

We spend too much time worrying about things such as clothes... food... health... and money – but we tend to ignore things with eternal significance. ... Worry will cause a person to not relax and be at rest. ... For example... Frank Sinatra's daughter (Tina) recalls her father's unceasing drive to succeed and make money - even when his health was at risk. ... She said that he constantly worried about money and getting more of it. Here is what she shared:

*His health was in tatters and his life mired in financial wrangles, but my father refused to stop giving concerts. "I've just got to earn more money," he said. His performances, sad to say, were becoming more and more uneven. Uncertain of his memory, he became dependent on TelePrompters. When I saw him at Desert Inn in Las Vegas, he struggled through the show and felt so sick at the end that he needed oxygen from a tank that he kept on hand. At another show he forgot the lyrics to songs he had sung a thousand times. I couldn't bear to see Dad struggle.*

*I remembered all the times he repeated the old boxing maxim "You gotta get out before you hit the mat." He wanted to retire at the top of his game, and I always thought he would know when his time came, but pushing 80, he lost track of when to quit.*

*After seeing one too many of these fiascos, I told him, "Pop, you can stop now; you don't have to stay on the road." With a stricken expression he said, "No, I've got to earn more money. I have to make sure everyone is taken care of." Unfortunately... since his death... there have been constant family wrangles over his fortune.*

(LISTEN!)... covetousness will not only cheapen our riches... but it will also cheapen us! ... We will start to become worried and anxious... and this anxiety is unnatural and unspiritual. The person who pursues money thinks that riches will solve his problems... when in reality... riches will create more problems!

If you have ever watched Fiddler on the Roof... you may recall Teveah commenting about that: “*May the Good Lord smite me with it... and may I never recover!*” ... .. But (as today’s passage shows us... material wealth gives a dangerous... false sense of security... and that feeling always ends in tragedy. ... Our focus is not to be consumed with things. You will find that lots of things actually **increase** your worries.

Today... our passage deals with finances/materialism... and will also deal with worry. ... Luke’s Gospel of Christ turns from the disciples’ need to trust God in the midst of persecution... (which we looked at last week)... to the obstacle that money can be to total devotion to God. ... It is hard to be sure why Luke placed this topic next... but it may be that... (since persecution often involves social ostracism and loss of livelihood)... material security would naturally arise in light of their being rejected by Jewish society.

The scene that Luke introduces us to... begins with Jesus being asked to resolve a family dispute over an inheritance. Rabbi’s were expected to help settle legal matters. ... A rabbi would often settle such disputes about inheritance... because very specific regulations about inheritance matters appear in the Pentateuch (Deut. 21:15–17; Num. 27:1–11; 36:7–9). And since Rabbis were experts on the Torah.... Who better to go to... than an authoritative Rabbi...? ... So in one sense... the man honored Christ as a he would a valued Rabbi. ... And yet Jesus did not treat this as an honor – and we can understand why. Jesus refused to enter into the dispute.

### **Luke 12:13**

The way that this is written is that the man interrupted Jesus while He was teaching. This man was not interested in what Christ was teaching but had

worldly possessions on his mind. (As though he saw himself as the center of the universe) he blurted out his personal concern... interrupting (as though **his** matter was more important than whatever Jesus was talking about.) ... Now that was rude and very audacious. Pretentious people are like that... aren't they? ... But he shows himself to be even more pretentious... in his request. ... (You see)... the man wasn't asking for Jesus to give a judicial opinion. ... *"Don't arbitrate between us. Just tell my brother THIS decision: He must give me my proper share..."*

But Jesus didn't intervene as requested.... He came to earth for the much greater purpose of reconciling us to God and to each other - **not** to reapportion people's wealth. ... This man presumed to involve Christ in a work He was not called to do. Christ's ministry did not include settling inheritances. ... But perhaps a greater reason for why Jesus refused... was that He knew that no answer He gave would solve the *real* problem, which was covetousness in the hearts of the two brothers. ... As long as both men were greedy... *no* judicial settlement would be satisfactory. Their greatest need was to have their hearts changed.

Christ addressed the problem with these two brothers... and used the opportunity to teach **all** of His followers about important matters that we need to know. ... We must not have an improper focus on possessions. Possessions do not give life its meaning.

### **Luke 12:14**

Jesus gave the man a harsh rebuke... starting with the vocative "Man!" ... *"**Man**, who made me a judge over you...?"* In essence Jesus says: *"I did not come here to be a run-of-the-mill Rabbi that settles petty material*

*disputes among his congregation. ... I have a kingdom focus.*” ... Jesus’ emphasis was the importance of preparing for God’s kingdom... rather than seeking to obtain the temporal rights and possessions for people... under the laws of man.

