

# What Life is Not About

What's up church fam. If you have a bible, turn with me to [Luke 12](#). My name is Marcus Williamson and I'm one of the pastors here at City Church. Hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving this past week, complete with turkey, stuffing, collard greens, and mac and cheese. Now for those in the room where Thanksgiving is either weird, awkward, or just tough to be around family, know that we are also glad you are back with us today and at the very least I pray that you were able to get a little rest.

Today, we are kicking off a three-week series leading up to Christmas called *Give Like God*. We do this series every year here at City Church, but I know with a title like this it can be a little suspect, especially if this is your first time here. The title Give Like God can mean a lot, but the main idea we are trying to hit on, is that as followers of Jesus we need to view our money and possessions a certain kind of way; because in America, we have a problem, dare I say, a cultural problem, when it comes to money and possessions. And usually, around this time of year, it sort of rears it's ugly head.

We are just so much quicker to spend large amounts of money around this time of year, despite maybe not having said large amounts of money. [Case in point, as of August of this year, American credit card debt levels have hit a new record of \\$1 trillion dollars.<sup>1</sup> Which means, the average American in 2023 carries roughly \\$21,000 in personal debt,<sup>2</sup> with \\$16,000 being in credit card debt alone. In a survey by Ladder and OnePoll, Americans spend an average of \\$18,000 per year on non-essential items. In other words, things we \*don't\* need.](#) JD Rockefeller, famous business mogul and philanthropist, had an all-time quote when asked how much money it takes to make someone happy. He famously said: "[Just a little bit more.](#)" And honestly, I think a lot of us here in America think this way not just with money but also with possessions. Just a little bit *more* won't hurt.

I'd imagine this is why storage units are a \$39 *billion* dollar industry. In part because people have more stuff than they know what to do with so they store it away, only to forget about it later. Now don't get me wrong some people do use storage units for good reasons but I'd argue the majority of storage units are more about overflow than it is about true necessity. Do you know there are over 50,000 storage facilities nationwide. Just to put that in perspective, there are more storage facilities in the U.S. than there are

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<sup>1</sup>Credit Card Debt [Stats](#)

<sup>2</sup>Stats on personal debt [here](#)

Starbucks, McDonald's, Dunkin Donuts, Pizza Huts and Wendy's...*combined*. That's a *lot* of space for things we don't have any real intentions of using on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup>

So long story short: greed and materialism isn't going away anytime soon. Even a lack of income isn't going to starve it out of our lives, because it wasn't actually never *about* how much money we had in the first place. It was always about the *desire for more*. It was always about the gravitation towards more things and new things as a balm for our soul.

So in this series, we want to tackle all of *this* head-on. Why is it that we so *gravitate* towards money, greed, and materialism? And more helpfully, *is there a better way* in regards to how we approach our money and possessions? So I want us to allow the Scriptures to speak into those topics directly. If we claim to follow Jesus, how should we think about and how should we use our money differently than the culture around us?

Today, we're going to kick things off with a passage from **Luke 12**, about a guy who had a very similar tendency as us in regards to *his* money and possessions. So take a look with me there, starting in **v. 13**:

*[13] Someone in the crowd said to him [him being Jesus], "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

So contextually, here's what was likely going on. In most Jewish families during this time, a father's inheritance was actually divided *unevenly* among his sons. Usually, the oldest son got a *double* share of the inheritance, and all the other sons got a *single* share. So most likely this guy who comes up to Jesus is one of the *younger* sons, and he wants Jesus to give him some more money. He's like, *"I just want things to be fair among us. You know what I'm say'n Jesus."*

Now, apparently this wasn't an unusual request for someone to make back in the day. First century rabbis, like Jesus, *would* often get involved in settling family financial disputes like this one. So this guy likely sees *Jesus* as such, willing to do what he asks of him. So let's see how Jesus responds in **v. 14**:

*[14] Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"*

In other words, Jesus says, *"nah fam, I'm not about to do that"* And then Jesus gives some much needed words of wisdom. Isn't that just like Jesus. We ask him for

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<sup>3</sup>Storage Facility [Stats](#)

something and then he gives us something else. Some would say, something better. Amen. Check out the *something better* that Jesus offers him in v. 15:

[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.**”

I don't think that's what my dude had in mind when he approached Jesus. That doesn't necessarily sound better than “*Lets get you some more money*” does it? Instead he says to watch out and be on guard. “*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.*” *Be on guard against the never-satisfied desire for more.* Famous theologian, and notorious one, Biggie Smalls, said it this way. “*Mo money, mo [what church fam?] problems.*”

