

Construction Zone

Jim Stephens

People up and down the socioeconomic scale struggle with materialism—it doesn't matter how much money you have. Satan builds highways of materialism that take us out of the zone, but God is building bridges that can bring us back. In this message, We learn how to actively steer clear of materialism and, instead live in the zone.

Materialism Is Not A Tangible Commodity, It's An Intangible Condition Of The Heart.

This is a message about Materialism. What is materialism anyway? Materialism is a preoccupation with things. Materialism, though is not a tangible commodity. It's an intangible condition of the heart.

We all think that materialism is about other people and that it begins where our income ends. Think about it. Materialism begins where your income and my income ends. Here's what I mean:

- o If you make \$30,000 a year, you don't think other people who make \$30,000 a year are materialistic. No, you think the person that makes \$60,000 is materialistic.
- o If you make a \$1,000,000 a year, you don't think that other people that make \$1,000,000 a year are materialistic. No. You think people who make \$5,000,000 a year are. You say, "They are materialistic."

Where is the ceiling? Where is the line beyond which someone is materialistic? What size home, what type of watch, what kind of car, what label, what size portfolio, what kind of vacation destination constitutes materialism? I don't know and you don't know.

How can I call you materialistic when I don't know your heart and your life, when I don't know your relationship between yourself and God? How can you call me materialistic if you don't know my heart and my life and my connection with God? We don't know. It's not tangible. It's intangible.

That concept has really had an impact on my thinking. Because it's far too easy to point to people and go, "Oh, she's materialistic. He's materialistic. They're materialistic because they have more than I have, and I think I deserve what they have. I've worked as hard as they've worked. I deserve it."

You can be so broke you can't even afford to pay attention – all your stuff would fit into a 4X6 UHaul or a backpack – envying someone whose stuff would fill a 5X8 UHaul and who's materialistic? Not him, you!

The two things that drive materialism are Envy and Greed. And no one – none of us think we have a problem with Envy or Greed!

God is for us. He wants to bless our lives. He is our perfectly beautiful and generous parent. He loves us. He wants to bless us occupationally, relationally, and he even blesses us financially. See, In The Zone, we're blessable. (Remember Abraham, "I will bless you and you will be a blessing!")

The blessings of God don't just cover the intangibles. They don't just cover peace, joy, and patience and tranquility of the soul. They also cover the tangibles—matter, stuff—because in God's economy matter matters. He thought it up. He made it. And matter matters, money matters, and stuff matters. God blesses us intangibly and also blesses us tangibly.

God wants us to live in the zone, the sweet spot of his success. The zone is a place that is distinguished from the rest. Let's say this is the zone. Everything outside is not the Zone! God is the Blessor.

- If we're in the zone, we are blessed.
- And because we're blessed, we can turn around and become blessings.
- If we're in the zone, we realize God owns it all. We don't own it, God owns it all. We're managers of the stuff God has given us.

What kind of stuff has God given us?

- He's given us abilities and aptitudes and talents.
- He has also given us a certain amount of money and material possessions.

We've got different amounts of stuff.

- Some have a big bag of jelly beans.
- Others have a medium bag of jelly beans.
- Others have a small bag of jelly beans. The jelly beans are our stuff.

We are all managers and not owners of the stuff. We're to manage it and to become stewards of the stuff. We don't own the stuff. How do we live in the zone?

We live in the zone:

- By being good stewards – good managers of the stuff
- By enjoying the stuff (We'll talk about enjoying the stuff next week)
- By saving some stuff (We'll talk about saving next week)
- By dealing with debt (We'll talk about debt next week)
- By bringing the tithe into the storehouse, the local church (Ken talked about that last week)
- By living a life of generosity.

We're in the zone of God's blessing. We are blessed. We're blessable, positionally.

But some people live in The Land of Ing.

- The Land of Ing is not the blessed place. The Land of Ing is a place outside the zone. It's walking around the edge and teetering on the ledge of the zone. It's missing the best that God has for a person's life.
- People who live in The Land of Ing are into own-ing, earn-ing, cloth-ing, hous-ing, bling-bling, and ca-ching, ca-ching! Two days ago – Black Friday. The Land of Ing.
- People who are living in The Land of Ing think a lot about their stuff. They think they have done it, they think they are ruling over the universe of themselves. That's not the place God wants us to live.