### **Luke 12:15**

My ESV translates the word from the New Testament original language “πλεονεξια” (pleyonexia) as “covetousness.” ... An extended translation of this word is: “*a greedy desire (or thirst) to have more*”... “*covetousness*” is a fine translation... but “*a thirsting to have more*” speaks a little more clearly to me. ... The picture is as if a man in order to quench his thirst takes a drink of salt water... which happens to be the only water that is available. This makes him still more thirsty. So he drinks again and again... until his thirst kills him. So Jesus warns against *a greedy desire to have more* ... or covetousness (if you prefer.) ... I will simply use the word “greed.” ... *Pleonexia* is not only the ever-thirsting desire for money and things. It also includes the desire for power... and the insatiable lust of the flesh.

We tend to think of greed as excessive desire for wealth and material possessions. And just what is an “excessive desire”...? ... Well... everyone measures “excessiveness” on a sliding scale ... (and a completely subjective scale - at that!) ... Each of us measures greed differently (usually to our advantage) so that we never find ourselves guilty of it. “*Not me. My desire for wealth and material possessions is not excessive...*”

(But here's the thing...) Jesus... in our passage today... does not define greed as excess desire for wealth. ... (No!)... He saw greed as a matter of priorities. ... This is important... so let me repeat that. **Jesus defines greed as a matter of priorities**. ... Any desire for wealth or power that lacks the kingdom of God as its motivation - is greed. ... To seek money... power... and possessions as a means of ONLY satisfying **self** - is greed. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Jesus drove the point of His warning home by giving them a parable. As we now dive into His parable... let me ask that you would test your own heart and attitudes. ... How do you respond to the wealthy farmer's *dilemma*? ... Here was a man who had a problem with too much wealth! ... If we say: "*I certainly wish I had that problem!*" we may be revealing covetousness in our hearts. If suddenly you inherited a great deal of wealth... would it create a problem for you? ... Or would you simply praise God and ask Him what He wanted you to do with it?

There are perils to prosperity.

**Proverbs 30:7-9 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> *Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:*

<sup>8</sup> *Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,* <sup>9</sup> *lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.*

Wealth can choke the Word of God.

**Matthew 13:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> *As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*

Wealth can create snares and temptations and give you a false sense of security.

**1 Timothy 6:6-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>6</sup> But godliness with contentment is great gain, <sup>7</sup> for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

**1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV)**

*<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*

The farmer in the parable that we are about to read was not just rich. He was VERY rich. . He had just reaped a bumper harvest. He had never had such a harvest. But that raised a problem. What was he going to do with his surplus? ... That was the question God was asking too — with His eye on the needs of the poor. ... It did not take this man long to make up his mind. He would build bigger barns. He would store the grain until the commodity was in short supply. Then he would put it up for sale and multiply his gains still more.

**Luke 12:16-21**

How do you respond to the *death* of the boastful farmer? ...Are you prone to think: “*Too bad this fellow died just when he had everything going for him! How tragic that he could not finish his great plans.*”?

(But you know what?) ... The greatest tragedy is not what the man left behind - but what lay *before* him: eternity without God! ... The man lived without God and died without God... and his wealth was but an incident in his life.

Realize that building new barns was logical and prudent. The word for these storehouses (ἀποθήκας, *apothēkas*) is plural... showing the great success of his crop. (And) these new barns was a good idea. **That** wasn't the problem. The problem was – what was missing. There was no thought of sharing... and no thought of stewardship. There was no thought for the poor... the ill... and the naked who were all around him.

(You see) the language in verses 17–19 reveals an ingrained selfishness. In the Greek the personal pronoun “*my*” occurs four times and “*I*” eight times.... He was completely self-absorbed. That is why he reached the fateful conclusion, “*And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry'*” Having made plans to resolve his problems... the man concludes that he can now live in total leisure and self-indulgence. ... He felt so secure that he sensed no need for God in his life.

He seemed to think that he himself was in control of his life (soul and body both) ...that he was “the master of his fate and the captain of his soul.” “*God WHO...?*” He thought that he was in such control of his life... that he also controlled its ending. ... So God tells him that his soul will be required of him - not after “*many years*”... but “*this very night.*” God himself will demand it of him... and it is God's timing.

If you live as though you are the captain of your own soul... that this life is all there is... and you live your life just for self - you are this fool.