So this young man might not have liked it, but in that moment, he needed to hear this wisdom; he needed to hear this word from God. And, just like this man, I think Jesus might be speaking to some of us today with similar language. He's like, I *need* you to be on guard fam. I *need* you to watch out for this *desire for more*. Don't let it sneak up on you. Last week, we talked in-depth about the danger of **coveting**: that is, the perpetual tendency to want the things other people have. And while it's similar to this week, the focus is different. This week we're just talking about the never-ending desire to have more for ourselves. Not even necessarily because **other** people have more, but because we just **want** more than we **have**.

Now here's what I find *interesting* about Jesus' response. He doesn't make it clear whether this is a warning intended for the *older* brother with the *double* share of the inheritance, or whether it's a warning for the *younger* brother who asks Jesus to *force* his brother to *share* the inheritance. Y'all see that? He doesn't pinpoint *who* in this scenario needs to *hear* his advice. So which is it—is it the *older* brother or is the *younger* brother? Well, as a good friend of mine used to say, “*por que no los dos?*” Why not both? I think the implication is that they *both* need to be on guard.

And this brings up an absolutely *crucial* point to be made: **greed is not a rich person problem or a poor person problem—it's an everybody problem.** *Bet money, when it comes to greed, we tend to look at the Wall Street executive, the CEO, the lawyers, the social elites, maybe even our immediate bosses. We say: “Those people are greedy. I'm not greedy. Have you seen my bank account? I literally can't afford to be greedy.” The greedy people, in our minds, are always those with at least a little more money than what we have. But that's exactly how we fall into the trap.* It's the same trap this man who approaches Jesus falls into: he assumes that because his brother has more money, *his*

*brother* is the greedy one. But Jesus seems to imply that *all of us*—rich, poor, and everything in between—*all of us* need to be “*on our guard*” against greed and materialism.

And then Jesus gives us the reason *for* that. The reason we should *all* be on guard is simply because “*...our life also does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*” Somebody turn to your neighbor and say, “*my life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*” **Jesus says *this right here is precisely what life is not about.*** And here me say, this might be one of the most counter-cultural things the bible has to say to 21st century Americans: **that life is *not about how much stuff we have.***

Now you probably hear that and go “*well yeah—of course life is not about how much stuff you have. C’mon, who would believe something shallow like that?*” To which I’d kindly retort, sure, we might all *agree* with Jesus, intellectually; but when we get a little more *specific and pointed* about it, I think it might start to hit a little closer to home. **Let me try and show you with an experiment:** I want you to try and imagine for a second making the same amount of money you make *right now*, but for the *rest of your life*. Whatever you make *right now*, is just *what you always make*. Next, I want you to imagine *never* living in a bigger or nicer house or apartment than *the one you currently live in*, for the rest of your life. Ok, let me hit closer to home. Everyone take a good look at your phone. This is your phone for the rest of your life. *Just diminished battery life and increasing uncoolness from here on out.* Now how would you say those scenarios make you feel? Just gut-level reaction. Yah, I thought so. Not great, right?

Now here me say, it’s not wrong or sinful to get and also take a raise. It’s not wrong or sinful to move into a bigger or nicer house. It’s not wrong or sinful to get the latest phone upgrade. But I want you to pay very close attention to any *discomfort* you felt when you imagined *not being able* to do any of those things, even for just a second. Did you *feel* that? Did you feel the disappointment in your soul? **That right there, I would argue, is a good indicator of the degree to which we all believe that “*life consists in the abundance of our possessions.*”** If we didn’t believe, at least a little, that life consisted in the abundance of our possessions, those things wouldn’t make us uncomfortable or disappointed at all. So that right there is what Jesus is talking about here. So we might not have a problem with what he says intellectually, but practically speaking, our hearts might have more to say about it than we think.

Jesus goes on, **v. 16**:

[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.'

So it's important to know that in Jesus' day and age, land and crops equaled money. If you had land and that land produced crops, that meant you were in good shape financially. So when it says that this guy's land "*yielded an abundant harvest,*" that means "*he had a good year financially.*" In other words, his stock portfolio took off, he got a very nice Christmas bonus, he got an amazing unexpected tax refund. So he made out way better this particular year than he thought he would. And the question he asks is: "*What should I do with all this extra? I've got way more than I need, so what should I do with it?*" That's his question so let's see what he's trying to cook up, v. 18:

[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.'"

