

OIL IN AMERICA: ABUNDANT LIFE OR ADDICTION?

"OUR ENORMOUSLY PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY...DEMANDS THAT WE MAKE CONSUMPTION OUR WAY OF LIFE, THAT WE CONVERT THE BUYING AND USE OF GOODS INTO RITUALS, THAT WE SEEK OUR SPIRITUAL SATISFACTION, OUR EGO SATISFACTION, IN CONSUMPTION... WE NEED THINGS CONSUMED, BURNED UP, WORN OUT, REPLACED, AND DISCARDED AT AN EVER-INCREASING RATE."

-Victor Lebow, 1955

The tragic BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that occurred this April released approximately 60,000 barrels of oil per day from the first day of the spill until the day the cap was put on the well (day 1 to 85), amounting to 5.1 million barrels of oil in total.¹ This catastrophe has destroyed ecosystems, harmed communities, and depleted livelihoods.

Oil is used to fuel cars, in paint, detergents, dyes, food additives, medicines, and even make-up; our day-to-day lives are surrounded by petroleum products.³ The United States consumes 20 million barrels of oil per day, as estimated in 2008.² This means that the amount of

oil spilled in the Gulf of Mexico equates to **only 25%** of the excessive amount we use **every day**, or approximately 0.07% of our annual use. When you think about the magnitude of the spill in the Gulf and how many problems it has caused, it is staggering to think that this amount is less than one percent of what we use on in a single year. We remain increasingly dependent on a resource that is not only non-renewable, but also harms communities and creation when it is extracted, processed, and refined.

Think About It This Way:

TRANSPORTATION. Over 66% of oil consumption in the U.S. is traced back to transportation; and over half of that fuels our personal cars.⁴

IF EVERYONE REDUCED PERSONAL CAR TRANSPORTATION BY APPROXIMATELY 40% FOR A SINGLE DAY, IT WOULD OFFSET THE AMOUNT OF OIL THAT HAS SPILLED IN THE GULF.

AGRICULTURE. From the fuel-run farm equipment, synthetic fertilizers, to the on average 1500-mile trip the food makes to your plate, 15% of our oil consumption is from our food.⁵

IF EVERY PERSON ATE AT LEAST ONE LOCAL MEAL A WEEK THE CONSUMPTION OF OIL WOULD REDUCE BY 1.1 MILLION BARRELS PER WEEK.⁵ THIS MEANS THAT APPROXIMATELY 4-5 LOCAL MEALS FROM EVERYONE IN THE UNITED STATES WOULD OFFSET THE AMOUNT OF OIL SPILLED IN THE GULF.

WATER. Picture a plastic water bottle a quarter filled: that is how much oil it takes to produce that bottle.⁶ Over 17 million barrels of oil are used to produce plastic water bottles annually.⁷

IF 2/3 OF THE U.S. POPULATION BOUGHT ONLY ONE LESS BOTTLE OF WATER, WE COULD OFFSET THE AMOUNT OF OIL SPILLED BY BP IN THE GULF.

Why Do Christians Care?

As a nation we have become markedly dependent on oil to function on very basic levels: producing and transporting the food we eat; getting to and from our daily work; and taking care of our personal hygiene and health. Of course eating, going to work, and taking care of ourselves are not ethically wrong things to do; they are all very healthy, positive things. Where the ethical issue comes in is when these actions depend on practices that are harmful to the people and world around us.

Like so many of today's problems, freeing ourselves of our harmful dependence on oil goes back to the simple question: Who are our neighbors and what does it mean to love them as ourselves (Galatians 5:14)? None of us would intentionally pollute our neighbors' air and water; we wouldn't destroy the natural beauty of our neighbors' homes by drilling on their property, risking a spill of the thick, toxic liquid that fuels so many of our daily activities. Many of the reasons that we are dependent on oil are for seemingly "good" causes, as mentioned before: feeding, providing for, and taking care of ourselves and our family.