Let me tell you Two things about money:

1 - Money is powerful. Jesus talked about money a lot. He talked about money more than He talked about heaven or hell or faith or even prayer. Why? Because we spend so much time and effort and energy trying to make it and save it and invest it and hopefully, bring it and give it. It represents who we are.

Money is powerful stuff. It has the potential to be used for greatness. Isn't that good? God wants us to use money for greatness. On the other hand, it has great potential to be used for some bad stuff.

- God knows if we live In The Zone, we can enjoy our stuff and save some stuff and give some stuff and bring some stuff to the storehouse.
- By doing so, we'll influence others, we'll build the greatest thing out there, the local church, and we will live a blessed life. Not a perfect life, not a life without problems, but a blessed life, life the way we're wired to live it.

2 - Money is a test.

- If you don't have enough, it's a test.
- If you have plenty – more than you need, it's a test.
- If you have plenty and lose most of it, it's a test.
- If God gives someone else more than you, it's a test.

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:10)

I've heard people say "Money is the root of all evil." That's incorrect, not what the Bible says at all. It's not money, it's not having money, it's loving money!

Jesus said this in the gospel of Matthew 6:24. He says, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

If I love money, it will lead me. If I lead money, it will serve me. Well, how do I lead money? How can I lead money? It goes back to living In The Zone.

When I'm In The Zone, God is owner and I'm the manager. When I understand that God owns it all, when I get it that I am a manager, then I have the opportunity to lead money and my money can serve me and it can serve God.

Why do we struggle with money so much? Have you ever struggled with money? I do. We all do. Let's be honest. I'm talking to people right now In The Zone. Some of us in the zone still get messed up about money. Why do we do it? It's the enemy. If he can get us to be materialistic and greedy and envious, he knows he can take us out of the zone, out of the sweet spot that God has for our lives.

Listen to this – more of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:

20 Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be. (Matthew 6:20-21 NLT)

If you're In The Zone and your stuff – your money, your jelly beans, your possessions, your treasure – is not In The Zone, you won't be In The Zone for long. You'll wind up living where what you love is. Your stuff, your treasures will pull you right Out of the Zone, right into the Land of Ing. Satan makes it easy to get out of the Zone.

Satan's Highways To The Land Of Ing

I've lived in Central Oregon for about five years now. I know we have two seasons here – "Winter and Road Construction." There's a sign on 3rd Street as you approach Greenwood (have you seen this one?) – "Road Construction Next 250 Miles!"

The evil one is in the road construction business. Did you know that? Here's what he does, and he's done this in all of our lives. He comes right to the edge of the zone—he can't get into the zone, obviously; but he comes right to the edge of the zone—and builds roads to take us out of the Zone – roads that relate to our money, our stuff.

- The Ride of Pride

The first road Satan builds to take us out of the Zone is the pride trip. It's his freeway and he wants us to take a pride trip. He says, "Come on, come on. You're the man! You made it." "Girl, you're unbelievable! It's your creativity, it's your vision, and it's your leadership. You did this. It's all about you!"

Those of us in the zone, we remember it's God's stuff for a while. But suddenly, as we travel down this freeway, management turns into ownership. We think it's ours. We think we did it, and we become prideful. When we're prideful, we want people to think we paid more for our stuff than we actually did. "Hey Jim, I like that cool shirt." "Thank you. It's Ralph Lauren (Target' more likely!)."

You pull up to an intersection in your car and pride says, "Oh, man, look at my car! Look at that piece of junk next to me. This is my ride!"

I've got this '86 TBird Turbo Coupe – I call it the Gray Ghost. It's not stock. It's got a 5.0L FI engine out of a Mustang Cobra, 5 speed close ratio gearbox, 16" Cobra wheels. This is a 19-year-old car. The problem is when I drive it I start to think I'm 19 years old! The ride of pride.