Bible commentator (John Phillips) writes:

The fellow made three mistakes. First, he *mistook his bankbook for his Bible*. He measured success in terms of what he read in his bankbook and on his balance sheet rather than by what he read in his Bible.

Then, too, he *mistook his body for his soul*. He had a little talk with himself. "Soul," he said, "thou hast much goods ... eat, drink, and be merry." What a way for a man to talk with his soul! What use does a soul have for barns and banquets? Those things have to do with the material side of life; they have nothing to do with the soul. The soul is engineered for the spiritual side of life. The soul needs to be saved and sanctified. The soul needs to be fed from the Bible. But this man had no thought for those things. He does not take account of the fact that the "ample goods" in which he rejoices cannot satisfy the *soul*. His soul has nothing!

Finally, this secular humanist *mistook time for eternity*. He was evidently still a young man. He assured himself that he had "many years," but he was going to be dead before daybreak. Even as he was gloating over his fortune and his future full of fun and frolics, looking again and again at his bankbook and his balance sheet, the voice of God rang forth. God had been looking at the balance sheet that *He* was keeping of this man's life. He wrote across the whole thing one word—*Bankrupt!*

### **Luke 12:21**

What does it mean to be "rich toward God"? It means to acknowledge gratefully that everything we have comes from God, and then make an effort to use what He gives us for the good of others and the glory of God. Wealth can be *enjoyed* and *employed* at the same time if our purpose is to honor God. ... .. The parable does not condemn planning or wealth per se.



Rather... Jesus' complaint is against the person who takes wealth and directs it totally toward the self. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

The rich farmer worried because he had too much... but the disciples might be tempted to worry because they did not have enough! ... They had given up all they had in order to follow Christ. ... They were living by faith... and faith is always tested. ... Jesus continues to discuss trust with his disciples - trust for daily provision. ... He has warned the people with him of the dangers of putting their trust in possessions. ... Now he turns to his disciples and instructs them on where their trust **should** be placed.

### **Luke 12:22**

If you have ever travelled through the Central Valley of California in late January through February... then you know what dense fog is. (Growing up in it... I hated it. It was dangerous to drive in. My scariest experiences in life have been getting caught in dense fog on a highway – and not being able to see beyond the hood of the car.) ... I have seen so much damage it has caused. ... But there is a fascinating thing about such fog.

It has been reported that a dense fog (extensive enough to cover seven city blocks - a hundred-feet deep)... is composed of less than **one glass of water**. It just happens to be divided into **millions** of droplets. (You see)... in the right form... a few gallons of water can cripple a hundred miles of traffic.

But here is why I mention it. In a similar way to fog... a very small substance of worry expands like a great fog that forms in our minds... and does great damage in our lives.

It gives us a false view of life... of itself... and of God. ... Worry convinces us that life is made up of what we eat and what we wear. ... We get so concerned about *the means* that we totally forget about *the end*... which is to glorify God. ... Worry blinds us to the world around us and the way God cares for His creation. ... It fails to recognize that God is working in our life. Worry wastes our energy so that we don't have the energy we need for constructive and creative problem solving. "*Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow,*" said Corrie Ten Boom; "*it empties today of its strength.*" ... .. Instead of adding to our lives... our worries take away from our lives. ... People can worry themselves into the hospital or into the grave!

Thirty percent of the things we worry about are things from the past. The past is past. It is not that a man can or ought to dissociate himself from his past; but he ought to use his past as a spur and a guide for better action in the future, and not as something about which he broods until he has worried himself into a paralysis of action.

Twelve percent of our worries are about our health (when nothing is actually wrong with us)... and ten percent of things we worry about are too petty and insignificant to really affect our future. That means that only eight percent of the things we worry about legitimately deserve our concern and thought.

When a person worries... their peace of mind and ability to focus on the right things is chopped up. ... Instead of keeping their eyes on the Lord... they focus on things that cannot satisfy.

### **Luke 12:23-24**

These verses remind me of a little poem that I read several years ago. Perhaps you can recall hearing it once before – as well.

*Said the Robin to the Sparrow,  
“I should really like to know  
Why these anxious human beings  
Rush about and worry so.”  
Said the Sparrow to the Robin,  
“Friend, I think that it must be  
They have no Heavenly Father,  
Such as cares for you and me.”*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

When we worry we live as “practical athiests.

### **Luke 12:25-26**

Worrying is useless. ... .. Since worry does not help... why worry?

