



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 More Like Mephibosheth  
(*Consumerism*, pp. 39-43)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Talking Back to the Tube  
(*Consumerism*, pp. 61-64)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:  
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### Christian Reflection

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# More Like Mephibosheth

Consumerism, first and foremost, is a culture of expectation that erodes our ability to appreciate relationships, kindnesses, and other pleasures of life. We are trained to evaluate, inspect, and be suspicious that what is offered isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Isn't this mistrusting mindset exactly what the serpent exploited in Eden?

### Prayer

Gracious God, we are aware that your call to us is profoundly counter-cultural.

**The consumer religion coaches us to believe that we are the center of the universe, that all things were created for us and our pleasure. We are taught to hoard our resources, to keep for ourselves, to value personal comfort above service and accumulation over sacrifice.**

Yet you have shown us another way in the life and teachings of Jesus, in his death and resurrection.

**As we reclaim our Christian heritage, we remember that all things were created for your pleasure, and we celebrate the invitation to participate in your work, bringing the ethics of heaven to earth. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: 2 Samuel 4:4; 9:1-13; 16:1-4; and 19:24-30

### Reflection

"Oddly enough, I find my twenty-first century American consumer behavior challenged by this ancient Israelite, he of the mellifluous name and malfunctioning feet, son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul," writes Singleton. "Mephibosheth, to begin with, knew something about gratitude." He received King David's unmerited kindness: "What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?" (2 Samuel 9:8). Even after a servant, Ziba, tricked the King into withdrawing his gift, Mephibosheth remains loyal and does not object.

Is Mephibosheth's behavior an example for us to follow? His self-effacing gratitude and submission echoes in King David's words: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?" (2 Samuel 7:18). The great King "after God's own heart," especially after his moral failings, knew how little he deserved the kindness he received. We find "Mephibosheth moments" in other biblical exemplars, from John the Baptist stepping back to enhance Jesus' ministry (John 3:30) to Jesus himself, who "did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited" (Philippians 2:6) and, along the way, instructed us to take the lowest place and turn the other cheek.

Mephibosheth's humility is almost offensive to us. "Our natural desires, after all, perpetually run in the direction of self-interest," Singleton observes. "The allure of having our expectations met by God is, sadly, readily mangled by worldly assumptions. Thus perverted, it too often leaves us as Christians looking around in dissatisfaction for the perfect church, the perfect job, the perfect home, even perhaps the perfect mate."



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There is a place for “righteous indignation” about goods and services. Jesus’ temple clearing serves as a model of zeal for God’s purposes, especially for protecting the rights of the weak and the poor. “Making sure a dangerous child’s toy got recalled is the kind of consumer-minded concern that might fit this call to action,” Singleton suggests. But this should not be confused with zeal for getting what we deserve, which, she confesses, is “the object of the zeal I exercise in my Consumer-Reports-minded reaction to errors and inconveniences – those moments when I confuse being ‘right’ with being ‘righteous.’”

Though it doesn’t have the ring of “Dare to be a Daniel” or even “Be Like Mike,” being a little “More Like Mephibosheth” is an appropriate aspiration in our consumerist culture.

### Study Questions

1. What do you find attractive about Mephibosheth? What traits or actions of his bother you?
2. How can the hard-to-please-consumer attitude disrupt human relationships and our relationship to God?
3. Do you agree with Dewey’s view in “Talking Back to the Tube” that television is a major source of our heightened consumerist expectations? Where is the television placed in your home, and what does this say about its importance?
4. Dewey recommends “talking back to the tube” as a way of resisting television’s barrage of consumerist values and images (pp. 63-64). Have you ever done this? What commercial (or program) and its exaggerated expectations about products, services, relationships, or institutions would you like to resist?

### Departing Hymn: “Take My Life and Let It Be” (altered)

Take my life, and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to Thee.  
Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of Thy love,  
at the impulse of Thy love.

Take my moments and my days;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King,  
always, only, for my King.

Take my silver and my gold;  
not a mite would I withhold.  
Take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for Thee,  
ever, only, all for Thee.

