

[Picture of Morris Family 1] Hello, name is Joshua Morris. My wife, Crystal, and our three children have been attending Catalyst for just under a year now. We love Catalyst for a ton of really cool reasons, but primarily because Catalyst has shown us what it means to love and be loved. We feel fortunate to be a part of it. You all have become our *Ohana* — a term in Hawaiian culture for family. Also, I should mention I've been watching a lot of surfing documentaries.

Now that we're into full-on summer mode, we've found that life once again looks slightly different than it has over the past nine months. Some of us scramble to help our kids fight boredom while others are busy keeping their lawn from looking like a post-apocalyptic wasteland. For most of us though, summer is also a time to relax a bit, enjoy our toys, and spend time with friends/family. Sometimes we even do all three in the form of a vacation.

[Cheesebridge 1, 2, 3] So this morning Catalyst is taking a quick vacation. We're traveling to the small British town of Cheesebridge. You may recognize Cheesebridge as the setting of today's film, *The Boxtrolls*. Cheesebridge is the dwelling place of Lord Archibald Snatcher and the beloved subterranean creatures of the movie's title. I loved this film. In fact, I loved it so much I wrote about it for graduate school. I'm pretty sure I got a C.

As its name indicates, Cheesebridge is a cheese-based economy. The more you have, the higher up toward the peak of the city you live. Even the shape of Cheesebridge — a sort of tall pyramid — is a visual representation of its social and economic hierarchy. At the top, the city's highest point, live the White Hats — elite aristocrats who lounge around a table piled high with various types of luxurious cheeses. They address the city's governmental affairs, but only if they have time between tastings. Below this, all the way to the bottom of the city lives everyone else — the increasingly poor and common folk. [Insert Image: Snatcher 4] This is where one of the movie's main characters, Archibald Snatcher, lives. Snatcher and the others are below the White Hats, physically *and* economically. Snatcher, however, really wants to break through. He wants to be living at the top of Cheesebridge with a shiny white hat on his head. He wears a red hat, but only because he's not currently allowed to wear a white one. And so he'll do whatever it takes to get there, including mistreating and even imprisoning others.

So if we were to pull someone like Snatcher aside and say, "Give it to me straight. Where do you stand in the overall picture of Cheesebridge? How do you feel about your social standing?" He would say something like, "Honestly, I'm a Have-Not."

[Cheesebridge, possibly with Haves at top and Have-nots at bottom 5] *The Boxtrolls* is a film about the "Haves" (up) and the "Have-Nots" (down). This story resonates with us because we also live in that world of "Haves" and "Have-Nots." We know what that's like, don't we? Most of us typically measure ourselves by what we don't have — a bigger house, a better car — rather than by what we do have and also by our relationship to it. We feel a lot like Snatcher because we're all "Have-Nots" living at the bottom with plenty of room to climb higher. We don't have the biggest and best.

When we feel this way, we easily forget that we're actually the richest people in the world, already living at the top! I mean, look around, we have more stuff in a single closet than some

have at all. And yet, quite honestly, we all FEEL like we don't have enough. We feel like WE are the "Have-nots," the bottom-dwellers. There's probably a very small number of people who wake up every single morning, look around at everything and say, "Yep, I'm all set. I have absolutely no desire for anything else."

Why is that? In Cheesebridge, status and meaning are attached to things — objects like cheese and white hats. If you have these things, you're in. You're at the top, socially elite. If you don't, like Snatcher, — or if you have a hat but it's red instead of white, not what you really want — you're feverishly working to get them because of your deep desire and what it would mean for you as an individual.

So what does this say about our perspective on stuff, on possessions? Why is it that even though by global standards we're living at the very top of Cheesebridge, we feel like the top is still pretty far up? Among many things, The Boxtrolls is a story about how we approach possessions, about the cravings we have for the cheese objects in our lives and then how we respond to those cravings.

Maybe you're saying, I don't live in Cheesebridge. I'm lactose intolerant. Well, so is Snatcher but he lives there anyway. But maybe some of us are living in Techtropolis, where having the latest piece of technology is king. Others may be living in Fashionville, where image rules the day. And finally, some of us could be dwelling in Hobbytown. The interesting thing about Hobbytown is that in Hobbytown, the line between need and want gets reeeaaally fuzzy. "Honey, do you have any idea how many of Brad Bloomer's pigs I could smoke at one time with this new smoker? I mean, 'RIBS!' Need I say more? Baby, think of the kids."

Now before we move any further, let's be very clear. None of this is to say that having things or wanting and acquiring new things is inherently bad. Everyone loves having a nice car, clothes that express who they are, or toys that they love. There's no reason to feel guilty about that. But what we want to do is step outside this system that we often find ourselves in — a system that says you need this because it's bigger, better, and new which makes YOU bigger, better, and new. This is the same system that Archibald Snatcher is in. We want to look beyond these objects, these possessions. We want to look at how we find true joy in these things and how we can see them as invitations to participate in God's self-giving grace instead of lifeless things that inadequately measure our spiritual, personal, and social worth.