Pride will mess you up. Yet, if we stay in the zone, if we understand constantly that God is the Blesser, that everything comes from him; if we understand we're managers and stewards of the stuff; if we're enjoying the stuff and saving the stuff and bringing the stuff to the storehouse, we're not going to take the pride trip. But so many of us move outside the zone because of the pride trip.

- **The Guilt Trip**

This is more of Satan's road construction, another road out of the Zone, and this one comes from the opposite end of spectrum, yet it still is about the same thing. The evil one comes up – and this attacks a lot of Christians – he comes up to the edge of the Zone and builds another road out. This one is called the guilt trip.

Pride wants others to think that you paid more for stuff. Guilt wants others to think you paid less. "Jim, I like your shirt." "Oh, this old thing? I got it on clearance at Target."

We feel guilty because God has blessed us. Is that nuts? Is that ironic? Here we have God who wants to bless. And God has blessed us in so many different ways, many times in ways that money can't even touch. Yet so often, Christians walk around and they're embarrassed over the blessings of God. It's unbelievable!

Guilt trip. "I don't need much stuff. I don't need as much as they need. I don't need to show off like they do. I can't afford all that stuff they have! I don't need all that expensive stuff they've got. All I need is my simple stuff." And we go from being proud about stuff to feeling guilty about stuff.

- When someone compliments you about something, whatever it is—your ability to lead, to speak, to sing, to counsel, your house, car, clothes—just say "Thank you. God's really blessed my life."
- Why should we be ashamed about what God's doing? That's just, that's crazy.

So, we see these two trips out of the zone: the Pride Trip and the Guilt Trip. You know what letter is right in the middle of Pride? "I" Look at this (Pr I de) You know what letter is right in the middle of guilt? Look at this (Pr I de and Gu I It)

If you're on the Pride Trip, it's because you've got the big I in the middle. If you're on the Guilt Trip, it's because you've got the big I right in the middle! That's from the enemy.

Mary And Judas

3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. (John 12:3-6 NIV)

- o Here's Mary—not the mother of Jesus, but Mary who anointed Jesus' feet with a priceless bottle of perfume.
- o Mary has a heart of generosity. I want you to see that right here at this same table, you have a heart of generosity, and you have a heart of selfishness and jealousy.
- o There's generosity, and then there's envy and greed. Mary anoints Jesus' feet with this costly perfume – that's her heart of generosity.
- o Contrasting that, you have the heart of Judas, which is the heart of selfishness. You know what Judas said? Judas said, "Mary, what are you thinking? Why are you wasting perfume on that? That's like wasting a year's salary!" Don't miss this – Judas said, "You could sell that and give the money to the poor."

Are you serious? Judas was just trying to put Mary on a Guilt Trip.

- o Do you think Judas was concerned about the poor? No! You know what Judas was doing? He was embezzling money from Jesus. Jesus has this ministry fund wallet which he put Judas in charge of – people were giving money to his ministry – and Judas was skimming some off the top and putting it in his pocket.
- o Judas wasn't concerned about the poor. Judas was eaten up with envy and jealousy. He wanted the spotlight off of him and onto Mary.

Do we do the same thing? We drive by someone's house, "Wow, look at that house! Must be nice. If I had that kind of money, I would sell that house and give the money to Westside Church, and I would also help the poor."

- o No you wouldn't. You know what that is? That is saying, "Hey take a Guilt Trip why don't you?"
- o That is envy and jealousy in spiritual packaging. That's a heart of Judas, when you or I say something like that. We've all said that before. "Oh, girl, what she paid for those earrings?! I mean, even if I had the money I wouldn't buy earrings like that. I'd take that money, I would do something good with it."

- o All these people I've heard that have made those statements—and I've made some before—I'm not seeing any of those people selling their houses and giving their money to the poor or selling their jewelry.

When we talk like that, we're not concerned about the poor. We're thinking about ourselves.

