of them essential. Today, the average person wants 500 hundred things and considers 100 of them essential.

Our obsession with stuff carries a hefty price tag. The average American family devotes a full one-fourth of its spendable income to outstanding debts.

Kulman's observations are sobering. Our addiction to material goods may actually make us less grateful than if we had very little. If your feeling of gratitude today has any relationship to the size of your bank account or the number of toys you have to play with, you may not be experiencing the true spirit of thanksgiving.

Edward Markquart, author and retired pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Des Moines, Washington, once put it this way: "A great danger in living in a materially abundant world is to come to expect that material abundance and no longer feel deep gratitude in one's heart."

To illustrate, he said, "At your house, have you ever experienced a Christmas where a child has just received 10 Christmas presents and then asks, 'Is that all? Isn't there more?' And next Christmas, when the child is older and receives only five gifts, he or she says, 'Well, it wasn't quite as good a Christmas as last year.'"

Markquart continued, "When a person receives so many presents, one no longer has that deep inner gratitude but rather the expectation of more abundance. By contrast, if a person has never received a Christmas present and receives one present, that person is overwhelmed with delight at that one gift."

The pastor recalled his mother's most memorable Christmas. "My mom, an immigrant, was raised in dire poverty, and when she received an orange that Christmas, her heart was overwhelmed with joy and thanksgiving. That single orange was the best and most memorable Christmas present she ever received. Why? Because there is something about poverty that enables one's heart to be filled with gratitude."

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Did you get what Markquart was saying? Our very affluence may seal us off from God. We may end up depending on our material blessings rather than our connection to God to provide us with both happiness and security.

Our associates in Life Care and Century Park have learned this truth: Our genuine inner peace and satisfaction comes from serving others.

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter