

Intro: All summer we've been looking at various parables Jesus used to teach us important life lessons. So far, we've looked at parables on prayer, parables on the Kingdom of God, parables that help us recognize Jesus as Messiah, and parables on what it means to be a disciple or close follower of Jesus.

Now today, and over the next two weeks it's gonna get really personal. Today and over the next two weeks, I want us to look at three parables Jesus used to teach his followers about how to manage their money and their material possessions.

These parables are so important for us, because they teach us what God thinks about money and possessions and what it looks like for you to be a sensible steward and manage your money the way God wants you to manage it.

The Bible talks a lot about how to sensibly manage our material possessions and our money. Over the years I think I've learned why. Nothing indicates where our heart allegiances lie more clearly than how we steward the resources God allows us to have. Jesus said it best... "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The question we must wrestle with is this: Are we resting our heart-trust in God...or are we subtly resting our heart-trust on our possessions and our wealth?

[Transition] - Today I want to look at a parable with you called the Parable of The Rich Fool in Luke 12:16ff. From this parable and the comments Jesus makes after the parable, I want to show you four signs of a sensible steward.

Before we jump into the parable, let me set the stage: In the opening verses of Luke 12 Jesus is teaching a huge crowd on some pretty heavy topics—things like hypocrisy, fearing God and honoring his authority above the authority of men, disowning and dishonoring the Holy Spirit verses trusting and relying on the Holy Spirit.

Then, shattering the mood and Jesus' stream of thought, one guy—lucky for him he remains nameless—near the front of the crowd yells out, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Whenever I'm asked to teach very young kids, I expect random, completely out of context questions like this. I remember one time, I was teaching some AWANA kids, and I was skillfully, and artfully making my main point, and some kid in the back yells, "I got a new dog." I'm like huh? Totally threw me off.

Thankfully, that doesn't happen when you're teaching adults. I mean I'm sure you guys are all thinking random stuff at times while I'm up here preaching...but at least you don't yell it out. Haha.

As Jesus is teaching away, this guy had obviously not been listening, but only waiting for Jesus to take a breath. He'd been standing there privately obsessing about his material life all the while missing the profound teaching about his spiritual life.

[Transition] - Jesus uses the man's "off the wall" question as a teachable moment to offer a stern warning to *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed."* Then he offers this truth principle: *"A person's life does not consist in the abundance of his/her possessions"* (Vv.14-15).

Then he tells a parable and unpacks it more deeply with three illustrations. And from Jesus teaching we can begin to discover four signs of a sensible steward. The first sign of a sensible steward is that a sensible steward will be responsible **(Luke 12:16-21). Read verses.**

1. A sensible steward will be responsible.

The first illustration here is a negative one. It is sort of a “here’s how not to be a sensible steward” lesson. This man was a very irresponsible steward. The thing I want you to notice immediately from verse 19 is that the man in this illustration was **irresponsible to himself**. He had a short sightedness problem. He lived his life totally convinced that life consisted purely of material things. He had lots of resources, and he thought that the amount of his possessions would, in some way, insulate him from, or insure him against, any trouble in his life. He was resting in the abundance of his possessions.

[**Illustration**] - One man wrote, “The trend of our culture is to undergird our lives with material securities from the cradle to the grave, providing all kinds of insurances--health, old-age, education, unemployment and so on. In addition, we insure ourselves against fire, earthquake, hurricane, and accident. These safeguards *are not wrong*, but they can very easily become a serious hindrance to our complete trust in God. Undoubtedly, if our debts are paid and our refrigerator full, if we have money in the bank, we have a tendency to feel secure in ourselves and to sense our need of God less. Herein lies the danger.”¹

[**Transition**] - So, first this man was irresponsible to himself. The second thing I want you to notice; **he was irresponsible to others**.

He didn’t realize that God’s blessings to him meant that he should help others. He had never heard the saying, “blessed to be a blessing.” Somehow, he got the idea that God’s blessings meant that he should hoard everything for himself. Just listen to his selfishness in verses 17-19. (Read it emphasizing all the personal pronouns). Wow, now here is a guy who is nearsighted in his blessing view!

¹ C. Stacy Woods in *Some Ways of God. Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no. 5.*

He doesn't realize that when God gives you more than you really need to adequately take care of your own family, those blessings are meant to be passed on. We are to be a channel, not a clog. We are to be a river and not a reservoir. He didn't think it those terms at all.