- o You know what we're actually thinking? "He doesn't deserve that. He doesn't deserve to live there, to drive that, to wear that, to travel there. He doesn't. I deserve that more than him. She doesn't deserve to look like that, to have that wardrobe, to shop there. I deserve it."
- o It's envy and greed. It's materialism, a preoccupation with things. And if we're not careful, it can eat our lunch. We want to get the spotlight off of our stuff and onto other people's stuff. We want to get it off of our selfish heart and onto the Marys we see.

When God blesses other people we should say "Yea, God and good for you!"

- o If we're in the zone, we know it all comes from God anyway. "Good for you that you can lead. Good for you, you got the promotion. Good for you, you got the inheritance. Good for you, you're making a lot of money. Good for you! Good for you. Yea, God!"
- o It's from God. Because here's the bottom line: Materialism begins where your income ends. I don't know if you're being materialistic, and you don't know if I'm being materialistic because there are no limitations.

So materialism isn't about having lots of stuff, being blessed by God.

- o Some of the greatest men and women in the Bible were high rollers.
- o Now, there are also many other great men and women mentioned in the Bible who were middle class and some lower class.
- o But you can't say that poverty is next to godliness. That's not in the Bible.

God is going to bless people - especially people who are in the zone.

- o God wants to bless us because he knows if he blesses us, we are going to bless the best thing out there, the local church.
- o We're going to bless other people's lives. We're going to be an example to people who don't know Christ, about how we steward our stuff. And it's going to be a "Yea, God!" and a win-win deal for everyone.
- o Materialism, greed, envy—Don't go there. Life's too short for that stuff.

God's Bridges Back To The Zone

Sometimes we get out of the Zone and into the Land of Ing, the land of greed, the land of envy, the land of materialism, especially during this time of year. Christmas is coming. Christmas at your house and my house. A lot of people in this room are going

to acquire so much credit card debt over the next three weeks it will take until this time next year to pay it off. If ever! Come on. What do we do about it?

I want to tell you about Three Bridges God has built to help you get back Into the Zone. Bridge One is...

- Admire Without The Need To Acquire

Here's the first thing you can do to get back In The Zone. We've got to develop the ability to admire something without having to acquire it or to own it. Can you do that?

- "Hey, that's a cool car, great house, phenomenal snowmobile...whatever." Compliment it. But say to yourself, "You know, I'm so glad I don't have to own that, paint that, insure that, protect that, and freak out about that." That's a liberating thing.
- You don't need to own it, just be good friends with someone who does! "Good for you! I'm glad you got that, man. That's great. Yeah, I'd love to spend a weekend at your lake house. Yes."

In Philippians 4:11, the apostle Paul talked about this. He said, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I've learned," (this is a learned thing,) "in whatever state I am, to be content."

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When I'm not content with my stuff, what do I do? I buy stuff with money I don't have.

- I'm talking about buying stuff with those plastic people eaters. (Ken's going to talk about that next week, credit cards.)
- Also, I've become materialistic when I buy something to keep up or to one up. "I'm buying this to keep up, or I'm buying this to one up. Top this!"
- "Keeping up with the Joneses" – spending money you don't have to buy things you don't need to impress people you don't like!
- You know what letter is right in the middle of materialism? You guessed it! Look at this (Mater I alism). The big I is right in the middle.

Anyhow, back to learning to be content. You'll never become content by having what you want. You can only find contentment in wanting what you have!

- What is going to produce contentment for you? I don't know. I cannot set those parameters for your life.
- What will produce contentment for me? You don't know. You can't put your standard on me.
- But for some reason we look at other people and go, "I deserve that. I need what they have." It's envy and jealousy and materialism.

Just concentrate on you and your relationship with God. Here's what I discovered:

- There's only one person I'm accountable to when it comes to money.
- There's only one person you're accountable to when it comes to money. God.
- We're spending, saving, bringing, and giving for an audience of one. That's it.

Listen to what Jesus said about stuff in Luke 12..

Speaking to the people, he went on, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot." (Luke 12:15 The Message)

Listen friends, is your life defined by what you have? Or what you don't have? You are way out of the Zone. You are living in the Land of Ing! Get out of there! Get In The Zone! Here's the next bridge God built to get us back In the Zone.

