

ENOUGH STUFF

Find out how to ensure that your life is not defined by your stuff.

We all need stuff—stuff to wear, stuff to eat, stuff for home, stuff for school. And, of course, beyond the necessities there's also the stuff we want but don't really need, as well as the stuff we dream about but could never afford. There's big stuff and little stuff, girl stuff and guy stuff, stuff for work and stuff for play, stuff for now and stuff for later. It seems the world is filled with stuff.

If we're not careful, we can have a hard time seeing past all that stuff. Material possessions (both those we have and those we want) can obstruct our view of who we really are and what life is really about.

Add to this stuff the persistent prattle of marketing and advertising, and you're in a tough spot as a teenager today. So how do you call a halt to the onward march of materialism in your life? The scriptures and modern prophets—and even modern science—give some suggestions.

1 Know Who You Are

One of the most subtle and dangerous aspects of materialism is the false identity it can give us. When we think of ourselves in terms of our stuff—whether it's our clothes, our toys, or our money—we paint a pale and shrunken picture of ourselves.

In addition, our sense of self-worth suffers under the constant onslaught of advertising messages that try to sell us an image of who we *ought to be* based on what we *ought to buy*. Some research suggests that such advertising has negative effects on self-esteem, relationships, creativity, and overall happiness.¹ To get teens to buy their products, some companies use cunning advertising techniques targeting the greatest teenage insecurities—fitting in, being “cool,” body image, and so on. By doing so, they distort true identity and hijack our natural development of self-image and personality.

As children of our Heavenly Father, we have a divine identity and potential, but Satan wants us to forget this

fact. When we doubt our divine nature and lose confidence in ourselves, we are more prone to fill the void with worldly things—with the outward trappings of coolness, prosperity, abundance, pleasure, or acceptance.

But the Savior reminds us, “A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). In our hearts we know it's true, but it's easy to lose sight of. Prayer, scripture study, and other spiritual experiences help give us sublime reminders that we are much greater than the sum of our stuff.

Five Tips for Tackling Materialism

2 Know Where You're Going

You may have seen the bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins." Whoever came up with that slogan was probably just having a bit of fun at the expense of consumer culture, but it's funny only because some people really do seem to believe that life is about acquiring stuff.

A correct outlook on the purpose of life probably can't be easily boiled down to a bumper-sticker slogan, but the scriptures give us several correctives to the "gimme, gimme" philosophy.

The prophet Alma taught, "Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world; for behold, you cannot carry them with you" (Alma 39:14). You've probably heard the saying "You can't take it with you." Well, it's scriptural.

So where should our focus be? The Savior has told us to look beyond the way station of this world toward our final destination. He said, "Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness" (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38). He also taught, "Thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better" (D&C 25:10).

The stuff we can buy in this world is nothing compared to the gift of eternal life, "which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7).

