

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance. If you weren't with us last Sunday, I made announcement that the Board has recently approved two capital projects—a renovated kitchen, and a new upper room constructed over top of the foyer.

We have a brochure available at the Info Desk if you would like to read more, or you can go to our website—www.n sac.bc.ca—and click on the caption “*Expanding Our Reach*.” There you will find the brochure, Frequently Asked Questions, and a link to the video we profiled last Sunday.

My thanks to Erik Bayfield who provided us with the drone footage, and Christian Eichmann who created the video. Please take time to read the brochure and prayerfully consider your part in contributing financially to these projects. At the end of February, we will be inviting all who are willing and able to hand in a pledge card that outlines your contribution.

I also have one other good piece of news that I wanted to pass on to you—on Friday of this week, after months of searching, we signed a lease agreement and have secured a location for our community house. We have sensed God leading us to take a step in securing safe, affordable, housing for some of our most vulnerable congregants, and we are grateful for the Lord's provision.

This week there will be some painting to do, and some moving of furniture, but the house will be operational in a matter of days. Some of you have been asking about whether you can donate your time, or furniture, or dishes—let me encourage you to talk with John Sawyer; he will be managing both the move-in and the house going forward.

At this time, let me invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to Luke 12:13-48, that's page 845 if you're using the Bible in the seat rack in front of you.

I've entitled this message, “*Wealth, Worry, and Watchfulness*” because Jesus address each of these issues. Specifically, Jesus challenges the wisdom of attaching to things instead of God (wealth), trying to control outcomes instead of trusting God (worry), and living for today with no thought for tomorrow (watchfulness).

I'm going to begin by reading vs. 13-21, and we'll look at the rest of the text as we make our way through. **Read.**

“13 Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus,] ‘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.

1. Wealth (Greed)—vs. 13-21: Jesus is asked to arbitrate between two angry, inflexible, people—this is the situation that prompts Jesus’ teaching. Two men—brothers—are in a dispute over their inheritance; one of the men wants Jesus to make a judgement in his favour. Instead, Jesus offers a parable about greed that cuts to the heart of the matter. This is not the first time—or the last—that Jesus describes possessions as a threat to discipleship.¹

The man in the parable, through no feat of his own, is blessed with an abundant harvest—he didn’t orchestrate the sun, the rain, or the quality of the soil; he didn’t hold back pest or disease. It was God who allowed for this bumper crop but the man seems to ignore God’s part. Listen to all the personal pronouns in vs. 17-18—“*What shall I do? I have no place to store **my** crops...I will tear down **my** barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store **my** surplus grain.*”

There’s no indication that the man feels any responsibility to God or to neighbour; there’s no indication that he intends to share any of the abundance God provided. Instead, the man plans to build bigger barns and spend his wealth on himself—eating, drinking, and being merry. He believed the lie that wealth would make him safe and secure, but as it turned out, that night would be his last.

Jesus calls this man a “fool”. In contemporary jargon we might use the words fool, dummy, or idiot interchangeably, but biblically speaking, a fool is one who lives as though God has no claim on their life. The fool says in his or her heart, “There is no God. I am free to live as I see fit.”

“*Watch out!*” Jesus says, “*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*” But many of us remain unconvinced. We’ve rebranded greed as a necessary, and perhaps even heroic, quest for more.

Wealth opens the door to opportunities that look exciting and promise satisfaction. We swallow the lie that we need more in order to be safe, and, happy. The question is, how much more do we need? When is enough, enough? Greed crowds out both God and others. Greed makes possessions our god and we begin to prioritize things over people, ourselves over others, and “having” over “giving”.

illus: I want to show you a picture of a young man I’ve known since he was 5 or 6 years old—this is Gilbert, and he was born in Rwanda. We’ve never met face to face, but Naomi and I sponsored Gilbert through the Compassion Canada Sponsorship program. Our support provided Gilbert with clothes, medication, food, and schooling. On his birthday and Christmas we would send him a gift of money and he would write us back to say “*Thank you! I used the money to buy a goat for my family—now we will have milk!*”