When Abraham Lincoln was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated... he spent some time in New York with Horace Greeley... and told him an anecdote that was meant to be an answer to the question everybody was asking him: *Are we really going to have a civil war?*

In his circuit-riding days Lincoln and his companions (riding to the next session of court) had crossed many swollen rivers on one particular journey... but the formidable Fox River was still ahead of them. ... They said one to another: *“If these streams give us so much trouble, how shall we get over the Fox River?”*

When darkness fell... they stopped for the night at a log tavern... where they fell in with the Methodist presiding elder of the district who rode through the country in all kinds of weather and knew all about the Fox

River. They gathered about him and asked him about the present state of the river. “Oh, yes,” replied the circuit rider, “*I know all about the Fox River. I have crossed it often and understand it well. But I have one fixed rule with regard to the Fox River—I never cross it till I reach it.*” ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Worry projects the worst: the Fox becomes the mighty Mississippi at flood stage. The worrier is perpetually going unfed and unclothed. Worry loads the present with the weight of the future. It is when tomorrow’s burden is added to the burden of today, that the weight is more than a man can bear.

### **Luke 12:27-30**

Flowers don’t have brains... yet they survive. Rooted in soil nourished by God... watered by rains sent by God... blooming in sunshine new every morning... the most tender of plants flourish in the season ordained for them. ... Jesus compared these short-lived examples of beauty and contentment to the astounding wealth and privilege of Solomon.

The Lord challenged His fledgling disciples to mature in their faith. He called them to stake their lives on their belief in God’s sovereignty. Worrying about the future to the point of distraction expresses doubt in the Lord’s ability to take care of those who rely upon Him.

Unbelievers... Jesus argues... habitually worry. In contrast (Jesus says) believers are to be different. Since you are different from other people because of your relationship to the Father... do not worry... for He will care for you.

*OK... OK... I get it Pastor! We are not to worry. That is very clear. But what has not been made clear is the HOW...? Just telling me not to worry*

*does not help me. I am a worry-wart! I can't seem to turn it off. Telling me to just stop – is frustrating! I want to know **HOW** I CAN STOP worrying...”*

Let me tell you that you are now ready for Luke 12:31. It is the cure for worry. However – many people do not like the cure. It requires that we do something that folks just don't want to do.

### **Luke 12:31**

Let us get our priorities right!

*Things!* This whole discussion began with *things*... with a man greatly put out because his brother would not share *things*. Our priority must be higher than that. We must seek first the kingdom of God. ... Instead of being concerned about worldly cares... we need to be concerned about spiritual concerns. That will cure our fleshly worries. If we involve ourselves MORE with spiritual concerns ... the Lord will see to it that we have the things we need.

### **Luke 12:32**

Our Father never stops thinking of us... planning for us... giving to us. Our Father is a living God and a giving God. He knows what is best for us and is determined to bestow it on us.

It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Don't treat this as a small prospect. It isn't! The kingdom is the greatest kingdom ever... and God will give His people position... prestige... power... and possessions unmatched by any kingdom/government in this world. No wonder we should seek first the kingdom of God. He is going to give it to us!

Right now we are a “little flock.” We are helpless animals that need close supervision... protection... and constant care. God is giving that to us NOW... and so much more in our future!

How do we win over worry...? By setting our hearts and minds on these spiritual matters. *God knows our needs...* so we can trust Him to meet them. We are sheep in His little flock... children in His family... and servants in His kingdom; and He will see to it that our needs are fully met. It is His *pleasure* to give us His kingdom... so will He not give us everything that we need?

### **Luke 12:33-34**

I believe that Jesus was asking His first-century listeners to do this. He knew they would soon be scattered around the Roman Empire. AND He calls some people to do this today. We **all** must be willing. But certainly we need to divest ourselves.

Making use of everything you own... in a way that benefits others. Hold on to your most precious belongings with a loose grip. Everything we have must be committed to Christ. ... If you have never done it before... pray through all you have... giving everything to God... especially your most treasured possessions. ... Put everything at his feet... so he can use it as He desires.

Where is your heart? ...In your barns and storehouses? ...In a Swiss bank account? ...Outdoors... in the wild...? In your home? In your kitchen? In your yard? In your wardrobe? In your car?

Or is it in Heaven? In your church? Among the poor and homeless?

If it is there... you have no worries!

Worry can be a wake-up call to help us recognize what is lacking in our spiritual lives. When you struggle with worry... you need to ask yourself: "What is it I'm unsure of? Are my priorities straight? Am I trusting God to provide? Am I living in the present? Am I placing too much value or security in temporal things instead of in the Lord?"

Because of the ill effects of worry, Jesus tells us not to worry about those needs that God promises to supply.