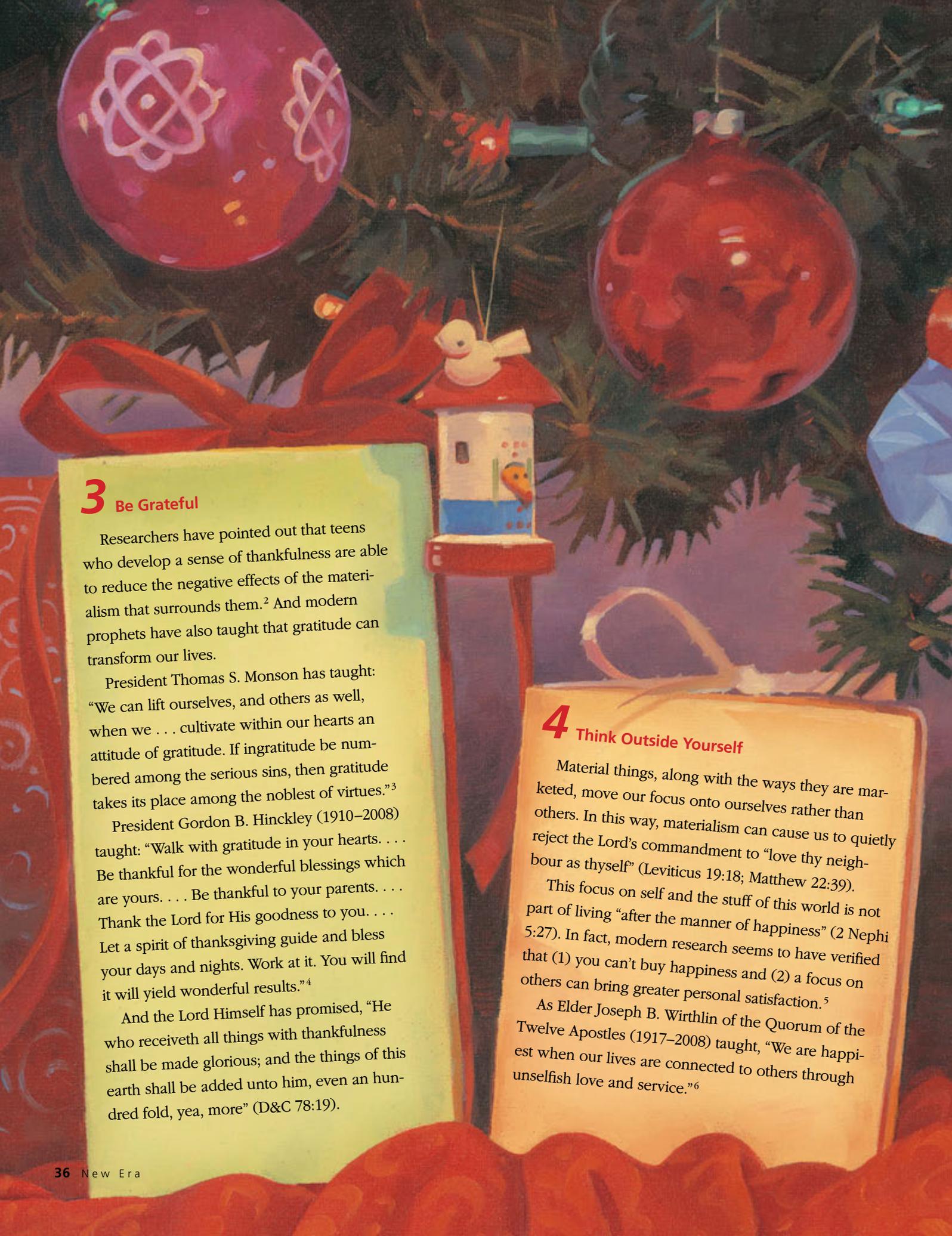
DON'T GET TRAPPED

"The tugs and pulls of the world are powerful. Worldly lifestyles are cleverly reinforced by the rationalization, 'Everybody is doing it,' thus fanning or feigning a majority. Products are promoted and attitudes engendered by clever niche marketing.

"Peter counseled, 'Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage' (2 Pet. 2:19).

Brothers and sisters, there are so many personalized prisons!"

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Tugs and Pulls of the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 35.



3 Be Grateful

Researchers have pointed out that teens who develop a sense of thankfulness are able to reduce the negative effects of the materialism that surrounds them.² And modern prophets have also taught that gratitude can transform our lives.

President Thomas S. Monson has taught: “We can lift ourselves, and others as well, when we . . . cultivate within our hearts an attitude of gratitude. If ingratitude be numbered among the serious sins, then gratitude takes its place among the noblest of virtues.”³

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught: “Walk with gratitude in your hearts. . . . Be thankful for the wonderful blessings which are yours. . . . Be thankful to your parents. . . . Thank the Lord for His goodness to you. . . . Let a spirit of thanksgiving guide and bless your days and nights. Work at it. You will find it will yield wonderful results.”⁴

And the Lord Himself has promised, “He who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more” (D&C 78:19).

4 Think Outside Yourself

Material things, along with the ways they are marketed, move our focus onto ourselves rather than others. In this way, materialism can cause us to quietly reject the Lord’s commandment to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39).

This focus on self and the stuff of this world is not part of living “after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27). In fact, modern research seems to have verified that (1) you can’t buy happiness and (2) a focus on others can bring greater personal satisfaction.⁵

As Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1917–2008) taught, “We are happiest when our lives are connected to others through unselfish love and service.”⁶



5 Be Wise

The Savior told His Apostles, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). In other words, we should be innocent but not naïve; we should understand the ways of the world without being worldly. This teaching can be applied to materialism.

According to some research, we can avoid developing materialistic attitudes if we are more aware of the selling intent of advertising and marketing.⁷ That is, if we constantly remind ourselves that the ads we see are just trying to get us to buy stuff, we’re less likely to buy into the message that stuff is all-important.

Again, we all need some stuff, and most stuff is neither good nor bad in and of itself. Neither is most advertising—unless it’s trying to sell us something harmful or has inappropriate content. But over time the incessant drone of materialism can influence our attitudes and thoughts and cause us to forget the Lord and His commandments, as well as our true selves. So we must be on guard.

These things, these necessities and accessories of life, are constantly before us. But we don’t have to let them drown out the voice of the Spirit telling us of a better self, a better way, and a better world. **NE**

NOTES

1. See, for example, Karen Kersting, “Driving teen egos—and buying—through ‘branding,’” *Monitor on Psychology: A Publication of the American Psychological Association*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2004): 60.
2. *Trends and Tudes* (newsletter for Harris Interactive, Jan. 2007), 7; available at www.harrisinteractive.com.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “An Attitude of Gratitude,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2000, 2.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *New Era*, Jan. 2001, 8.
5. See, for example, Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (2002); and Tori DeAngelis, “Consumerism and its discontents,” *Monitor on Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2004): 52.
6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 101.
7. See Moniek Buijzen, “Parental mediation of undesired advertising effects,” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2005): 153.

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Matthew 6:19–21.