

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 12:13-21

- Q. If you were to gain a windfall of money (perhaps by winning the lottery, or receiving a large inheritance, or getting a huge raise at work...however you might get a big increase of money)...what would you do with it? (possible ice breaker)**
- Q. Describe a time when you have been interrupted. How did you respond? (possible ice breaker)**

This passage opens with what appears to be an interruption. Jesus is in full-on preaching mode and someone calls out from the crowd, *“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”* I would love to have seen how Jesus responded to this (beyond what He said...we have that recorded in this passage...but I’d love to have observed His non-verbal response. Was He annoyed? Was He opportunistic? Both? Neither?)

As a parent, I experience interruption frequently...usually after Sunday service while I’m in the middle of a conversation with someone. One of my kids will come up and just start talking—usually making some sort of request. (I don’t know about other parents out there, but my kids seem to think I’m a wish-granting genie—even though the bulk of their requests get denied they persistently keep asking.) But it is incredibly frustrating to be interrupted like that.

It’s hard to know exactly what the social norms of the day were. Was this guy crying out from the crowd an abnormal interruption, or was this par for the course in that culture? Hard to say.

Jesus’ response is interesting. *“Man, who appointed Me a judge or an arbiter between you?”* This can be taken a couple of different ways. The first, and how it is more frequently taken, Jesus seems to be saying, “Dude, don’t lay that responsibility on me. Figure it out yourself.” With the rest of the passage, then, being a warning about greed. Another way this question could be taken, (and, granted, it is a minority view) is that Jesus was asking more of a leading question trying to get the man to focus on the “Who” part of the question. In other words, Jesus may have wanted the man to take the focus off of himself and his brother and focus on the One who did/would in fact make Jesus a judge. Regardless of which way you take the question, the point/lesson/warning of the passage stays the same.

Verse 15 is the overriding imperative of this passage: *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* (NIV)

- Q. Jesus seems to indicate that there are different kinds of greed (or different ways in which greed plays itself out). What are some various forms of greed you’ve observed? What are some forms of greed you personally wrestle with?**

The challenge is that this man from the crowd, much like us, likely didn’t recognize his greed for what it was. In fact, he was probably thinking he was bringing an issue of justice, fairness,

equity to Jesus' attention. In his mind, this was an issue of righteousness. And as we'll see, he had it all wrong, all twisted and warped. What this man thought was a justice/righteousness issue really sprang from the ugliness of greed. This man, we can safely assume, was a younger brother. In the cultural norm of the time—and for a long time prior...we even see it back in the Old Testament—the oldest son would receive the lion's share of the family estate. This younger brother, perhaps having heard some of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom, and how Jesus' teaching confronted social/cultural norms, perhaps saw an opportunity here. Maybe, he may have been thinking, this Jesus guy will tell my older brother how unfair this arrangement is and speak into it. Jesus did not end up taking that social/cultural arrangement head on. Instead, as usual, He aimed at the heart—the heart of the younger brother, the older brother, all who were listening, and you and me.

- Q. Do you want more than you have? Why? What do you believe having more would add to your life?**
- Q. Have you ever considered the possibility that the “kingdom life” that Jesus came to inaugurate and invite people into is one of “downward mobility”? How does that change our “wants” if we try to live faithful to that vision?**
- Q. How have you seen/experienced a desire for “fairness”, “justice”, “equality” actually be a cover for greed? (**HG leaders—please be careful with this one. There may be some strong opinions from different ends of the economic and political spectrum, with each pointing the finger at the other.**)**
- Q. Think through your “possessions”. Do you have clothes that you don't wear? (I've heard that if you haven't worn something in the past year, get rid of it.) Do you have stuff in boxes in your closet or garage? Why do you have that stuff...what's your plan with it? Do you have stuff in storage? Again, what's the plan for that stuff?**
- Q. Thinking through your “stuff”what can you honestly say your life would be truly worse off if you didn't have?**
- Q. Does your life line up with Jesus' statement: “[your] life does not consist in the abundance of your possession.”? How so? (Or, how not?)**

As Jesus paints the parable in this passage, notice how often this “certain rich man” refers to himself. “What shall *I* do? *I* have no place to store **my** crops. This is what *I'll* do. *I* will tear down **my** barns and build bigger ones, and there *I* will store all **my** grain and **my** goods. And *I'll* say to **myself**, “*you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat drink and be merry.*”” (emphasis added) Noticed the complete and utter self-focus. This is the root of greed. Greed is all about “I”, “me”, “mine”. Completely blind to the fact that abundance brings/means opportunity to meet the needs of others.

Q. How can we guard ourselves against self-focus? (The challenge is that self-focus causes so many blind spots that we don't even know we're self-focused. But one "hint" I can offer is that God plan/purpose/design for "community" is aimed at this.)

Verse 20 brings the important reality into focus. *"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.'"* We all need to remember that our life is not our own. It can/will be demanded/required of us. The word translated "demanded" or "required" (depending on your translation) carries the idea of a legitimate legal claim. We truly are not our own. To forget that there is Another who has legitimate claim over us is the beginning of all sorts of problems...greed being a main one. We are answerable and accountable to God. What we do with the resources He's entrusted to us is a BIG deal. And as this parable/passage clearly points out, those resources (truly God's resources) are NOT for the purpose of self-indulgence (i.e. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.)

This passage ends with the exhortation to be "rich toward God". What does that mean? Well, before we try to answer that we need to step back and "own up" to this warning that Jesus lays out in this passage. He is speaking to us. We are rich people. That is unarguable/undebatable. The typical American is in the top 2% of the world's wealth. We consume far more than our fair share of resources, and others are harmed (or kept down) so that we can maintain/sustain our lavish lifestyles. In fact, the earth could not sustain itself if all the people on the planet consumed at the rate of the U.S. When there are people on the planet going without and we have more than enough (many times over)...it's safe to say that "rich toward God" looks like sharing our abundance with those who need it.

Q. How are you sharing the abundance God has entrusted to you with others?

Q. In what ways do you "live simply, so that others may simply live."?

Q. What could it look like if you, as a Home Group, really held each other accountable to your use of money? (By "accountable" I don't mean being legalistic. But let your imaginations run a bit on how you could leverage God's resources for His glory and the blessing/benefit of others. What are you willing to do without in order to bless others?)