So his current digs couldn't hold everything, so he starts dreaming and planning to build something bigger and better to hold all of his excess. And on the surface, this isn't entirely alarming. But, let's keep reading and see if there is any more motivation behind building this bigger barn. v. 19:

[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.*"

Oh. Y'all catch that. He think he set now. He said I'm bout to retire. I'm gonna take life easy. I'm gonna eat some of this filet mignon, sip on this margarita, and live my best life. You can't tell me noth'n. In the ESV, he says "*And I'll say to my soul.*" It had already hit him on a soul level. My dude was trying to name it and claim it. He hasn't even started building the barn yet before he's trying to take it easy for many years. **Alright, let me talk to yah. If this is not the American Dream I don't know what is. Take this parable out of the pages of the Bible and it might be 1:1. He got some extra cash on hand. So much so that he's already wanting to build something bigger to carry it all. Then he was like, once my money is right I think I'll retire cause I'll be good. I'll be set for many years. It would seem at his core he just wants to be financially independent. And I get that. And I would imagine we all understand and get this. Because this guy in the story looks a lot like a lot of us in this room. Ask anyone in this room today, do you want to be financially independent, and I'm pretty certain there would be a resounding "yes" in the building. But**

now the Lord wants to chime in before my dude starts truly going down this path any further—v. 20:

*[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.**"*

So God pulls up and says, bruh. This type of daydreaming is not a good look. Don't get too far swept up. Don't get too far ahead and end up looking foolish. He's like, *if you die tonight, who will all of your stuff belong to?* Definitely not *you*, right? This man wanted the equivalent of the American Dream, and man was he dreaming and planning towards it, so much so that God stepped in before he could accomplish any of it to warn him, *you might not actually get what you desired, because your life will be demanded of you tonight and then where will everything go.*

Now death is something no one likes talking about. It's something no one wants to think about. We live life in such a way where we are distracted by dreaming of *our* future. Planning for *our* future. And even if events happen where we start to think about it, maybe there's death in the family, or we start to notice our age a little more, even if those things happen, we tend to quiet those voices by drowning them out with The Great British Bake-off Holiday Special on Netflix. Oh, just me? Here's the reality, no one likes talking or thinking about death but what God says to this man still remains true; death will come for us all someday. And sadly for us we won't know when. Only God knows.

And if we look back at the parable, you'll find that this man was very attached to his stuff. You know because he says "*my*" to a lot of things. It was my crops this, my barns that, my grain, again in the ESV, he even says my soul. From his perspective, everything he had was *his* and for him alone. He probably worked hard to be in this spot. So he planned and dreamed of a future where he alone was satisfied. Where he was taken care of. And God rightly pulls up on the fella and says, it would be foolish of you to only store things up for yourself and not be "*rich toward me [God]*". He had no awareness and preparation for eternity. And God wanted to help him see reality. To get perspective. Because he was living life as if he wouldn't die, as if his stuff wouldn't be his one day.

And *then*, with that point made, Jesus just ends his story. No resolution, no change of heart, no pretty bow at the end of the story—just a haunting story and a question: "*So which one is it gonna be?*" I don't think many people would've liked Jesus' style of

story-telling if he were around today. His stories usually don't leave you all warm and fuzzy afterwards. So **Jesus just leaves us with this story as a way of illustrating that "life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions."** As a way of showing us that money and possessions are precisely *not* what life is all about.

But I would argue that here in America this is a foreign language to us. That deep down we actually *do* believe that money and possessions are precisely what life is about. And here's why I say that, it's because I believe on a soul level, much like this man in the parable, **we are discontent with what we have, because we are discontent with who we are.** I'm gonna say it again, **I think we are discontent with what we have, because we are discontent with who we are.** And there is part of us that believes that buying and having more stuff will fix, even if just for a moment, what we currently don't like about ourselves. The more stuff we surround ourselves with, the more we can be distracted by it. The more we can live in a world where we feel in control of our future. Where the world is our oyster.

