



materialism

ENGAGE

Notes and questions from the talks for further engagement by individuals or groups.

allsaintsworcester

MATERIALISM (1): everything matters

Recap

"In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth."

That's the first line of the Bible. The God who is beyond all physicality creates the material universe. And the verdict?

"And God saw that it was good."

But the Bible is not trying to pretend that all is well.

Geologists and Earth scientists have started using the term Anthropocene – to describe the present geological epoch that is now so definitively shaped and dominated by a single species – us! The scale of human power to dominate, makeover and shape the entire planetary surface is astonishing. With our mining and landfill, and concrete and carbon transfer and inventions of nuclear weapons and plastics. This is our dark human exceptionalism. This exceptional capacity to mess things up.

The story of the Bible is searingly honest about the mess. It is also a story of redemption and renewal in Jesus Christ.

Read and ask

Colossians 1.15-20

If Creation affirms that the material world is good, what does the incarnation affirm? What does the resurrection affirm?

What then is the biblical vision of the eternal future?

Discuss

Owen used the contrasting pictures of bulldozers and air-conditioned chapels to sum up two different approaches to material reality. The way of the bulldozer stood for modern industrial society, dominating the material world, pursuing more growth/profit/consumption/convenience with little regard for the limits that stand in our way. The air-conditioned chapels stood for escapist spiritual responses where we block out the problems by imagining that we will all soon escape to heaven.

- How might our lifestyles be 'driving the bulldozers'?
- How might we be guilty of sitting in air-conditioned chapels with our eyes closed?

A third approach to the material world was offered - 'walking in the garden' – that was about re-learning to respect limits, enjoy our connection with things, and root ourselves in a big enough hope that we can sacrificially join in the healing mission of Jesus in this damaged garden.

- How do you, or could you, enjoy your earthed-ness?
- What might it mean for us to respect the limits of a finite material reality?
- How might we establish levels of “enough”?

Practice

- Research and seek to understand something right in front of you, e.g. the food on your plate, or the tree on your street, or the contents of your shampoo.
- Plant seeds/walk barefoot/sit in the rain
- Engage with and support the work of A Rocha or Tearfund

Pray

O Lord of all creation, the source of life.

Wake us up.

Disturb our shallow lifestyle aspirations,

Disrupt our shallow theologies of escape.

Give us wisdom and wonder.

Lead us into a prophetic witness of “enough”

Lead us into lament, and joy.

Where we are overwhelmed with our capacity to ruin and destroy,

Restore us with your capacity to heal.

Lead us into lives of faith, hope and love.

MATERIALISM (2): stewarding resource

Recap

Rich continued this module by helping us think about how we approach the stewardship of our resources – our time, gifts, abilities, possessions and money.

We looked at how all our resources are a gift of God, an expression of His grace and blessing in our lives. And given this, how we steward them is of huge importance to both us and others. In short, our resources are not primarily for us but rather for the sake of others.

Followers of Jesus seek to steward their God-given resources unto the extension of the Kingdom of God. This has two aims. First, to work towards social justice – a holy “levelling up” to ensure everyone has enough. And second, to then work towards “shalom” – the flourishing of humanity and all creation.

The choices we make around how we live and use our resources are really important – they can help with the task of *social renewal*. Equally important is what we work towards in our lives – are we working for a Kingdom expression of things (*cultural renewal*)?

Read and ask

Jeremiah 29:4-7 and Revelation 21:1-7

What is the vision of human flourishing in the scriptures?

What is the role of justice? And what are its limits?

Why does it matter that we tackle both the symptoms of inequality and the causes?

What is our vocation and how should that inform how we do our “work” (paid or not)?

Discuss

How do we discern how to best invest God-given resources?

What is the role of the Spirit and of prayer in this process?

Where should we allow ethical convictions to limit and inform our choices?

To what extent do we, or should we, discern this more in community?

Have you thought recently about whether your spending reflects your convictions?

Practice

Pay attention to the news – local, national and international – and engage with the stories around social inequality, injustice, climate change. Let it affect your emotions!

Ask God to show you where you need to change and how you can respond.

Identify one practical thing you can do to help change things.

Read

Saying Yes to Life – Ruth Valerio (exceptional book on the choices we make)

Neither Poverty nor Riches – Craig Blomberg (overview of the Bible’s teaching on this)

MATERIALISM (3): the climate emergency

Recap

Jack began with a vision of faith in a God who can move mountains and suggested that in the developing climate emergency we face one huge and incredibly steep mountain.

Last week the UN released a report showing how woefully short the global community is falling in our urgently needed efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and avert further climate change catastrophe.

