



What the Increased Use of Storage Units Reveals About Our Values

The Wired Word for the Week of November 2, 2025

In the News

London-based culture journalist Jessica Furseth says she still keeps a bicycle she used to commute to work, even though she no longer rides it since she moved. She says she's "unable to let go. It's not really about the bike but the person I was when I rode it. Can I be this person again? Do I even want to?"

Research puts the number of Americans who rent storage units anywhere between 11 and 40%. With over 50,000 storage facilities in the United States, the over \$50 billion market is expected to just keep growing. Furseth says "the four Ds driving the sector are downsizing, decluttering, divorce, and death." But she points out that there may be more to the reason we cling to stuff we aren't actually using: "Stuff is never just stuff -- our belongings become part of our identity, tying us to our past and future."

"Humans survive on hope -- thinking about who we want to be, whether it was somebody we were before, or an idealized version of ourselves," says Mary E. Dozier, an associate professor of psychology at Mississippi State University.

Ben Soreff, a professional organizer with House to Home Organizing in Connecticut, suggests that "holding on to stuff isn't really about monetary value, nor is it even really about emotional attachment." Instead, it's because we don't have the time, energy, or desire to make decisions about all of it.

"I have two fairly large storage units in Kansas City that I've had since 2008," wrote Suzy Chase of New York City. "I'm the last one in my family who's alive ... So all the family heirlooms have come to me. Everyone I've ever loved is in those storage units."

"Everything in storage is the story of my family, and I feel responsible for that story," Chase said. "It feels like a privilege, but it also feels like a weight. There's a lot of emotion with that. I don't like to go into the storage units. It feels like when I open the door, I'm opening up to grief."

Marketing executive Polly Arrowsmith said after losing her home in bankruptcy, she realized how little she really needed. She doesn't like to go to her storage unit because it brings back the pain of losing her home, and she recognizes that to be healthy, she needs to move forward. "My health is so much more important than things. I used to think I could shop myself into happiness, but I don't need to be such a consumer anymore."

Graphic designer Katherine Coffey of Detroit, Michigan, placed items from her childhood in a storage unit in 2020, keeping only things most meaningful to her. "It was like a capsule of my identity," she said. Then a fire at the storage facility destroyed everything, leaving only her memories.

Editor and professor Kathy Barnes writes that "We all carry an idea of the person we want to be. ... These dreams can inspire us, but they also leave behind something else: clutter." Professional organizer Dr. Regina Lark says we hold onto objects she calls aspirational clutter because "they represent

who we wish we were, rather than who we are." Some examples of aspirational clutter include stacks of books, unfinished craft projects, kitchen tools, workout gear, 'Someday' clothes, musical instruments, and camping supplies. We use such items to define our imagined identity.

"What we should be doing is asking simple, critical questions," Lark says.

"What would have to change in my life for me to actually use this?" Ask

"whether these items are actively being used, or if they're just adding to household clutter. Ask why do you want to do this activity? Is it aligned with your current life or a fantasy? What would have to shift in your day or week to make you use these items?" What has prevented you from following through on your aspirations to use these items? Did something interrupt you? Can you try a different approach or schedule a time to take action?

As Lark puts it, "It's always great to aspire. But ask yourself: What's getting in my way? And if it's causing you grief, maybe the kindest thing you can do is stop holding on."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The State of the Storage Unit.](#) *Dwell*

[The Hidden Weight of Aspirational Clutter and How to Let It Go \(for Good!\).](#)
Better Homes & Gardens

[Seinfeld on Ebay and Storage Units ... \(Video 0:40\).](#) *Gee*

[How to Deal With Your Doom Pile.](#) *Real Simple*

[What Are Doom Boxes \(And Why Do so Many of Us Have Them?\).](#) *The Good Trade*

[Clutter Control: Is Too Much 'Stuff' Draining You?](#) *WebMD*

Applying the News Story

Many biblical passages emphasize the need to seek treasure that lasts forever, rather than worldly possessions that are subject to decay, corruption and loss ([Matthew 6:19-20](#); [2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#); [Colossians 3:1-3](#); [1 John 2:15-17](#)). How do our attitudes about material things relate to the way we treat people ([James 5:1-6](#))? How might keeping these texts in mind help you deal with your tendency to accumulate stuff that easily becomes junk?