This is why retail therapy is a thing. We have linked our mood and to a degree our soul to buying stuff. Hence why, when we buy things on top of things for ourselves, it makes us feel better. Buying becomes like a drug for many of us. For some of us, we don't just buy clothes that fit us and keep us warm—we buy certain *brands* of clothing that make other people *see us* a certain way. This is why we don't just all drive beige-colored basic vehicles—we drive Lexuses and Mercedes and Teslas. Well, maybe we don't—but *some people* do, right? **Marketing companies have realized we don't just buy things out of necessity—we buy to obtain a status.**

And in all of this, I do think there is something we are tapping into. We are correctly noticing something is off about us. We are discerning that we need something. But sadly, the world around us tells us that money and stuff can buy us happiness. That those things can lift our spirits. That they can fix what's broken inside. And here me say, those things are not evil in and of themselves, but like the man in the parable I think God is trying to say, don't follow the world in this way. They are saying *money and possessions* can make you new. That they can make you feel good about yourself. But God is like, it won't in the long run. Maybe temporarily. For a split second, you'll feel like a new person. And then, in a blink of an eye, you won't anymore. And then rinse and repeat. More stuff won't cure you. You'll always want more stuff. That's how this road ends. With us dying and not being able to take any of it with us. So I think *that's* part of what Jesus wants us to take away from this story.

And how he wants us to *respond* practically to this story is this: that we should “*take care, and be on [our] guard against all kinds of greed.*” That, in the words from the parable, we *wouldn’t “store up things, or treasures, for ourselves,”* but instead “*be rich towards God.*” That’s the remedy. That’s the antidote. So let’s talk about this before we’re done. What does it look like, practically, to *be on our guard* against greed, because life isn’t about how much stuff I have? I’ve got two *methods* for us, that any one of us can put into practice immediately. Two steps of repentance you can take this week. **Method #1** is...

## **Making and keeping a budget.**

When Jesus says to “*be on our guard*” against greed, the language he uses is *vivid*: it means literally to “*keep an eye on.*” The implication is that **if you are not regularly keeping an eye on where your money goes, a lot of it is probably going towards stuff you don’t need.** And one of the most practical ways to keep an eye on your money is via a current, detailed *budget*. So practically speaking, if you don’t *have* a budget, I would suggest making one. **Having some sort of system for telling your money where to go and where not to go is the first line of defense against greed in your life.**

Now if you don’t know where to start with making a budget, we’re gonna offer two things to help. First, we will post a ready-made budget spreadsheet on our website, on the same page where we post *this teaching* later today. You can download it and start using it to put together a budget. *Secondly*, if you need further help, we would love to connect you with people in our church who would love nothing more than to be able to help you with this. So both of those things are available to you if they’re helpful. But whatever you need to do, if you don’t currently have a budget, make one.

Now If you wanna be even *more vigilant* in your resistance to greed, once you *make* your budget, go over it with somebody in your LifeGroup. Have them go through it and point out any places where you might be *overallocating* or *underallocating* money for certain things. In fact, I would suggest *regularly* inviting other followers of Jesus into how you think about and spend your money. If someone in your LifeGroup *asks you* for input on how *they* are spending money, take them up on it. Give them your honest thoughts, instead of just saying “*well it’s your money—you can do whatever you want with it.*” If they’re asking you, it’s because they *want your honest thoughts.*



Maybe to you, that sounds super uncomfortable to do. But I've found that there are usually only three reasons people don't like to talk to others about their spending: either 1) because they pridefully think they don't *need* any help, 2) because they are *embarrassed* for others to see how they spend their money, or 3) they feel weird about it. And while I understand those hesitations, for followers of Jesus, neither of those are actually good reasons. The gospel tells us that we need wisdom from God<sup>4</sup> and others<sup>5</sup> in *all* aspects of life (especially our money), *and* that whatever shame or embarrassment we have has been dealt with at the cross. So that means we can seek help without fear of being laughed at or looked down on. So I invite you, to invite others into how you think about your money. But the point is, one way or another, formulate a plan to use budgeting and community to keep an eye on greed and materialism in your life. Alright, **Method #2:**

### **Giving away 10% of your income as a starting point.**

I would encourage anyone who is a follower of Jesus to give away 10% of their income, *minimum*. This is how you are able to start to be rich towards God. The biblical word for that is *tithing* ("*tithe*" literally means "*tenth*"). Here's what is *abundantly clear* to me from the Scriptures: **you will not find very many patterns of God's people giving away less than a tenth of their income.** *In the Old Testament, God's people really gave more like 30-40% of their income away. And in the New Testament, people are sometimes generous to the point of selling their homes and possessions so that they can give more generously.* So when you take an honest survey of the bible, 10% is honestly on the *low end* of the spectrum when it comes to what God's people give away.