Already, there is huge disruption and human suffering tied to climate change. And it is costing most from populations who have contributed the least to the problem.

Shane Claiborne

“We live in a world that has become way too adjusted to injustice, a world that has become way too comfortable to inequity between rich and poor, a world that has become way too accustomed to violence. We need some holy maladjusted people in the world.”

As the people of the God, we should be outraged at the mountain of the climate emergency. We’re called to be a holy maladjusted people, responding with faith that as we act, God can do extraordinary things.

Read and ask

Matthew 17:14-20

- How do you make sense of Jesus’ language of mustard seeds and moving mountains?
- What do you find daunting/encouraging?
- Share examples of ‘mountains’ that have been moved by faith.

Discuss

- With regard to the climate emergency, how might we be too well adjusted to business as normal?
- How can we become ‘holy maladjusted people’?
- What contexts has God placed you in, where he might be able to use you to move mountains? (Employer? School? Church?)

Practice

- Ask your employer where your pension fund is invested and request it is moved away from fossil fuels.
- Ask your local school about their plans to reduce emissions and educate on climate change.
- If you own a car, could you avoid driving it for the rest of Lent?

Take it further

Christianity and Climate Change, a nine-part film series with discussion guide for groups, with world renowned climate scientist and Christian, Katharine Hayhoe:

www.tearfund.org/climatefilms

MATERIALISM (4): consumerism

Recap

We are exposed to multiple thousands of product images and adverts every single day of our lives, captivating our imaginations, shaping our aspirations, and marking out where belonging/worth/acceptance are to be found.

Consumerism is a dominating cultural force in all our lives.

Walter Brueggemann

“The key pathology of our time, which seduces us all, is the reduction of our imagination so that we are too numbed, satiated, and co-opted to do serious imaginative work.”

When Paul wrote to the followers of Jesus in Colossae, the dominating cultural force in all their lives was the Roman Empire. Instead of corporate logos, there were images of the Empire at every turn. Instead of weekly trips to the mall and a retail calendar, there were devotions to the imperial cult and the calendar of feast days to celebrate Caesar. Instead of an inequitable global economy, there was an exploitable tax system that sucked wealth and economic power back to Rome. Caesar was, of course, supreme, his rule delivered peace, everyone knew that, it was self-evident.

Into this context Paul writes about the supremacy of Christ, that Jesus is the head over every power and authority and that through him has come true salvation and peace, not through the brute force of the Roman Army (or Western air-craft carriers) but conversely through the blood of the cross.

Read and ask

Colossians 1.15-17, 2.6-10

- Which words or sentences most directly challenge the claims of the Roman Empire to be the ultimate political/religious reality that is here to stay?
- Which words or sentences most directly challenge the claims and promises of our individualistic consumer culture?
- In what ways is our following of Jesus in the 21st century calling into question our individualistic consumer culture?

Discuss

- What do the foundational messages of our first two modules in our Pattern journey ‘Beloved Identity’ and ‘Togetherness’ have to say to our consumerism?
- *“Maybe our insatiable drive for more is actually a clumsy expression of our intuition that we were made for something without bounds – that we were made for God.”*
- When have you tasted the fulness of Christ (v10), or the ‘enough of God’?
- Which of the suggested steps listed below will you try? What is your 12th step?

Practice

Try the 12-step programme for recovering consumers!

1. Appreciate how materially rich we really are.
2. Sell something and gift the cash.
3. Learn to fast and feast.
4. Prioritise shared meals over the consumer frenzy.
5. Make your home a site of production too (not just consumption).
6. Learn your neighbours' names.
7. Decode the ads, or...
8. Use the mute button.
9. Publish your budget to trusted friends (Clarifying question: are you putting more towards your future needs than you are towards others' present needs?)
10. Pause before a purchase.
11. Watch The Lorax.
12. ???

Take it further:

Read: 'Consumer Detox' by Mark Powley

Watch: The Lorax

Click: <https://joyinenough.org>

MATERIALISM (5): systemic injustice

Recap

Kath wrapped up this series with a challenging talk, helping us see that we are culpable in the perpetuating of a broken and unjust system. We were invited to see that we all have a responsibility to move from ignorance or denial, and instead to choose to be people who make good, and sometimes difficult, choices to help a new system emerge.

Sonya Renee Taylor

We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.

We suggest you begin by asking a few people in the group to reflect on what else Kath said and the questions it has raised for them.

Read and ask

Isaiah 58:1-12

What would it look like if we were to individually and collectively embody what Isaiah prophesies here?

What does this mean in light of the resurrection of Jesus? How does that make it easier?