The Big Questions

1. What prompts people to add more "stuff" to their lives? What types of things seem to multiply in your own physical and digital life? Why are those particular things of interest to you?
2. How has your relationship with material things changed over time? To what do you attribute the change?
3. Make a list of everything God wants us to keep and store.
4. Why might people have difficulty parting with certain items in their life? Why is it so hard to declutter?
5. What criteria do you use to decide whether it is time to keep something or time to throw or give it away? What role, if any, does your faith play in this kind of practice?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Ecclesiastes 5:15-16

As they came from their mother's womb, so they shall go again, naked as they came; they shall take nothing for their toil that they may carry away with their hands. This also is a grievous ill: just as they came, so shall they

go, and what gain do they have from toiling for the wind? (For context, read [Ecclesiastes 5:13-20](#).)

The writer expresses the idea that just as we bring nothing into this world, we take nothing away. In his sonnet, [Ozymandias](#), Percy Bysshe Shelley describes what's left in the desert of a wrecked monument to a great ruler: lifeless remnants of half-sunken, shattered stone, with the engraved message: "Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" The rich man in Jesus' story in [Luke 16:19-31](#) discovered that he couldn't take his garments and banquets with him after he died.

Questions: Given the reality of our mortality, what drives us to toil "for the wind"? If we can carry nothing away with our hands, what is the purpose of living?

Luke 12:15

And [Jesus] said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (For context, read [Luke 12:13-21](#).)

Jesus told a parable about a rich man whose land produced such abundant crops that he decided to build more barns to store all his grain. After that, he imagined that he could kick back and take life easy (vv. 16-19). But God called him a fool, because he would die, having "stored up treasures" for himself that he would never enjoy, because he would die that very night (v. 20) while he was not "rich toward God" (v. 21).

Elsewhere, Jesus asked, "[W]hat will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" ([Matthew 16:24-26](#)). Other versions render the word translated "life" as "soul."

Questions: What is the "life" we may forfeit by seeking to gain the whole world? If you found out that you were going to die tonight, whose would all your possessions be? How can we guard against all kinds of greed? How can the church nurture attitudes that establish emotional and practical guardrails to protect us from greed? What is the relationship between being "rich toward God" and being "rich in good works, generous, and ready to share" ([1 Timothy 6:17-19](#))?

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (For context, read [Hebrews 11:32--12:2](#).)

Some organizational experts say that a contributing factor to clutter can be a lack of focus on what is important, because of distractions that cloud our vision. In [Matthew 14:29-31](#), Peter walked on water as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus. It was only when he allowed the strong wind to distract him that fear overwhelmed his faith and he began to sink.

The Hebrews text uses the metaphor of runners who look to Jesus, the pacesetter, trailblazer and champion who inspires them to keep racing when the going gets tough. And we are those runners! A great cloud of witnesses, people of faith who have completed their races, are watching and cheering us on as we run our own race of faith.

Questions: Why might a runner find it difficult to lay aside every weight before a race? What clutter might function as weights that prevent us from

running the best race of faith we can? How can looking to Jesus help us focus and encourage us to press on to victory when the going gets tough? What lessons can we learn from the way other people of faith handled the challenges they faced? What hindered and helped them in their races of faith?

Acts 2:44-47

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (For context, read [Acts 2:41-47](#).)

Anthropologist James Loucky reflected on his experience of a Salish potlatch on the Pacific coast: "Gratitude and generosity are central to the teachings and lifeways of indigenous communities. More than a year's preparation culminates in potlatch, a time of immense generosity, gratitude, healing and beauty. Guests in 70-80 canoes arrive, some having paddled for days to accept the invitation to gather. The spirits of hundreds and even thousands of guests who witness the welcome to shore are uplifted and nourished by and through gifts of the sea provided plenteously by people who have lived alongside and from the sea since time immemorial. The great giving includes blankets and artful cedar creations, along with perhaps the greatest gifts shared: the exuberance of youth and elders joining in song and protocol during days and nights of dancing, drumming and speaking from the heart, to renew people's being."

The potlatch tradition expresses the indigenous belief that the greatest honor belongs to those who are most generous. The more one gives away,

the more respect and appreciation one receives. In the act of self-giving, a chief bonds with the people, who reciprocate by accepting the responsibility to care for the chief and the chief's family in perpetuity.