The way God would have wanted this story to go might be something like this. Verse 17 would read, *"He began to pray. What shall I do since you have blessed me so richly and I have no place to store YOUR crops. How can you use my blessing to be a blessing to OTHERS. And he said this is what I will do, I will tear down GOD'S barns and I will build larger ones and I will store all of HIS grain and HIS goods and I will say to OTHERS how can I be a blessing to you...."* Big difference in perspective, yes?

[Illustration] - In September 2013, according to the Medical Daily journal, a man in Brazil developed what doctors called "pathological generosity." In an article published in the Journal of Neuroscience, doctors described the strange case of a 49-year-old man identified as "Mr. A" who had a remarkable personality change after suffering a stroke. His physicians said that the stroke affected the subcortical regions of the man's brain he suddenly had an "excessive and persistent" urge to help others. He wouldn't stop giving money and gifts to people he barely knew. According to his wife, he would buy candy, soda, and food for kids he met on the street. He also quit his job as a manager of a large corporation. Dr. Larry Goldstein, a neurologist at Duke University said, "Although the observation of personality change is not that unusual, this particular one is apparently novel."

When asked by researchers if he wanted to return to his job, Mr. A. claimed that he "saw death from close up" and he wanted to "be in high spirits" for the rest of his life. Mr. A. was put on medication for depression,

which he said cured his depression, but his "pathological generosity" remained unchanged.²

The Apostle Paul calls us to generosity, not pathological generosity, but sincere generosity. In 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 when he's urging folks in Corinth to give he writes, "*Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, (In other words, don't give all you have so you become needy, instead give out of your plenty) ...* **14** *At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. ...* **15** *as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."* That last line is a quote describing how the Jewish people in the desert after the Exodus were to gather manna each morning...only enough for one day. This led Dr. Haddon Robinson to the insight that when Jesus prayed, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" it meant that if you have two loaves, one was for giving away and sharing with others.

Now, one key in being a sensible steward is living within your means. Living within your means, means that you set your lifestyle and manage your debt load so that you don't have to use all your money for you. Instead, you live and manage your life in such a way that you are positioned to take care of your needs...with the remaining free to use as God calls you and leads you. A sensible steward manages his or her life in such a way that enables freedom, flexibility, and generosity.

[**Transition**] - Unfortunately the man in our story was not only **irresponsible to himself**, thinking that material blessings could satisfy and be his security. He was **irresponsible to others**, thinking that the material blessings he had, were just for him to enjoy. Thirdly, **He was also irresponsible to God**.

² (John Erickson, "Brazilian Man Can't Stop Giving Gifts, Money After Stroke Induces 'Pathological Generosity,'" Medical Daily (9-8-13) <http://www.medicaldaily.com/brazilian-man-cant-stop-giving-gifts-money-after-stroke-induces-pathological-generosity-255990>, accessed 1-22-2014))

He didn't realize the uncertainty of life and the certainty of judgement or the certainty of accountability. I guess he just thought life was just going to continue as it had. And God said, "you're a fool" in verse 20. Jesus wraps up this story by saying, "this is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." In other words, God is saying if you are being rich toward yourself and not toward God and others—that's foolish!

[Illustration] - Its sort of like the wealthy man who had a dream about him going to heaven and an angel gave him a tour. The angel showed him his gardener's mansion and it was magnificent. The angel showed him the missionary in his church's mansion, and it was gorgeous. But, then the angel shows him his heavenly home. It was an eight-by-eight shack. Why so small he asks? "Well," the angel said, "We did the best we could with what you gave us."

To be "rich toward God" means to pour your life and your resources into things that are going to last long beyond your life. Things with eternal value! Things that God is involved with! Please realize, whatever you invest on earth in accordance with God's agenda and values, the Bible says, you are actually investing in heaven, where everything you invest is 100% safe and secure.

You see, it's about responsibility toward God. God says a sensible steward will be responsible. A sensible steward understands that when it comes to blessings they are to be like a river, not a reservoir.

[Transition] - Now Jesus goes on and illustrates this opening parable. The illustration gives us a second sign of a sensible steward. A sensible steward is relaxed. Read Luke 12: 22-34

2. A sensible steward is relaxed (12:22-34).

This illustration teaches us that a sensible steward is relaxed and worry free because they are resting and trusting in God as provider. They are

keeping money in perspective, using it as God commands and it leads to a peaceful heart.

