

June 16, 2014**HOW LONG DO THINGS LAST?****By Jim Mathis**

Over the past 15 or 20 years, I have owned about a dozen cell phones. Almost all had to be replaced because they stopped working. They were not built to last for very long. Similarly, most computer people I know agree if a computer is more than three years old, it is rapidly advancing into technological old age.

On the other hand, as a musician when I perform in concerts, I regularly use a 60-year-old guitar amplifier that I still consider very reliable. My wife and I have furniture in our house we have owned for more than 40 years that we have no intention of replacing. These all were built to withstand the ravages of time.

Some do not need to last because they become obsolete before they wear out, like computers and other technological devices that seem outdated almost before you get them home from the store. Other things, such as plastic packaging, have a lifespan far beyond their usefulness.

I have been struggling with this issue of reasonable usefulness and obsolescence because my car is getting older. Today it has accumulated more miles than any of the previous 34 cars I have owned. Yet it remains just as tightly constructed and solid as the day I bought it 11 years ago. Since the car is still in excellent operating condition, I think I will keep driving it.

When I got involved with photography in the 1960s, it was said black and white photographs would last about 100 years and color photographs would last less than twenty years. Most people ignored this fact, assuming their pictures would last forever. Now in the business of restoring old photographs, I have found these predictions accurate. Black and white photos from the early 20th century are usually merely torn or damaged from handling or poor storage; color prints from the last half of the 20th century are badly faded.

Let's apply this understanding of the temporary nature of things we possess to the spiritual realm. Jesus often spoke about this, urging listeners not to become too attached to what they owned. For instance, He said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust can destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19-20).

Jesus was citing the futility of devoting our lives to the pursuit of things that wear out, become damaged, or grow obsolete. He was saying it is far wiser to focus on things that are eternal, those that will never grow old. Then He made an additional comment: "For where

your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Jesus astutely observed if money and what we possess hold our top priority, we become devoted to seeking and accumulating things we cannot keep forever.

On another occasion, He spoke about a rich man who decided to build a larger barn to stockpile his overabundance of crops. He told himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry." That night, however, the rich man died, leaving all of his earthly possessions for someone else to claim. Jesus closed with the comment, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:18-21).

The question we each must ask ourselves is this: Am we spending our time, energy and talent primarily to acquire things we will discard or lose, or investing those in things that will last for eternity?

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What are some things you currently have and value that you know will soon wear out or become obsolete, causing you to discard them?

2. Now, think of other things that have been made to last for a long time. Which do you value the most – and why? The short-term things or ones that are longer lasting?

3. If you were to assess your life and priorities, how are you devoting most of your own time and energy – toward things that ultimately will be discarded or lost, or things that have eternal value? Explain your answer.

4. Do you think there is a need to re-evaluate and redirect your focus in this respect? Why or why not?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages: Proverbs 3:27-28, 11:24-26, 19:17, 22:2,9, 27:20, 28:8