

LIFE AND STUFF: DO WE KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

TEXT: LUKE 12:13-21 NIV

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

14 Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” 15 Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

16 And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

21 “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

INTRODUCTION

How many of us have a garage that can no longer be parked anymore because it is filled up with so much other “stuff?”

The late comedian George Carlin famously did an entire monologue on this “stuff” — proclaiming that the “meaning of life is trying to find a place to put your stuff” and that “A house is just a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff.”

Funny stuff. But not funny are the TV “reality” shows that feature what happens to all that “stuff.” First, there is “Storage Wars,” where confiscated storage lockers (the original owners are either dead or unable to pay storage fees any longer) go on the auction block. After the locks have been cut, there is a bidding war among the “stuff scavengers” hoping to make a profit off of left behind stuff.

Second, there is the loser version of that scene called “Storage Nightmares,” where the proud new owner of an abandoned storage unit discovers the “stuff” that was treasured and kept by someone else is nothing but weird and worthless junk.

Third are the truly tragic programs detailing the lives of “Hoarders.” The “hoarders” who are highlighted live lives swallowed up by their “stuff.” Unable to throw anything away, their whole identity, and I mean every aspect of their life, is defined by their collected piles of stuff. Unless they are surrounded, indeed drowning, in their “stuff,” their lives have no meaning.

Think you are not “stuff prone” or “stuff inclined?” Do you have an online automatic back-up system? Does your computer send everything you file to the all-knowing and all-saving “Cloud” so that you don’t ever lose any of your on-line “stuff?” Even if you don’t have boxes of odd papers, old clothes, broken tools, or raggedy toys squirreled away in some physical storage space, chances are you’ve got old files, months of e-mails, forgettable photos, and just general information, all stacked on your electronic “stuff”—and all safely crated and cared for by some electronic gatekeeper and security system. No matter how high tech your “treasures” might be, they are still “stuff.”

In today’s parable, Jesus makes it all too clear how “life” and “stuff” are not one and the same. –
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I. STUFF IS ABOUT POSSESSIONS; LIFE IS WHAT WE POSSESS (VV.13-15).

A. When our love is for possessions we are focused on what is owed to us.

B. This pursuit affects our relationships, our attitude, and our actions.

C. Greed is like a thirst that cannot be quenched.

D. We are driven by desire. There is no answer for, “How much is enough?”

II. STUFF IS ABOUT THE AMOUNT WE ACCUMULATE; LIFE IS ABOUT WHAT WE DISTRIBUTE (VV. 16-19).

“Covetousness, or the desire to have more than one has (not necessarily through envy of somebody else) not only leads to strife but also expresses a fundamentally wrong philosophy of life, according to which possessions are all that really matter.”

I.H. Marshall, New Bible Commentary, Revised (1970): Luke, p. 908

A. When our focus is on “stuff” we lose sight of the source. “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.”

B. Abundance can lead to distributing our blessings or a focus on gathering more. The expressed thought was, “What shall I do with my...”

C. When our focus is on “stuff” we lose sight of the need of others and the good we could do. “I will build bigger barns for my stuff and I will take it easy and be happy...”

III. STUFF IS WHAT WE CAN LOSE; LIFE IS ABOUT WHAT WE CAN KEEP (VV. 20-21).

Martin Luther wrote, “I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.”

A. The stuff he thought he could control and hold onto slipped through his hands.

B. The life he could have had slipped through his hands as well.

CONCLUSION

Illustration: Making the Situation Worse

In his sermon, *Avarice: The Disease and Its Cure*, Charles Hoffacker writes,

When I was a kid, I was often ravaged by poison ivy. The key to poison ivy, once you have it, is not to scratch. Restraining yourself is hard, for your skin itches and you want relief. But scratching only makes poison ivy worse.

Avarice works the same way. We get infected, and we want to scratch, although we know we shouldn't do so. Possessing more and more promises relief, but only makes the situation worse. We keep scratching, but it's no solution.

Jesus issues a warning, a warning inspired by a squabble over inheritance, but one that all of us need to hear. He says: "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Clarence Jordan's translation of this verse brings out its original earthiness. Here's what Jesus says according to Jordan: "You all be careful and stay on your guard against all kinds of greediness. For a person's life is not for the piling up of possessions."

In these few words, Jesus rejects much of what keeps our society humming. He warns us against greed, avarice, the desire to possess more than we need, more than we can use, more than we want.

Important questions to ask ourselves:

- We all have goals, but what is the ultimate purpose of reaching those goals?
- We all have possessions, but what is their meaning in our lives?
- We all would enjoy having more, but why?