*Frances R. Havergal* (1874)  
Tune: HENDON

# More Like Mephibosheth

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To reflect on how consumerism is a culture of expectation, encouraging us to be suspicious and demanding not only in our consumption, but in relationships with one another and with God.
2. To evaluate Mephibosheth's example of a more humble and grateful response to life.
3. To evaluate "talking back to the tube" and other ways of resisting the distortion of our expectations by television programming and advertising.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Consumerism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Story

Share Laura Singleton's story of her argument in the supermarket. It begins, "My words were slightly whiny, but my tone was firm: 'But this coupon doesn't say it can't be used with another coupon'" (*Consumerism*, p. 39). This episode exemplifies our consumerist tendencies to be cynical about goods and services, and to have exaggerated expectations. It was not, she concludes, a Mephibosheth moment.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read responsively together the prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

## Scripture Reading

Ask four group members to read 2 Samuel 4:4; 9:1-13; 16:1-4; and 19:24-30 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

Members may be unfamiliar with Mephibosheth (meh-FIB'-o-SHETH), whose strange story is spread across fifteen chapters of Second Samuel. Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, David's dear friend, and grandson of King Saul. After David secured the throne from Saul, he took Mephibosheth into his home (Samuel 9:1-13). The King, no doubt, had mixed motives when he befriended Mephibosheth; perhaps David intended to keep close watch on this rival for his throne. Later David's son, Absalom, led a palace revolt that forced the King to flee Jerusalem. This is when Ziba, Mephibosheth's self-promoting servant, lied to the King about his master (16:1-4); Ziba said Mephibosheth had stayed in Jerusalem because he wanted to become king in David's place. David promised Mephibosheth's possessions to Ziba, and only offered to return half of them to Mephibosheth after hearing his side of the story about not accompanying David into exile from the city (19:24-30).

Singleton recommends that we should be "a little more like Mephibosheth," not exactly like him. She sees him as a model for expecting less and being more grateful for what we receive. Encourage members to discuss elements of his attitude that they do not admire.

Brett Dewey explores how television fosters the attitude of impatient and cynical expectation that Singleton decries. As time permits, ask members to consider how they can minimize this influence of TV on their attitudes.

### *Study Questions*

1. We may appreciate his loyalty to David and genuine gratitude for the unmerited favor of the King. Mephibosheth does not need to be the center of attention; he is content with David's generous provision. On the other hand, his language may seem to us to be groveling or servile.
2. Members may discuss our increasingly unrealistic expectations of church, job, home, and mate. For example, people talk about "shopping around" for a good (or better) church, and they compare the music, preaching, and ministries at their current church to what they hear about other churches. Some church may be the "place to be seen," and we may be tempted to change our membership like putting on the latest designer clothing. Or, to take another example, some people are always dissatisfied with where they work. They may see some places to work or positions as more attractive simply because others desire them too; then they become dissatisfied when that job's newness wears off.

Singleton worries that we will reduce our relationship to the God of the universe to simply a provider of everything we expect—from a close-in parking space at Wal-Mart to a promotion at work. "I find, indeed, that God's Word promises me great things—the Lord's return, my own resurrection to eternity with Him, and a new heaven and a new earth, to name just a few. But a smooth connection through O'Hare Airport? It doesn't seem to be my birthright, even as a child of the King" (p. 43).

3. Members might mention new products—foods, clothes, furniture, electronics, vacation destinations—that they learned about from television in the last year. Have they gleaned design concepts, fashion ideas, or product recommendations from watching TV? Did they buy something on impulse after seeing it advertised or used on television? What cable television channels do they think are oriented toward promoting products and services to viewers? Do their children learn about products from television?

Encourage members to inventory the 'space' in their home in relation to their television set(s). How many and how large are the televisions? Where are they located? Do they dominate a room? Does the placement of other furniture emphasize the TV's importance? How often is the TV turned on? Do family members watch or listen to it from several rooms?

4. Encourage members to mention specific commercials or programs that they would criticize. Is a certain product's relation to our happiness exaggerated? Does a particular broadcast make an expensive purchase too significant? Are universities, churches, politicians, political parties, or charities 'puffed' in certain commercials? Do some shows paint an unrealistic picture of the 'good life' that leaves out the dependent, disabled, elderly, or very young from consideration?

### *Departing Hymn*

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.