So I feel totally comfortable saying that if you're a follower of Jesus, and you're not giving away at least 10% of your income, something probably needs to change. *Now hear me say, if you're here and you or your family is in a tough season from a financial standpoint; if somebody lost a job, or your budget just took a huge hit, or something like that—please feel free to pause this conversation while you get on your feet financially—I want you to know that's okay. And if that's you—if you're in financial need and you're a part of our church family—please make sure your LifeGroup knows about it, that people in our church know about it—because in any way we can, we want to help with that.* There may be seasons where 10% just isn't feasible, and that's okay.

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<sup>4</sup> James 1:5

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 12:15

And for others of us, maybe it's *not* necessarily a tough season financially—it's just that we've spent a long time *not* being financially generous, and it's going to take some work to break those habits and work towards that type of lifestyle. And that's okay too, so long as you're working *towards* it. **Someone in our church family that helps people with budgeting often says “even if you can't give away 10% of your income right now, it's worth figuring out what a path to what 10% would look like.” Maybe it looks like giving away 1% for a couple months, then working your way up to 2%, and so on. So if you can't get to 10% right away, that's okay—but what does it look like to move in that direction?**

Now, practically speaking, if you're a City Church *member*, we ask that you *start* with giving that 10% towards our church family here in Knoxville. Hopefully that is not the *only* way you're being generous, but if you're a member we just ask that you *start* there. We see the local church as being on the frontlines of meeting needs within our church family and out in our city. So we ask that if you're gonna start somewhere with generosity, you start there. We make it super easy to set that up online via *Pushpay*, so that if you want, you can set it up to happen on its own and not even have to think about it.

If you're *not* a City Church member, or if you are and you want to give over and above 10%, pick somewhere. A local church, a local non-profit, a person or family you know is in need, someone in your LifeGroup that needs persistent, ongoing help—maybe some combination of *all* of those. Just find something to give to that doesn't directly benefit you personally. Somewhere that doesn't directly benefit your *own* kingdom, but rather *God's* kingdom. One way or another, give away at least 10% of your income to something outside of yourself or your family.

**And remember: with all of this, the goal isn't to just check off a box and say “okay, God's happy with me now that I give more money away.” The goal is to use our habits and our actions in allowing the Holy Spirit to loosen our grip on money and possessions, and set our attention and affections on the kingdom of Jesus. This is what life *is* about. To be rich toward God. By refusing to “store up treasures for ourselves,” we are teaching our hearts to instead “store up treasure in heaven.”<sup>6</sup> To care most about the things of God, the things of the kingdom, rather than care most about our own kingdom.**

Now as we close, I just want to take you back to the beginning of the parable Jesus tells. It says that right after the guy's land in the story “produced plentifully,” he asked *himself* a question. Here was the question:

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:19-21

[17] “...*what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.*”

Now I know it's easy to knock on this guy in the passage, but that right there is an *excellent* question to ask. He unexpectedly comes into way more than he needs, and his question is *what should I do* with it? The problem for a lot of us is that we don't even stop to ask that question. *We have a good year and we think “cool, more for me,” and put it right in our bank account. Or we think “cool—new flat screen TV that I really want but definitely don't need—don't mind if I do.” “Cool—exotic vacation, here we come.”*

But here's where he went astray: he asked the question to the wrong *person*. He asked *himself* what he should do with his extra, rather than asking *God* what he should do with his extra. We're going to get into this much more *next* week, but who is it that *gives* us all of our stuff, and especially our extra? *God*. So whose *counsel* should we seek about what to *do* with our extra? *God*. If the *extra you have* comes from God himself, don't you think *he* should get to make the call on where that extra *goes*? If he *gave* it to you, don't you think he should get to tell you what he wants you to *do* with it?

And when you do *that*, you'll find that he often has much bigger and better purposes for your extra than building bigger barns. *That's* where we learn what life is all about, and that's where we start learning how to imitate the generosity of God himself. And that's precisely what God wants for us to do. He doesn't want us to get swept away doing our own thing, he wants us to get swept away in what he is doing for the whole world. Which is reconciling all things back to himself. He wants us to remember the Gospel. How Jesus left heaven for our sake. How Jesus went to the cross to die for our sake, so that it can impact us in such a way where we stop saying “*my*”, like the man in the story: “*this is my house, this is my money, this is my clothes, this is my [fill in the blank]*” and instead say, *this is the Lord's*, how can I use what he's given me to give towards others. See, life is not about money and possessions and this desire for more, it's really about finding contentment in God, with what he's given, and figuring out how to give any extra to others so they can maybe one day see God.

Let's pray together.