Being relaxed about money and having financial peace is the blessing of a sensible steward. People in life who have plenty of money are prone to worry about what they're going to do with what they have or how they are going to protect it.

The difference between a person who worries and a person who doesn't worry at all comes down to who or what is truly Lord of your life. If you put God first and declare him owner and Lord of everything, then you realize that it's all God's and he is faithful to take care of it. A sensible steward is relaxed because they understand it's all God's anyway.

[**Transition**] – Okay, so far, we've seen that: A sensible steward will be **responsible**— being rich toward God and others, not simply rich toward self. A sensible steward will be **relaxed**. Why? Because God is our faithful provider and we're trusting him and obeying him in the matter of money. Thirdly, a sensible steward will be **ready**.

3. A sensible steward will be ready (12:35-40).

In verses 35-40 Jesus shifts the emphasis from worry about the present to being watchful about the future. Essentially this illustration informs us that a sensible steward will understand eternal things and be ready not only for the coming of Christ, but they will champion things of eternal value. They will manage their resources today with wise understanding about their accountability and responsibility to God at the end of their life. Listen to the "readiness" language. Read verses 35-40.

A sensible steward wisely and aggressively manages the situations Jesus presents for *today* with His *future return* immanently in view. A sensible steward seizes the day. A sensible steward makes the most of every moment of this life because he has the values of his master clearly in view.

[Quote] - Like one man said, "For I shall pass through this world but once and any good I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now and not defer it. For I shall not pass this way again." And a quote that is perhaps more familiar, "Only one life, it'll soon be past; Only what's done for Christ will last." If you're not being a sensible steward, don't wait. Life is short. Start now.

[Illustration] D. L. Moody tells story of walking down the street and guy hands him \$5 and said you have been such a blessing to me. Moody walked one block and came upon someone in need and passed on the five dollars. Walked another couple of blocks and someone else came up to him and did the same thing. This time he didn't pass it on, and no one ever did that again. John Maxwell said, "When you store, you get no more." The blessing stops the moment you see yourself as a reservoir rather than a river.

[Transition] - A sensible steward will be **ready**—ready and serving the master's agenda. That leads us to the final sign of a sensible steward. A Sensible steward will be rewarded. **Read verses 41-48.**

4. A sensible steward will be rewarded (12:41-48).

Here is the icing on the cake. Do you see what Jesus is saying about the person who puts God #1 in their life, who lets God have control of the agenda of their lives, who understands that God is the owner of all things and manages his blessings with that in view? Do you see what Jesus is saying about that servant? That servant is a sensible and wise steward or manager. And that sensible steward will be rewarded with everything God has in store for him or her.

In the Old Testament, in II Chronicles 16:9 it tells us that "the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."

The Lord is searching for the person who has settled the Lordship issues in their lives and have become sensible stewards with all God has given them. And you know what he's going to do when He finds that person? He's going to *bless that person even more*. The sensible steward will be rewarded and given more responsibility and so on and so on.

Conclusion:

I'm pretty sure no one in this room wants to squander the resources God has given to you. I believe you all want to be **very sensible stewards**. So, here are my encouragements to you in response to this parable of the Rich Fool and the illustrations Jesus uses to unpack it:

1. Weigh your responsibilities in light of your blessings (13-21).

Give thought to your ways. Be intentional. The sensible steward will be responsible—to God, to others, and to him or herself.

Here are my questions for you:

- How has God blessed you?
- Are you managing it as God has called you to?
- Are you demonstrating that God is first in your life by giving first and regularly out of what he's entrusted to you? Or are you giving him leftovers whenever you have them?

2. Wait on God to meet your needs because you have put him first (22-34).

The sensible steward will be relaxed.

- Do you believe God has provided for you up to this point?
- Do you trust him for tomorrow? Or do you fear you won't have enough or that somehow God won't take care of you?

3. Watch for the Lord's return because your values are based on eternity (35-40).

The sensible steward will be ready...and serving.

1. Do you live each moment with the end in view? It has been said that what we do in this life will echo in eternity.

2. Are you storing up treasures in heaven or only in your earthly account?

4. Work in accordance with the Lord's agenda and in obedience to his will. Be faithful to His assignment to love God and love others. Because when he returns the sensible steward will be rewarded (41-48).