



Bible Study DAY #2

Ready to Share My Stuff

By Jesse Sheedy

Key Concept:

We are called to be faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us – caring for the good things God has entrusted to our care and sharing these gifts with those in need.

Introduction

Stuff can be a touchy issue, with two extremes to be avoided. On the one hand, we realize pretty easily that having too much stuff or relying on our things instead of God can be a supremely bad thing. Our wealth of goods can distract us from time in prayer and silence, lead us to sinfully hoard an unfair amount of resources to ourselves, or even convince us for awhile that we've got all our bases covered, and have no need for God. Stuff can be dangerous, a spiritual temptation that we recognize.

On the other hand, most of us aren't called to be hermits who live in poverty or give all that we have to the poor, thus joining them. There can be a temptation to reject earthly things altogether and see them as obstacles to God. This extreme ideal stands in contrast to a loving God who made all things good. God has provided us with many good gifts for sustaining our lives and, frankly, for enjoying. We need especially to avoid any suggestion that the material world and the stuff it contains are evil in any way – all things were made by God, including all the stuff we have! And of course, extreme poverty and a lack of stuff is a physical evil that plagues much of the world's population. Some of your campers may be experiencing this kind of poverty, some for the first time in the midst of our economic downturn. God calls us to respond to those who are destitute and lack the things of this world.

So how can we navigate theologically between seeing the danger of too many things without rejecting all the good gifts God gives us? We need to cultivate a few virtues and perspectives. First of all, we need to recognize that all of the stuff that we have is a gift from God. If we practice and teach gratitude for all that we own, we'll understand that God has given us all good things, and our stuff isn't ours by right but by God's gift and grace. Secondly, we need to be sure that nothing we own, no matter how wonderful in its own right, is more important to us than our relationship with God – including the face of Christ recognized in one another. And finally, we need to recognize our responsibility to respond – which brings us back to our theme of Stewardship. We are called to care for the allotment of stuff that we've been given, and share it with those in need.

Bible Text

Parable of Rich man with his grain warehouses - Luke 12:16-22

Key Verse: Luke 12:21



Biblical Interpretation

The rich man is called a fool not because he was wealthy, but because of the focus of his vision. Count how many times the word 'I' occurs in the passage. In a few short lines, the rich man shows that he has no ability to see the needs of anyone beyond himself, no ability to see others in need or even God. While Jesus doesn't say it explicitly, everyone hearing the story in his time would immediately notice that there's no mention of paying the tithe, or the 10% of one's goods that are owed to the temple under the Jewish law of Jesus' time. The man didn't feel like he needed to give to others or to God Himself!

What's even worse, though, and the real reason for his foolishness, was the extreme limits of his vision. The parable ends with the man being told by God that his life will be demanded of him – a harsh judgment! But even if that hadn't been the end of it, the rich fool thought that all he needed in life was his abundance of goods. He couldn't see the need for God, for relationships with other people, or for the ability to make a difference in the lives of others. He couldn't see anything but his position of comfort and stability. Had he lived to enjoy it, this kind of lifestyle would quickly become dreadfully boring. He really thought that his material wealth was the best and most secure thing he could possess in life. He saw only his own needs, and was unable to look past them to see the needs of others, or to understand his own need for God.

The irony is that in ignoring his need for God, he gave himself a specific worth – the worth of his possessions. It seemed large to him, but he himself had a much greater worth – an infinite and heavenly worth in the eyes of God, if only he had the eyes to look beyond his stuff. The rich man vastly underestimated how much he was worth to God, to himself, and to his community.

This wasn't only because he was wealthy, of course. It's possible to be very poor and have no vision outside of your own needs, and equally possible to be very wealthy and see the whole picture of God's love and our response. What matters isn't how much we have, but our ability to see it in perspective, use it well and wisely, and never let what we have come between us and God. Verse 15, right before this story, gives away the moral in advance by saying that 'one's life does not consist of abundance of possessions'. It's also true that our life doesn't consist of a **lack** of possessions – our life consists of a value grounded in our relationship to God, to others, and with ourselves.

We could all probably name times when we've fallen into the same trap as the rich fool – striving to gain for ourselves some security. We've probably even let some of our possessions take our focus away from the things that are really important – family, friends, God. Our culture teaches us through advertising very early in life that we need things to be complete – we want the latest clothing, music, games, cars, and gizmos. We build our own bigger barns to hold them, accumulating things at a rapid rate. This scripture challenges us with a stark reminder where all of those things will end up, and just how limited is their worth to our lives.

Camp Shalom

A time and place apart

Additional Bible resources

Rich Young Man,	Matthew 19: 16-22, Luke 18: 18-23, Mark 10: 17-31
The communal life of the apostles:	Acts 2:42- 47
Preaching of John the Baptist:	Luke 3:10-15
Parable of Rich Man and Lazarus:	Luke 16: 19-31
Generosity in giving to meet the needs of others:	2 Corinthians 8: 1-15
Living in abundance and in need equally:	Philippians 4: 10-20
God and Money, Dependence on God:	Matthew 6: 24-34
Job Praises God even when he loses everything:	Job 1, esp. 21-22
Ecclesiastes on the impermanence of all created things:	Eccl 5: 7-19

David and Solomon, using their enormous wealth to build a temple:

Solomon's wealth: 1 King 10: 14-29

Temple building: 1 King 5-6

David stocks up for the temple: 1 Chronicles 29:1-9

Joseph administers the goods of Egypt to save the people from starvation:

Gen 41, esp. 47-57

Abraham shares his hospitality with strangers, entertaining God in the process:

Gen 18:1-15

Widow gives the last of her food to Elijah, God's prophet:

1 Kings 17: 7-16