[**Illustrate two options 6, 7**] Unfortunately, the church hasn't always been very good at helping us with this. There are generally two ways that we've historically approached this subject. The first is "Be poor! Go sell all you have and follow Jesus. After all, Jesus didn't have a house. He had to borrow a donkey just to ride into Jerusalem. Hey listen, if you have a lot of money, a lot of stuff, then you must not be very spiritual. In fact, you should be living with humble means at the lowest part of the city. You should be at the bottom of the map."

The second is the exact opposite. It says, "God wants you to be rich, to prosper! He wants you be living at the top of the map in Cheesebridge with the White Hats, enjoying the good life of

blessing and God's good favor. You're a child of the King! Name it and claim it, man! Hey listen, if you don't have a lot of money, a lot of stuff, then you must not be very spiritual."

But are these our only options? Are either of these perspectives a healthy model for how we should view the gifts of God's creation? It's interesting to think about the fact that neither of these options seem very joyous or fulfilling, to us or to anyone around us.

If you have a Bible, turn with me to Mark 10, starting at verse 17. If you don't have a Bible, feel free to take one from the table at the back. It's yours to keep. This story in Mark happens immediately after Jesus has welcomed a group of children to him. The disciples didn't think they should be there until Jesus said that to enter the Kingdom of God, we must receive it as children. Then, this happens:

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked.

Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God."

So the guy with a lot of really cool stuff says he wants to inherit eternal life. Jesus says okay cool, do all these things. The guy says check — that's child's play. Literally, I've done that since I was a kid. Jesus says okay great, now go sell your cool stuff, give the proceeds to the poor, and come with me. Except wait, hold on. This sounds a LOT like the first option we named earlier. Jesus literally just told him to go and be poor. He told him to live at the bottom of the

Cheesebridge map. It sounds to me like maybe having no stuff is a requirement for inheriting eternal life.

So is that how I'm supposed to interpret this? Are you saying that I should have less stuff if I want to follow Jesus and have eternal life? This doesn't make sense because I love my home, my car, my air conditioning, but I also deeply love Jesus. Is he telling me I have to choose?

That might be true if Jesus told the man to sell his stuff and *become* poor. But that's not how the disciples and the early church in Acts interpreted this and neither should we. Jesus wasn't being prescriptive about what it meant to follow him. When you become a believer, you don't sell all your stuff. In this passage Jesus challenges the man's perspective on possessions. He challenges him to see his possessions as objects of God's grace that would bring true life to himself and to others. Jesus says, "sell your possessions and *give the money to the poor.*" This was revolutionary because of the predominant Jewish attitude toward riches. Look, even the disciples were shocked when Jesus said that it's nearly impossible for a person with this perspective to enter the Kingdom. They said, "Then who in the world can be saved?" To the Jews at that time, if you had a lot of money and possessions, it was a sign of divine favor. Not only were you at the top of Cheesebridge, God was right there with you. This actually sounds a lot like the second option we mentioned earlier. So the thought was why would I give up the very thing that proves God loves me?

These people were living in the same world that we do, where status and meaning are measured by cheese and white hats. What Jesus points out here is that when we equate our belongings with our spiritual standing before God and our social standing before others, we've seriously misunderstood our relationship to possessions. And dangerously so. The man goes away sad. He doesn't inherit eternal life because he couldn't imagine life without his white hat.

[Image of Winnie and Lord Portley Rind] One of my favorite lines from the movie is when Winnie, daughter of Lord Portley Rind, the head of the aristocracy, asks her father point blank, "Would you give up your white hat to save me?" Jesus asks this man a similar question, "Would you give up your incorrect perspective of possessions to save yourself and others?" Unfortunately this guy couldn't see beyond the objects themselves because, for him — and Archibald Snatcher and Lord Portley Rind and everyone else on the Cheesebridge map — losing a possession meant losing status. It was a subtraction from their identity.

At this point, you may be saying, "It still sounds like you're saying stuff is bad. You're talking about giving up my possessions as the best option here." James tells us, "**Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens.**" -- James 1:17

[Bring back map, with Boxtrolls added "off the map"] Here's where I think we finally learn from our friends, the Boxtrolls. Oh yeah, the Boxtrolls! What about them? This is their movie, right? What can we learn about life and flourishing from creatures that rummage through the streets at

night, collecting useless objects? If the White Hats, Snatcher, and the citizens of Cheesebridge don't have the answers, what about the ones living off the map?

