

Worthless Things

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Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.

Psalm 119:36-37

The composer of the great Psalm 119 knew something about himself specifically and about human nature in general. He knew that covetousness is a threat to walking in God's way. Therefore he prayed, ***"Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness."*** A heart inclined toward God's Word would help him be satisfied in what God provides.

The sin of covetousness is a lot like the sin of pride—it is easy to see in others, but difficult to see in ourselves. Yet this is an area where we should ask God to search us and know our hearts, to see if there is some wicked way in us. Covetousness not only defeats us, it also deceives us. Covetousness makes one climb the ladder of success, only to find out that the ladder was set against the wrong building. It is a serious matter, because the Bible tells us how covetousness has ruined many people.

- Balaam sold out God's people and his own soul due to covetousness (Numbers 22; 2 Peter 2:15-16)
- Ahab murdered due to covetousness (1 Kings 21:1-13)
- David committed adultery and murder because he coveted (2 Samuel 11:2-17)
- Achan stole and brought Israel to defeat by covetousness (Joshua 7:18-26)
- Judas stole from his fellow disciples and betrayed Jesus due to covetousness (John 12:6; Matthew 26:14-16)
- Gehazi lied for the sake of covetousness (2 Kings 5:20-26)
- Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit out of covetousness (Acts 5:1-6)

The psalmist also knew that one way to fight against covetousness is to keep one's eyes on the Lord and directed away from worthless things. So he prayed, ***"Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things."*** It's true that some things, comparatively speaking, are worthless things. They are

of no value for eternity and little value for the present age. He prayed that God would empower and enable him to turn away his eyes and attention from such things.

Many lives are wasted because people find themselves unwilling or unable to turn away their eyes from worthless things. The modern world, with its media and entertainment technology, brings before us an endless river of worthless things to occupy not only our eyes and time, but also our heart and minds.

You know the routine: You sit down at the computer, with your smartphone, in front of the television—maybe it's plugged into a game system. Before you know it, hour upon hour has passed by. Then you realize that you spent far more time sitting there than you intended to. Perhaps you did nothing obviously evil with that time given over to worthless things, but the time spent is gone forever.

Of course we need a measure of "downtime" and relaxation. Used properly, these things do us good. Yet it is all too easy—especially in our modern age—to take something that could be good for us and to abuse it. We end up spending too much time with our eyes on worthless things.

Some things are clearly worthless. Other things are thought by many to be worthy, but are in fact worthless:

- Worthless because they do no good.
- Worthless because they do not last.
- Worthless because they help no one else.
- Worthless because they build no faith, hope, or love.
- Worthless because they distract from things that are truly worthy.
- Worthless because they have nothing to do with Jesus.

Like many of us, the psalmist understood that he had a natural tendency toward worthless things. So he prayed for that natural tendency to be counteracted. The eyes

are so powerful that the psalmist had to pray—pray for power from outside himself to turn his eyes from worthless things. Did he have no eyelids he could close? No muscles in his neck to turn his head? Yet we all sympathize with this prayer. The eyes are so small—yet they can lead the whole

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person, and they often lead people straight to destruction. This is because the eyes lead the heart, they lead the mind, and they can lead the whole person.

The psalmist wanted to look another way, a better way. The best way to look away from sin is to look at something else.

In almost any sport that involves a ball, participants must keep their eyes on the ball. If the baseball player doesn't keep his eye on the ball, it might hit him in the head. The soccer player who doesn't keep his eye on the ball won't score a goal. The basketball player who doesn't watch the ball will miss the pass from his teammate. While the game is on, players can't watch the birds, or the spectators, or the clouds in the sky. All those are worthless things at that moment.

The psalmist then did something wise; he prayed for revival: ***"And revive me in Your way."*** He wanted to be made alive again in the way, or path, of God. He wanted to walk in God's way, and to do it with a revived heart. He prayed for deadness in one direction—toward worthless things—and for life in another direction: toward God's way.

That's worthy, not worthless. 

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