"TAKE CARE! BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL KINDS OF GREED; FOR ONE'S LIFE DOES NOT CONSIST IN THE ABUNDANCE OF POSSESSIONS."

-Jesus. Luke 12:15

In Ezekiel 34, he prophesies: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock." Should we only take care of ourselves? There are warnings in both the Old and New Testaments about sins of omission (Lev. 4:13-14; Ezek 34:2-4 10; Zeph 1:12; Obadiah 10-14; Hosea 4:1; Luke 10:25-37; James 4:17): neglecting to do what is right and take care of our brothers and sisters when we see them suffering, even when that suffering isn't caused by us. So how much more when we DO contribute to the harm!

Sometimes it feels that we are hopelessly caught in a system that forces us to make choices that harm others – the way that so much of our society is structured depends on unhealthy consumption habits, including oil. Isn't the way things are already too far gone? Is it even possible to sufficiently take care of ourselves AND make sure that we aren't inadvertently causing harm to others?

Wouldn't that take some pretty radical and difficult changes?

“BY GOD’S GRACE, WE HAVE
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Well, yes – it would. But there is good news. When Jesus came, he did something pretty radical for us: he died to set us free from the bondage of sin (Romans 6:10-11, 14)– intentional or unintentional; omission or perpetration.

Titus 2:11-14 encourages us with this:

“For the GRACE of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live SELF-CONTROLLED, UPRIGHT, AND GODLY lives in THIS PRESENT AGE, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who GAVE HIMSELF FOR US TO REDEEM US from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, EAGER TO DO WHAT IS GOOD.”

By God's grace, we have **HOPE** in Jesus to free us from our unhealthy dependence on worldly passions. So let's LIVE in that hope – in the abundant life that Jesus offers – and fight our addictions. As people of faith, we are called to consume consciously and responsibly in every aspect of our lives, from driving our cars, to choosing the food that we eat and the products we use, and supporting sustainable energy alternatives.

What can you do as an individual?

- **GIVE** money to support clean-up and restoration efforts in the Gulf.
- **PAY ATTENTION** to what and how much you are consuming. Where did it come from? How far has it traveled? What kind of conditions what is produced in? Try to buy your clothing second-hand.
- **GET ACTIVE**. Ride a bike, rollerblade, walk, or take public transportation to work twice a week.
- **PLAN AHEAD**. Combine the errands/trips that you have to take by car weekly.
- **BOTTLE YOUR OWN**. Use a re-usable water bottle rather than buying disposable water bottle, and carry it around with you. If you don't like the taste of tap water, try using a filter.
- **BUY AND EAT LOCAL**. Join a CSA farm or go to the farmers market to support local, sustainable agriculture, reduce your impact, and enjoy healthy, fresh food. You can find a local farm or farmers market near you at www.localharvest.org.

What can you do as a community?

- **CARPPOOL** to work, church, or other events. Share rides with friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Try using www.GoLoco.org to plan your carpools.
- **GROW TOGETHER**. Start or participate in a community garden for naturally grown food that doesn't have to travel far. Visit www.communitygarden.org/learn to find tips and a how-to guide to start a community garden.
- **FRIENDLY COMPETITION**. Organize a transportation challenge at your work or church where people pledge to walk, drive, or use public transportation a set number of times each week or month. Each time they do, their name goes into a raffle and a drawing is held at the end of the month for a prize.
- **RAISE YOUR VOICES** to call for more clean energy, efficiency, and conservation.

1. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-oil-spill-20100719,0,1562603.story>

2. <http://flagcounter.com/factbook/us>

3. http://www.eia.doe.gov/kids/energy.cfm?page=oil_home-basics

4. http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/analysis_publications/oil_market_basics/demand_text.htm

5. Steven L. Hopf in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver

6. <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/stories/spacescience/water-bottle-pollution/>

7. http://www.onlineeducation.net/bottled_water/



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