

1. Children: (Show the offering plate, and various direct mail charity appeals). I believe in being generous. So I give money away to organizations that are worthwhile. Remember the fish offering for OGHS? The adults have an offering too. When I give money to other organizations, I write a check and send it in the mail. But in church, we do things differently. We put it in the plate and bring it forward during a special time in the service. Why? Because giving is part of our worship. We put the plate on the table as an offering to God. It is dedicated to God.
2. I lived in the parsonage in Genoa for 16 years. It was a good enough house, older, a block away from the church, with a nice yard and a garage that I stuffed full. One thing it didn't have was a barn. My father-in-law looked at my situation and said *Larry, what you need is a barn*. Looking back, I think he wanted to clear out some of the stuff in his barns—and give it to me. But I had no room.
3. Then we moved to Scipio and now we have two barns. As it turned out, a fair amount of the stuff in my father-in-law's barn wound up in my barn, added to my own father's stuff, which I have dutifully dragged from place to place whenever I have moved. It's my "man cave." Most of the stuff is pretty old, but lots of times whenever something breaks I can just hunt around in the barn and find a replacement.
4. So to me, the rich man in today's reading actually sounds quite prudent. His land is producing too much. So the answer is to build bigger barns. That is a good problem to have.
5. And he has enough set aside so that he can retire, take his leisure, enjoy life. That's good. He's got enough stored up to last for many years. Eat, drink and be merry—in the words of Ecclesiastes. Isn't that the goal of retirement? You paid your dues, now it's time to enjoy life.
6. But like most parables, there is a kicker at the end. He dies before he is able to enjoy the fruit of his labor. As the hymn says, he was *rich in things, but poor in soul*. Someone else will enjoy the fruit of his labor. *Vanity, vanity, all is vanity*.
7. The rich man forgot about God. His life was not as secure as he thought. He stored up treasure for himself, but was poor toward God. He had forgotten that we are only stewards of our stuff. Naked we come into the world. Naked we leave it. Jesus said *be on your guard against greed*. Life is not about getting more and more stuff.
8. So what is the answer? A lot of people are downsizing. Maybe we should buy one those tiny houses, say 400 square feet. But is that what Jesus is getting at?
9. For some I'm sure it is a good solution. But I don't think Jesus is saying wealth is bad, poverty is good. It is not wrong to eat, drink and be merry and enjoy the good things of life. It's not wrong to build a bigger barn.
10. But Jesus says *be on your guard against greed*. Life is not about how much stuff we have. *Be rich toward God*.

11. Our world is vastly different from the world of Jesus. In 1st century Palestine, there was the 1% and there was the 99%. The 99% were not middle class. They were dirt poor, exploited by the wealthy and everyone knew it. So things were pretty black and white. It's a bit tricky to apply all of Jesus' teachings against wealth to our modern world.
12. But as we read this parable from our modern point of view, we can draw some lessons from it.
13. Most of us, by comparison, are doing quite well. We may not be the 1%, but many of us are retired, we travel, we do most anything we want. There's nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with having nice stuff and enjoying the blessings God has given us.
14. But we are fools if we believe the message of our culture and think that getting stuff is what life is all about. We are fools if we get so wrapped up in buying and getting that we forget about God.
15. When I was a teenager, life seemed meaningless. What's the point of it all? You slave away at a job for 40 or 50 years, and only then you get to retire and do what you want? And then you die. You work so you can live. You live so you can work. What kind of a life is that? Is that all there is?
16. Then I started working and I discovered that work is good. I enjoyed most of the jobs I had—and I had a lot of different jobs when I was in my 20s.
17. I enjoyed work because I was accomplishing something—whether it was butchering crab in Alaska, building houses in Binghamton, driving a Coke truck in

New Orleans, planting trees in Oregon or cooking in Wisconsin. It felt good to be useful and get paid for it. It's good to be productive.

18. What is the good life? Even in retirement we ought to find ways to make ourselves useful. I had a woman in the church in Genoa who was 90, couldn't get out much, but liked calling people on the phone. So whenever we needed things for our dinners she would get on the phone and call everyone.
19. What is the good life? The rich man in the parable thought he had the answer: build a big barn, fill it full, then sit back and relax. This sounds like the goal of many retired people. I put in my time, now it's time to go boating, travel, play golf, buy an RV, have a good time.
20. There's nothing wrong with any of those things, but is that all there is? What is the good life?
21. Our view of retirement has been changing. Retirement is now being called the last third of life. We may be looking at 30 years, plus or minus of retirement. This is a big change from my grandparent's generation when people just didn't live that long. Do you know how they set the age of retirement at 65? When Social Security was founded in 1935, most people only lived to 63. Most people died before they collected Social Security. That was my father too. He died at 60. That's just how the system was designed. Most people had worn out bodies from a lifetime of physical labor, so all they could do is sit on the porch. That's one vision of retirement.

