

Extract from chapter five of *Consumer Detox: Less Stuff, More Life* (Zondervan)

Life to the full

Maximizing

We tend to want to maximize our lives. We want the best deal for our money. We seek the greatest pleasure from the time we have. We want the maximum quality of life and relationships. Basically, we want to maximize everything.

Now where would we get an idea like this? Who could possibly benefit from a society of people trying to make their lives as full as possible?

Make the most of now (Vodafone)

Live life to the Max (Pepsi Max)

Don't let the opportunity pass you by (British Airways)

"Carpe diem ... seize the day, make your lives extraordinary" (Mr Keating, *Dead Poets Society*)

Vodafone, Pepsi, British Airways, Hollywood – that's an interesting alliance. They're keen to latch onto something so commonplace in our culture that we accept it unthinkingly. This is the deeply held belief that one life is all we have and we should get the best of it.

So how can we maximize our lives?

We can fill them with as many experiences, entertainments, and adventures as possible. In films this comes across as a noble, life-affirming approach. But advertisers are equally happy with it. They know that there are plenty of companies lining up to provide us with the experiences we're after. That's why at least one "Things to Do Before You Die" website is sponsored by a travel agent. *Carpe diem* is pretty much the motto of consumerism. It could be translated "buy while stocks last."

As long as we're thinking like this – that life is made meaningful only by personal experience within a limited timeframe – we'll be unstoppable consumers. We'll have an infinite desire to travel to more places, consume more products, pursue more interests, and make more connections. In other words, we'll be a marketer's dream...

Life to the Full?

If there's one quote from Jesus that Christians are tempted to turn into a consumer slogan, it's this: life to the full. Didn't Jesus say, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10)? The connection with the consumer dream is obvious. You want to maximize your life? Jesus came to make it happen!

Alarm bells should start ringing, though, when Jesus and the advertisers say the same thing. Actually, Jesus saying "Maximize your life" would have been as likely as him ordering a ham and pineapple pizza for the Last Supper. But because we're so conditioned to maximize our lives, we naturally hear Jesus' words that way. We easily imagine a bigger bubble of possessions, a greater collection of experiences. We confuse "life to the full" with a full life.



But that's not what life to the full means. Jesus isn't offering a course in self-advancement or a cure for baldness.

The life Jesus talks about in John's gospel is to know God, to escape the tragic consequences of sin, and to be raised to a new existence after death (if that doesn't sound like life to the full, we've got the consumer bug worse than we think!).

I'm not suggesting that by *life* Jesus meant some kind of distant dream. Right now, the life he offers really is LIFE, a new way of living (and dying). But it has nothing to do with collecting more and more stuff. Quite the opposite.

The Greek word in John 10:10, often translated "to the full," is *perissos*. It means "abundantly," but also "more than enough" or "with some to spare." In the Bible, *perissos* describes the money we have left over to give to charity. *Perissos* is the food we don't need because we've had plenty. It's the name for the baskets of spare crumbs gathered up after the hungry have been fed (Mark 12:44; Luke 15:17; Matthew 14:20).

Words in the *perissos* family are sometimes translated as "overflow." Paul uses them to explain how God's gift to us in Jesus Christ *overflows* to many people in need of grace. He also uses them to describe the way poor Christians in Macedonia let sacrificial giving *overflow* through them, even though they basically had nothing left (Romans 5:15; 2 Corinthians 8:1-3).

In other words, this is not about the consumer dream. When *perissos* applies to possessions in the Bible, it doesn't mean life to the full.

It means *life to the overflow*.

Life to the overflow is about having above and beyond what we need *so that we can share*.

It's about living with less so that others might be blessed.

It's not about having, it's about giving.

Life to the overflow isn't an ever-increasing bubble of possessions; it's more like a cup which, when it is filled up, spills over into the lives of others.

That's very different from maximizing your life.