- **Develop An Attitude Of Gratitude**

Here's another thing that God has taught me: Develop an attitude of gratitude.

And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful. (Colossians 3:15 NLT)

Be thankful. That's a choice. Thankful is an attitude. Thankful is acknowledging that on every day of your life, there's still more going right in your life than going wrong. There's always something to be thankful – grateful for. Be thankful and be with thankful people. Who do you hang out with? Thankful, grateful people? Or greedy envious people who stoke your own envy, greed, and dissatisfaction?

- I like being around people who are thankful and I like being around people who are generous. Here's what I found out. The people with the highest net worth are not necessarily the most thankful or the most generous people.
- When we compare ourselves to God, we realize we have nothing to bring. Everything is about God, and we have to emerge with this spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving. So develop an attitude of gratitude.
- Here's another thing. Learn the secret of generosity.

- **Learn The Secret Of Generosity - Get To Give vs. Get To Have**

2 Corinthians 8:7 says...

But just as you excel in everything-in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us-see that you also excel in this grace of giving. (2 Corinthians 8:7)

Excel in this grace of giving. We're not talking about tithing. Tithing is not giving. Tithing is bringing. We're talking about a lifestyle of generosity, because there's basically two types of getters:

- There's the Velcro getter—stuff sticks to you like Velcro. You get to have. We should never get to have. People who get to have live in The Land of Ing.
- There's the Teflon getter. We need to be Teflon givers—we get to give. Get, give. Get, give. Get, give. It just slides off us. It's a lifestyle of generosity.

Here is something that I discovered that really helps me break the back of greed and materialism in my life.

- I give stuff away. I'm not talking about broken down, mangy, sorry stuff here. I mean stuff I like. I do that regularly, "You like this? Here it is, I like this, and I can tell you like it. Just take it."
- It helps me remember, "You know what? Everything you have, everything you are is all from God. You're blessed. You're on the receiving end of the tangible and intangible favor of God. Be a blessing. Don't be Velcro. Be Teflon."

Close

Satan's Road Construction - Pride Trip or Guilt Trip – Satan wants to get you on the fast track out of the zone. You put the big I in the middle and Satan will put you on the road out.

God's Bridges back to the Zone:

- Admire Without the Need to Acquire
- Develop an Attitude of Gratitude
- Learn this – Get to Give, Don't get to Have!

Let's put our things aside and bow our heads..

Pray:

Father thank you for being a Bridge-builder. Thank you for finding us out here, outside the Zone, where we've foolishly driven down the roads Satan has constructed to get us as far outside your Zone as possible. Jesus, thank you for making a way for us to get across the gap and Into the Zone of your life, your blessing, your provision.

We decide today to do a U-turn in our attitudes about money, about material things, about thankfulness, about giving, about life itself. We exit Satan's highways of Envy and Greed, of Pride and Guilt, and we cross the Bridges of Gratitude and Generosity right into the Zone you prepared for us to live in and enjoy. Thank you for bridges that allow us to come home.

Appeal (Let's keep our heads bowed for a minute..)

If you're Out of the Zone and want to cross Into the Zone today..

- o If you want to make a personal choice – a decision that you know is right and you know you're ready today to step across the line of faith, to step into the Zone of God's life for you (and I'm not going to embarrass you here, this is between you and God – but I'd like to share this moment with you, to agree with you that this is the best decision you can make)
- o If you are deciding now to enter God's Zone of Life – by faith – by simply trusting in Jesus' sacrifice to pay your debt, and God's gracious acceptance – coming just the way you are..
- o Would you raise your hand and look up at me – just for a moment – let me agree with you in this great decision!

Prayer Let's all pray this prayer together..

Father, thank you for loving me, for wanting to bless me, for making a way for me to cross over and into the Zone – to live in your blessing, to be blessable, and to become a blessing. Forgive me for my sins and failures. Accept me into your family as I accept Jesus' sacrifice for all my mess-ups. I believe what you say and I receive what you have given. In Jesus' Name. Amen!

Let's Celebrate!