Unlike their human counterparts, the Boxtrolls' perspective actually frees them to live uniquely joyous lives. We see this in how they interact with their possessions. As they amass new stuff daily, their concern is not with making it to the top of Cheesebridge. Remember, they're off the map! When they look at a possession, they see its life-giving qualities. That's why they're able to smash a clock and turn into a musical instrument which they all enjoy. Unlike the rich man in Mark, The Boxtrolls' relationship to their possessions is such that these are meaningful things that have the potential bring true joy — beautiful music and harmonious living. These possessions don't inhibit life, they produce it!

The Boxtrolls don't even listening to the noise that says you have to have this or that in order to feel important, loved, or accepted by some false standard. That's the M.O. of the structured world above them, the world of Cheesebridge, our world — the White Hats, Snatcher, and the rich man.

Friends, we're not saying possessions are inherently bad. What we've seen through the Scriptures is that when we view our possessions as gifts from God, then they no longer become things that define us or brings us cultural status — like Snatcher and the White Hats. Instead they become a way in which we participate in a flourishing life of worship and helping bring that same life to others. I love the words of author Miroslav Volf here. He says, “**God gives us good gifts so that we can imitate the giver.**”

So how do we, as Catalyst, approach our possessions as part of our worship? How can we think about others when it's our stuff? How do we, like the Boxtrolls, choose to live off the map — outside of this broken system?

When we see our stuff as objects of God's grace, as gifts, then we begin participating in them. Participating in them means engaging the relationship we have with our possessions — a spiritual, life-giving, and worshipful relationship. We imitate the giver by allowing our possessions, however many or few, big or small, new or vintage — to bring life and joy to others as much as it does us.

For my birthday a few years ago, Crystal bought me a grill and smoker. Which I claim was the day I officially became a man. I'd been wanting one for so long and when I finally got it, they may have been able to hear me from space. And I used this grill and smoker...a lot. For me, it's an object of worship. While I grill, I contemplate God's beauty outdoors. I'm reminded of the sacrifice of one life to provide for another.

My grill isn't top of the line and it's certainly not as big as the grills and smokers my neighbors own. It would be very easy to make that my focus. Don't think I haven't thought about it! What if instead of enjoying what I had, I unnecessarily began trying to get the biggest and best to impress my neighbors or win best neighborhood grill? What if my enthusiasm for this grill

eclipsed my ability to listen to their stories and their needs? Then that object goes from being a meaningful gift to becoming my white hat.

Shortly after I got the grill all set up and mastered the use of it, we invited people over to help celebrate. And, you know, *that's* when that grill was at its very best. Because not only were we engaging it as one of God's good (and perfect) gifts, but it became a way to share love with family and friends.

Does it seem silly to us that a mere object can be a means of worship? Not if we view the object as more than a lifeless thing, but instead as a good and perfect gift where God is present as we enjoy it and even share it with others. God wants us to see these everyday objects as good gifts that bind us to him and to each other.

Catalyst, what is your white hat? What is the thing you're chasing for security or status in a broken system of stuff-gathering? How might we instead imitate the Giver on a daily basis by living off the map like the Boxtrolls? For those of us living in Techtropolis, let our devices and online social presence become ways in which we know and love instead of demanding to be heard or accepted. For those of us in Fashionville, let our image become a unique expression of our love for the Greatest Designer of all time. And for those of us dwelling in Hobbytown, let our time spent engaging our loves be the way we share the joy of the Creator with others.

Communion Set Up

[Communion Slide] We begin at this table, which invites us back to the night before Jesus was killed, the meal he shared with his followers. In that meal, he offered us what he had – bread, broken as his body. Wine as his blood, poured out as a new covenant between God and us. This meal invites us to receive the gift of God's love, the gift of God's life. In receiving this gift of bread and wine, we are transformed into givers like God.

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You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive this meal. If you want to receive God's love, to be transformed into a source of life and healing by the very source of life himself, then you are welcome to come to the table today.

Before we come, I'm going lead you in a prayer of Examen. I'll ask you four questions and give you space to reflect prayerfully on them. Then I'll pray for the meal, and you're welcome to come forward as you're ready.

Examen

1. When in the last week were my possessions a path for me to love God and love others?
2. When in the last week did I look to what I own for status or identity?
3. When in the next week will I be tempted to look to what I own for status or identity?
4. How in the next week can my possessions lead me to love God and love others?

Prayer of Consecration

God, giver of every good and perfect gift, thank you for welcoming us into this space today. We have heard the good news today that you invite us out of the rat race of acquisition and status-seeking. That you give to us that we might share in the joy of giving. We confess that this is a difficult lesson to learn, and even more challenging to practice, so we approach your table today as a people in need of your grace. We ask that these wafers and juice become a spiritual food that gives us the grace we need to imitate your generosity. May we leave as a people with new eyes, that see everything we have as an opportunity to share the love you have lavished upon us with the world around us.

We offer these prayers and approach your table in the name of your son, Jesus.