22. For my mother, it was a different story. At the age of retirement, she still had 30 years ahead of her and her health was still reasonably good for many of those years. She had a place in Florida; she traveled the world. She was active. That's another vision of retirement.

23. Jesus is pointing us to yet another vision of retirement. Not just eat, drink and be merry, but develop meaning, develop purpose beyond a me centered life. Or as Jesus says, don't just store up treasure for yourself, be rich toward God as well. As Jesus says, *one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*. Life is more than our stuff—contrary to the bumper sticker on the back of the RV loaded down with stuff that says *the one who winds up with the most toys wins*.

24. The rich man was prudent and wise. Yet God called him a fool. Why? In all his planning, there was no thought of God, no provision to help others, no planning for life after death. It was all me, myself and I. His plans were suddenly cut short when he died.

25. For those who are still working, or for those who are in still in school and a long ways away from retirement, it is still useful to think about constitutes the good life.

26. Lately, behaviorists have been studying what makes people happy. They have done studies on the effect of material wealth on people's happiness. It's interesting because they have found that after a certain point, the amount of money you make does not determine how happy you are. As long as your needs are being met, the wealthy are no happier than the rest of us.

27. I had very little when I was in grad school 30 years ago. I lived in the dorm and drove an old pickup truck. I don't think I am that much happier now than I was then. The size of my barn doesn't determine how satisfied I am with my life. What is the good life?

28. Another study by Dunn and Norton has found that spending money to help others leads to greater satisfaction than spending it on ourselves. So take someone like Warren Buffett, the second richest person in the world, who decided to give away almost all of his fortune. 85% of it will go to the Gates foundation, over time. The Bill and Melinda Gates foundation helps people all over the world with health problems like malaria, TB, HIV—and helps libraries and schools, some here in the U.S. He could have kept it all for himself and his kids: "eat, drink and be merry." But he decided to give it away. He made the largest philanthropic gift in world history, \$37 billion.

29. Buffett and Gates are so committed to the cause that they are talking to their billionaire friends about doing the same thing: give it away.

30. Bill Carlson, former executive of the American Baptist Churches NYS, used to say *give until it feels good—which is one or two steps beyond the place where it hurts*.

31. Now you might be thinking that's fine for someone like Warren Buffett but not for me. Very few can give billions to charity. But all of us can give something. We feel good when we give. It doesn't have to \$37 billion. It could be

picking up a restaurant check or giving a gift to a friend. It increases our happiness.

32. Giving is a good antidote to the materialism around us. Living a generous life is an essential part of what it means to live a good life.
33. So instead of *eat, drink and be merry*, instead of a thirty year party, retirement can be a time to develop meaning and purpose beyond the satisfaction of our own desires and wants.
34. Christians go through life with our hands open, giving of our resources. We place our offerings on the altar and present them to the Lord as a part of our worship. We support God's work in the world. Instead of grabbing and trying to hold onto every morsel for ourselves, we share, we give, as we follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who owned everything but gave it all up for us.
35. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever. Amen, so be it.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, judge of us all,
you have placed in our hands the wealth we call our own.
Through your Spirit, give us wisdom,
that our possessions may not be a curse,
but a means of blessing in our lives.

Hear our prayers, God of grace,
and help us to fulfill them,
working according to your purpose,
in peace, justice, and mercy,
in all we do;
through Jesus Christ the Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever,
and who taught us to pray:

Westminstergram

[Melanie, please insert Luke 12:13-21]

Our reading for this week tells the story of a prudent landowner who was so successful that he did not have big enough barns to store his harvest. He decided to tear down the old barns and build new ones. After all that, he said to himself, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” In other words, he was able to retire and live a life of leisure. But, in a surprise ending, he died that very night, and this wealthy man was “rich in things, but poor in soul.” This outwardly successful, prudent businessman was really a rich fool.

Our world is vastly different, which complicates our reading of the parable. In their world, there were a very few wealthy and universally despised individuals who made their living by exploiting the 99% who were dirt poor. There was no middle class.

Nevertheless, many will identify with the rich fool who does not have room for all his stuff. We think of building more storage, or hiring a “decluttering” consultant who will help us deal with it all.

Yet the deeper issue concerns the direction of our life. What constitutes “the good life”? What is our goal? How do we envision retirement, that final third of our lives? Join us, as consider these important issues.