It is written, "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: ... a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together; ... a time to keep and a time to throw away; ... ([Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](#)) and "Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back. Divide your means seven ways, or even eight, for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth" ([Ecclesiastes 11:1-2](#)). As the saying goes, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket."

Questions: Why not put all your eggs in one basket? Does accumulating more stuff necessarily lead to greater clutter? Why or why not? How might the potlatch tradition relate to the practice of members of the early church described in the Acts text? How do the Ecclesiastes texts connect with these traditions? What relevance do those traditions have for the church and society today? How would you describe the season of life in which you currently are living? Is it a time for gathering resources, or for dispensing possessions you have accumulated?

For Further Discussion

1. The article, [How to Get Rid of Stuff: 11 Reasons Why It's Hard to Declutter & What to Do About It.](#) *simplelionheartlife*, identifies these obstacles to decluttering: lack of time; lack of energy or motivation; fear that we might get rid of something we'll need later; sentimental attachments; burnout; feeling overwhelmed; not knowing where to start or what to do with the stuff you don't need anymore; feeling guilt about letting go of things; keeping stuff that represents your "fantasy self" ... who you want to be, or think you should be, not who you actually are; and keeping stuff that represents your past self, not who you are today.

Which obstacles have you encountered that have been most problematic for you? What strategies have you found to be effective in overcoming these obstacles?

2. Consider this, from Peter Walsh, former host of The Learning Channel's *Clean Sweep* show, who divides clutter into two general types: "'Memory' clutter is stuff that reminds us of important events, like old school programs or newspaper clippings. 'Someday' clutter refers to items you won't toss because you feel you might need them someday."

Walsh suggests that people who have a lot of "Memory" clutter may be too attached to the past, while people who keep a lot of "Someday" clutter may focus too much on the future.

"It's about balance," Walsh says. "If you have so much stuff it drags you into the past or pulls you into the future, you can't live in the present." So Walsh encourages his clients to ask themselves: "What is the vision for the life I want?"

3. Reflect on this, from *The Wired Word* Team Member, Frank Ramirez: "I served four pastorates in 45 years of ministry, and that gave us time to throw things away between churches -- but we still took too much stuff with us. Our kids won't want this stuff, so we are trying now in retirement to take stuff to The Depot (the local Mennonite equivalent of Goodwill). I never had to have storage units because I had a garage."

Another *TWW* Team Member, Joanna Loucky-Ramsey, says her mother Millie worked as a housemaid when she was a young adult, before her employer had an electric dishwasher. Sometimes Millie would stash dirty dishes in the oven before heading out the door to attend a Gospel meeting. The kitchen always looked spotless when she left, but a peek into the oven told the true story. The clutter was still there, just temporarily hidden from

view. And she still had to deal with it before the dishes were needed for the next meal.

4. Discuss this, from Barbara Hemphill, author of *Less Clutter More Life*: "I believe God created every person for a specific purpose, for a specific work. ... When you know your purpose, then it's easy to know what's clutter."

Hemphill says, ask yourself, "Does this [physical or digital thing] help me accomplish my work or have the life I want? If it doesn't, by definition, it's clutter," she says. "Clutter prevents you from reaching your purpose, but getting rid of clutter helps you reveal your purpose."

Responding to the News

Might your personal purpose be hampered by unimportant activities that clutter your calendar but don't really add meaning to your life? Might periodically dealing with your "stuff" be a kind of spiritual discipline? What might such a practice accomplish for you spiritually? What steps can you take to declutter your spiritual life? Now make a list of everything God wants you to jettison.

You may wish to sing the hymn, ["If I Gained the World, but Lost the Savior,"](#) or listen to [a contemporary version](#) to help you focus on Jesus and what is most important in life.

Prayer suggested by [1 Peter 1:13](#); [Genesis 1:14](#)

O God who changes not, you created heavenly bodies, seasons and rhythms that provide order for our lives. Help us to keep and treasure what you prize, to release those things that have no eternal value, and to generously give away what was never ours to hoard. Set all our hope, not on the things of this world, but on the grace Jesus Christ will bring us when he is revealed. Amen.

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