What does this look like in practice?

If seeking justice *is* worship, why do we not make it more of a priority in our lives?

Discuss

Does it feel to you like we're at the doorway of a new era? How?

What might be stopping you?

What is drawing you in?

Was it a surprise to you to hear that we are deeply entwined in unjust global systems?

If you had the opportunity to speak to the world right now, as a Christian, what would be your central message and do you think this is the same as Jesus's central message?

How can the Kingdom of God blueprint offer us a way to 'build back different'?

Practice

The primary focus of this last talk was to encourage us all to take action and make changes to our consumer habits. Kath mentioned three areas where we can all do this. Here are some details of how we can do each of them.

(1) Fuel your compassion

There are various ways you can fuel compassion (the word “compassion” comes from the Latin words *cum* and *passio* – which means to suffer with):

Read/watch stories from survivors of human trafficking and slavery

<https://www.ijmuk.org/stories/gsn-iwd-2021>

<https://youtu.be/iIML8kKHs0M>

<https://youtu.be/XfDPG9GOMD4>

Watch the global news (not just being produced in the UK)

A good source of independent news is The Week.

Educate yourself by reading

We recommend these books on this subject:

The Locust Effect by Gary Haugen

Good News about Injustice by Gary Haugen

Words for a dying world by Hannah Malcolm

Live Justly available here <http://www.tearfund.org/livejustly>.

(2) Adopt the banana principle

Kath talked about the story of a man who lost his job in the pandemic and is on a low income, but who had decided that in response to what he'd learnt about systemic injustice, he was going to switch from buying a bunch of 8 normal bananas, to 6 Fairtrade bananas.

How could we apply the same principle to some of the most ethically problematic products?

(i) Electronics

The reality is that this is hard. But check out this helpful article:

<https://www.causeartist.com/purchase-sustainable-and-ethical-electronics/>

(ii) Coffee

Have a look at the coffee you are using - whether it's from your favourite café or supermarket – and ask “do I know where this coffee came from? What steps are being taken to ensure people harvesting them are paid a decent wage and what steps are being taken to ensure the worst forms of child labour are being prevented?”.

The following is a hierarchy of good practice on purchasing coffee:

- a. Source from independent coffee suppliers, and if it's not obvious - ask questions about their sourcing. Great options are [Manumit Coffee](#) and [Blue Bear Coffee](#) (both intentionally eliminating slavery from their supply chains).
- b. Supermarket – look for Fairtrade/organic/Rainforest Alliance certification

- c. Make sure you can at least see the country of origin which shows the supplier is aware of the source.

(iii) Chocolate

This is easier than ever so there are no excuses! The following are all available from supermarkets:

- Tony's Chocolonely is working to eliminate slavery from their supply chains
- Divine chocolate – fairtrade chocolate
- Green and Blacks
- Equal Exchange

As a starter for 10 – could you choose an ethically sourced easter egg?

<https://tonyschocolonely.com/uk/en/our-chocolate/product/egg-stra-special-chocolate-eggs-3>

(iv) Clothes

- Download the "Good on You" app here: https://linkin.bio/goodonyou_app
The app was developed by a group of campaigners, fashionistas, scientists, writers and developers, united in seeing fashion become more sustainable and fair, including ending human rights abuses within the industry.
- Check out Fashion Revolution's transparency index: <https://bit.ly/37L8aTG>
- Great options for buying and selling second-hand clothes (as well as charity shops) are eBay, Depop and Oxfam Online.
- Swap clothes with friends or organise a clothes swap!?
- Ethical labels to try out include *People Tree, Lucy and Yak, Hiut Denim, Patagonia*.

(v) Seafood

Research where your seafood is coming from. The Thai fishing industry is reported to be reliant on migrant workers, many of who have been trafficking or are bonded labourers.

Use your consumer power and engage the supermarkets you buy from, by reminding them of the commitment they've made in their 'Modern Slavery Statements' to eliminating slavery from their supply chains.

For a 6 part video series which goes into greater depth on these products (perfect to do as part of a life group!): <https://www.ijmuk.org/slavefreevideos>

(3) Pray

Karl Barth famously said that "to clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world." Perhaps this is also an area of our lives where we can apply the banana principle – pray more for others and less for ourselves?

Things you can do that will help sustain you as you pray:

- sign up for regular prayer updates from charities who are working with the poor and the oppressed
- IJM <https://www.tfaforms.com/4752322>
- Tearfund email - info@tearfund.org or check on www.tearfund.org/pray
- Join a prayer group prayergroups@allsaintsworcester.org.uk or start one up!