



# SEEDS

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*The Story of Stuff*  
by Nate Macy

It's not often that I feel led to use my writing space to fervently recommend a video, and even less so a web site. But, after watching "The Story of Stuff" ([www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com)), I am going to wholeheartedly encourage exactly that. Now, before you write me off as just another environmental liberal who is as hypocritical as the next guy and doesn't understand that my ideological point of view would mean the end of Western Civilization as Jesus (or at the very least Constantine and George Washington), intended it to be, understand that I know full well that I cannot stand on the moral high ground on this issue. I am, in fact, the hypocrite you have named me. I have not escaped from the capitalism and the greed and the lust that pervades our culture. It's like recognizing that we breathe air. All of this is absolutely embedded in and around us. We are, by our very existence as 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans, consumers. But, just as when we are plunged underneath water we suddenly and vividly remember that air to breathe is important, we are now in a time when we are suddenly and vividly being reminded that there are limits and consequences to our overindulgence and self-definition as consumers.



Photo courtesy of Katie Blanch ([www.flickr.com/photos/blueisbest/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/blueisbest/))

This video chronicles the impact of consumerism on our world, which is truly frightening. But still more horrifying is the history of the consumer economy and the intentionality with which it was built. The system was envisioned by the economist Victor Lebeau who said "Our enormously productive economy... demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption... we need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate." This was the system, and continues to be the system that our country has embraced as a model.

For any of you yet wondering why this is relevant material for a "spiritual" article, let me emphasize the quote "Our enormously productive economy... demands that *we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption*" Paul, in Romans 12, seemed to think that our spiritual satisfaction and way of life is sought and found in being living sacrifices to God.

We are ingrained worshipers. As humans we will worship something, and by that I mean we will dedicate ourselves – time, money, energy, emotion – to something beyond ourselves, or at times to our own sense of well-being. How much more malicious can a system be that intentionally seeks to make us worship things, to fill our

innate desire to worship with what amounts to the destruction of the planet, the cultivation of injustice, and the utter inability to find fulfillment?

We, as the people of God, have been duped, lulled, hoodwinked and drawn into this system. Not only do we fight an uphill battle against this in what and how we choose to purchase, but we have begun to view each other – ministry, art, relationships, and ultimately, God – as something we can consume. There are, of course, glaringly obvious examples of this – from the “health and wealth” gospel to the Christian youth sub-market, which in its products and ideas runs strangely parallel to secular youth consumerism. But the subtle ways that this grabs a hold of us and shapes our ideas and our faith are more misleading and prominent than we easily grasp. Many of us no longer think that we need to contribute to our meetings and churches, but rather that the church is there to meet our needs. The music, message, programs, and pastoral staff are there for us to consume. We demand a more and more stylish and entertaining delivery of the gospel, of the truth (when we bother to consider what truth really is), and then discard and replace this at “an ever accelerating rate.” One need not look past the latest separate and unique versions of the Bible for men, women, teens, and children to see this. How soon will we see the Bible-for-people-between-the-ages-of-23-and-32-with-IQ’s-beneath-100-and-tatoos?

We know as God’s people, even if we have forgotten it, that there is another way. We sing “tis the gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free.” Our spiritual heritage shouts of the way of poverty and self denial. We know that Jesus told the rich man that it would be easier for the camel to go through the eye of the needle. This is not to be confused with the rejection of the blessings of wealth. Money is not the root of all evil, the love of money is. The early Friends and others have found that integrity and simplicity in business often result in wealth. However, wealth simply means an opportunity for stewardship, a marshalling of resources that we may use to transform the world. We have the resources to begin a revolution, and now is the time.

We must begin. We must begin to think about how to use our resources. We must embrace those who have been proclaiming this prophetic message already, and truly hear what they have to say. We must re-prioritize, not simply because it is the fate of our planet that hangs in the balance, but because it is also the well being of our souls, the well being of our brothers and sisters, the centrality of God’s jealous command, “You shall have no other gods before me.”

However, we also must recognize the lesson learned from the zealots who have gone before. If our crusade against consumerism becomes all encompassing, if it becomes our “way of life, ritual, and spiritual satisfaction” then we have accomplished nothing. We cannot replace a life lived in sacrifice to God with a campaign to change the world. We must begin by reordering our beings, by “being transformed by the renewing of our minds,” which we accomplish by bringing all of this to God, who knows and suffers and cares more than we can imagine. God, who will honor our prayer to be God’s people and show us how to begin this monumental task of bringing about the Kingdom in our own lives and the world. And that task is where “we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction,” it is the truly good stuff with which our lives should be filled.



Nate Macy, a GOOD NEWS *Associate*, is a member of Newberg Friends Church. He holds a BA in Christian Ministry and an MA in Spiritual Formation, both from George Fox University. His ministry includes composing, worship leadership, retreat leadership, spiritual direction and music production. He has released two CD’s, *Hope* and the *Psalms Project*.



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