

# Better Sharing Than Storing

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher  
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio  
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(Luke 12:13-21 Common English Bible)

<sup>13</sup> Someone from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

<sup>14</sup> Jesus said to him, "Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?"

<sup>15</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy."

<sup>16</sup> Then he told them a parable: "A certain rich man's land produced a bountiful crop. <sup>17</sup> He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! <sup>18</sup> Then he thought, Here's what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That's where I'll store all my grain and goods. <sup>19</sup> I'll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?' <sup>21</sup> This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God."

Though I have a few months before I retire from this pastorate, I've taken the first tiny steps toward cleaning out my office. After nearly 32 years, that space has accumulated a lot of stuff. (If you've never seen it and are curious, feel free to stick your head in there after the service.)

By far the biggest task will be to remove my personal library. Bookshelves fill two walls of the office. As I've told people before, don't be impressed: I've read all of some of the books, parts of a few of the books, and none of some of the books. Our congregation's recent seminary graduate Kathy Hartzell has accepted some books from my library, and another seminarian in our presbytery will soon take a look to see if she would like any of them.

There are other things that I have acquired or have been given to me across the years: figurines, crosses, photographs, houseplants, a radio, table lamps, a few autographed baseballs, other mementos. Some I will take home with me, other things I will find another home for.

Looking at all the stuff I've accumulated over the years made me think about the psychological disorder that is hoarding. Most of us wouldn't deserve that diagnosis, but I imagine that some, maybe many of us have an accumulation of stuff in closets and attics and basements and spare rooms and garages and breezeways and sheds. Maybe some of you have items permanently housed in self-storage units. That's a growing industry in this country, I understand. We have more stuff in our apartments and condos and homes than we can handle, so we add space by renting it elsewhere.

That's not too different from the situation we heard about today in the reading from the Gospel of Luke. A "rich man," Jesus called him. Not a bad guy. Not a dishonest man. Quite simply, his land did well. "...The riches of this man were honestly

acquired. It was the legitimate produce of his fields.”<sup>1</sup> So just because Jesus labeled him as a “rich man,” let’s not think that Jesus was anti-rich. Jesus wasn’t anti-rich; he was anti-greed.<sup>2</sup>

How did greed enter the discussion? Because of the rich man’s shortcoming. “It would seem that the rich man had found security for life in the abundance of his possessions (12:15). Yet as the ending of the parable teaches (12:20), his security procedures had foolishly failed to take God into consideration.”<sup>3</sup>

You see, the rich man’s shortcoming was that his prayers were to himself. He didn’t seek God’s guidance for his life. No, he relied on his own resourcefulness. As we heard, the rich man said to himself, “What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest!”

But actually, he did. The rich man *did* have someplace to “store” his harvest. But he didn’t realize it because he thought only of himself, his situation, his desires, his future.

In going through one of my bookshelves the other day I came across a book a friend loaned me. It’s an antique. 1871. Leather binding. Gold-leaf pages. Tom is going give it to his daughters someday, but he thought I might enjoy a look at it. It had a section about this parable of the rich man. Here’s how that author from more than 150 years ago thought Jesus would have responded to the rich man’s complaint that he had no place to store his abundant harvest: “No room! ‘Thou hast barns — the bosoms of the needy; the houses of the widows; the mouths of orphans.’”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the rich man could have “stored” his abundance not as an addition to his own private collection. He could have “stored” his abundance as an investment in

- easing the needs of families who must go to bed hungry many nights each month;
- investing in easing the pain of those suffering from disease;
- investing in easing the vulnerability of orphaned children who deserve a stable home to grow up in;
- investing in easing the anxiety of seniors who have no family to lend support when needed;
- investing in easing the unsettledness of refugees who long to return home when peace finally smothers the flames of war;
- investing in easing the emotional pain that prompts people to become addicted to drugs;
- investing in helping those whose desire for self-sufficiency relies on getting the education they need.

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<sup>1</sup> William Bacon Stevens, The Parables of the New Testament Practically Unfolded. Philadelphia: C.J.M. Stoddart & Co., 1871, p. 59

<sup>2</sup> Homiletic.com July/August 2022 at <https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93041370> accessed 7/21/2022

<sup>3</sup> Karris, p. 156

<sup>4</sup> William Bacon Stevens, The Parables of the New Testament Practically Unfolded. Philadelphia: C.J.M. Stoddart & Co., 1871, p. 60

The rich man could have “stored” his abundance by investing in the lives of God’s children near and far who lack what they need or suffer from undeserved hardships. He could have invested his abundance in what Jesus later describes as “treasures in heaven.”

In the parable the voice of God declares “Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things that you have prepared for *yourself* [emphasis added]?” The rich man’s focus on his life here and now caused him great anxiety about being separated from all he had built up for himself. But what if he not merely “stored his abundance” for his own needs but also invested in meeting the needs of men and women and children in his midst? He would have what Jesus called “an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the rich man would discover that his treasures had preceded him to heaven.

The Bible is consistent in the theme that:

- we are given to — so that we might give to others;
- we are blessed — so that we might be a blessing;
- we are loved — so that we might love;
- we are reconciled — so that we might reconcile;
- we are forgiven — so that we might forgive.

The problem with greed and accumulation is that rich fools — then and now — forget that blessings are intended to be used to bless others.<sup>6</sup>

In case the thought occurred to you, I don’t see this story as a condemnation of the wisdom and practicality of estate planning. Disciplined planning and sacrificing now eases possible stress that could land on your dependents later. But once you’ve made plans that will provide for yourself, how can you “store” the abundance that exceeds what you need?

In the story Jesus warns, “Guard yourself against all kinds of greed.”<sup>7</sup> “‘Greed’ is the lust to have more, more than is needed, the boundless grasping after more.”<sup>8</sup> While we may greedily try to amass things like approval and popularity, influence and power, comfort and ease, by far the kind of greed most prevalent in our culture is the lust for money and the things we can obtain with it.

So to be practical, here are some possible antidotes to accumulation:

- Go through your closets and drawers once a year. If you didn’t wear a piece of clothing that year, give it away.
- Consider shared ownership of possessions with your neighbors. There are tons of things we own which we don’t need exclusive use of. Do two homes need two lawn mowers? Sharing possession combats accumulation and builds relationships....

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 12:34 New Revised Standard Version

<sup>6</sup> “Rich Fools,” August 5, 2007 at <https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93000344>, accessed 7/25/2022

<sup>7</sup> See Luke 12:15

<sup>8</sup> Anchor, p. 970

- Journal a list of all the things you need to live and another list of things you want for your life. Commit to purchasing only from the need list for the rest of the year.
- Make a list of your monthly budget categories in order of amounts spent on each. Look at how your charitable giving compares with your accumulation line items – clothing, eating out, entertainment, grooming, hobbies, etc. Does the order need to change?
- For the next month, every time you appreciate something that somebody else has, stop to pray for your own contentment with how you have been blessed.
- Don't rent a storage unit. If you have one, consolidate to only what you can fit in your home.
- Christmas shopping starts again in [a few months if you haven't begun already!] Declare a tight price limit on family presents, go with a no-gift Christmas [like our church's annual "'Alternative Christmas' Charity Bazaar," or spend as much sponsoring a local shelter as you do on gifts. Our well-fed, sedentary, affluent lifestyle can lead us away from being "rich toward God" (v. 21). But the message of Jesus is that we are blessed to be a blessing. Leave the bigger barns to the rich fools of the parables... and commit to being better at sharing than at storing.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Rich Fools," August 5, 2007 at <https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93000344>, accessed 7/25/2022