

When Is Enough Enough?

Are you a collector? If you are, you're in good company. Lots of people enjoy collecting ... something. The most popular collector items are antiques, vinyl records, comic books, and coins, but hey, the sky's the limit. I've known friends and acquaintances who collect salt and pepper shakers, golf balls, Disney memorabilia, Coca-Cola memorabilia, and on and on. I once collected motion discomfort bags from different airlines. Don't laugh; apparently, I wasn't the only one; when I decided to get rid of it, the collection sold quickly on eBay.

Collecting can be a harmless enough hobby, but for some people it can become expensive—and obsessive. But it's a whole different matter when collecting turns into hoarding.



The poster kids for hoarding were Homer and Langley Collyer. Born in the 1880s, they were the sons of a wealthy physician. Both Homer and Langley were college graduates—and Langley was even a concert pianist who played Carnegie Hall—but both men never

married and lived at home with their parents in a four-story brownstone mansion. When their parents died in the 1920s, Homer and Langley inherited the house and all their money. One practiced law; the other sold pianos. They both taught Sunday School. They had social lives. Two quite normal men—or so it seemed.

When Homer lost his eyesight in 1933, Langley stayed home and took care of his brother. After all, they had money and neither one needed to work. But they became increasingly anti-social and eventually got to the point *they never left the house*. This only aroused the curiosity of the community, who stared at the house and assumed the brothers were hiding money and treasures. All this only caused the brothers to become more anti-social.

And that's how life continued until 1947. An anonymous call informed police of a dead body in the Collyer mansion, but police couldn't get the door open. Junk was stacked from floor to ceiling. They had to use a ladder and go through the second-story window. It took a while to work through the maze of stuff piled everywhere, but they finally found Homer Collyer sitting in a chair—dead. He had only been deceased for a few hours, but it became clear he had starved to death.

Homer's body was removed, but the house still smelled of a dead body. It took the police two weeks to find the body of Langley under all the debris. Here's what the police pieced together: Langley had been taking care of his blind and paralyzed brother, but apparently, a large pile of stuff fell on Langley, killing him. And Homer was left to starve to death.

No heirs and no will, so the city of New York was left to clean out the house. It took several months to remove an estimated



live cats, and fourteen pianos. And let's not overlook the chassis to a Ford Model T—inside the house!

The brownstone is long gone—replaced with a small park—but the phrase "Collyer's mansion" is now a code phrase within the New York Fire Department for the house of an extreme hoarder.



We can self-righteously shake our heads at two brothers whose hoarding and consumption was the death of them, but we would be wise to look at ourselves and ask, "When is enough enough." *Well, I'm not as bad as those two brothers!* Maybe not, but trying to find our security and comfort in things comes in many forms. We can live in a small apartment, use public transportation everywhere, and have only one pair of socks and still be consumed by things. Anytime we think, "I'll be content if I could just have *this*," is an indication we are looking to the wrong source for our contentment. The wealthy and the poor can be equally guilty of looking in the wrong direction for contentment.

I am not saying the homeless person should be satisfied with his destitute state. No one should be without the basics of food, clothing, and shelter, but contentment is not derived from a single item. It's an attitude that is not dependent on how much or how little we have.

- Contentment—true contentment—comes from a relationship with God.
- Contentment comes from walking with the One who provides.
- Contentment comes from realizing the greatest treasure is our relationship with God who will one day overwhelm us with the glories and treasures of His kingdom.
- Contentment comes, not from striving for things, but from striving to be more and more like Jesus.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6).

When is enough enough? This may sound trite to those who have not experienced Him, but when you have Jesus, you have enough.