A few years ago, Gilbert graduated from school and his time in the Compassion Sponsorship Program came to an end—we no longer had a way to contact him. We began a new sponsorship with a child in Thailand, Nattawut is his name, and now we are corresponding with him. But six weeks ago, out of the blue, I received the following email, “*My name is Gilbert. I live in Rwanda country. I was your sponsored child. Do you remember me? I remember your wife called*

¹ C.f. Luke 8:4-15; 14:12-33; 16:1-13, 19-31; 18:18-30.

Naomi and your children—Luke & Anna. I am waiting your best answer.”

Gilbert is currently completing a three year degree in social work at the University of Rwanda. I was thrilled to get Gilbert’s email, but I got a little choked up when I noticed the subject line—it read, “*Hello my father*”. Of all the words he could have used, he chose the word “father”. In that moment I felt both joy and a twinge of shame—joy to hear how well he was doing, and shame because what we gave cost us so little and yet made such a difference to him and his family. Why we didn’t give more?

Greed casts a large shadow—we aren’t meant to hoard what God has given. Biblically speaking, all that we are and have belongs to God, and we are invited to steward what He has given according to His priorities. The question is, how do we do that? Where do we start?

One of the best ways to break the power of greed is to practice giving to God and others. The Old Testament Law called for a tithe—people gave 10% of their money, crops, and livestock to the work of God; this “gift” was given in recognition that the other 90% belonged to God too.

Giving 10% of your annual income might be a stretch for some of us, but others are capable of giving more. For a number of years now, God has enabled Naomi and me to give north of 15% of our annual income to this church, to other organizations, and to people in need.

illus: The idea of giving away monthly income can be frightening—like the man in the parable, we have a strong desire to keep what we have as close as we can. How does one begin to give? Let me suggest

that beginning to give is a lot like training to run a marathon. A marathon is 42 kilometres long—for a non-runner, this is an overwhelming distance. But no one begins by running 42 km, they begin by running 1—over time, with training, 1 becomes 3, 3 becomes 5, and you’re on your way. The same thing happens as we give.

Determine what you can give and then begin. If you receive \$1000, can you give 3% and live off the other \$970? Can you give 5% and live off the other \$950? Can you give 10% and live off the remaining \$900? Determine what you can give and then begin. Here’s a helpful tip—don’t wait until the end of the month to determine if there is anything left over to give; give to God first, and then apportion the rest. Test God in this...He will be faithful.

When I was a small boy, my parents helped me begin this practice of tithing—before I had a single expense, I learned to live within the 90%. Naomi and I are doing the same thing with our kids. We give them a monthly allowance, and they give God 10%, they save a percentage, and they are free to spend the rest. Our hope is that what begins as spiritual practice, will become for them a godly habit.

2. Worry—vs. 22-34: Let’s move on and look at what Jesus says about worry, beginning in vs. 22.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a

single hour to your life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

*27 Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! 29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 **But seek his kingdom**, and these things will be given to you as well.*

32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus begins by addressing the issue of wealth/greed, and now He addresses the issue of worry. Before I go any further, I want to qualify what I’m about to say. We live at a time in Western society when awareness of mental illness is at an all time high, and this awareness is a good thing. I mention this because I suspect a number of us here today suffers with an anxiety disorder. Some of us have chemical deficiencies in our bodies that make us prone to an anxiety that goes beyond far beyond the worry that Jesus is addressing. If you wrestle with anxiety, you don’t have to hide in shame.

Let’s take a few moment to explore the nature of worry. Let me

begin with an informal poll—raise your hand if worry is regular part of your life. I’ve got a white board with me this morning, and I want to capture some of the things that we find ourselves worrying about—call out your answers (**capture people’s responses**).

I want all of you to look at the words I’ve written down—there’s enough worry here to crush a city. I wonder, seeing these words written out, does it make you feel better or worse? After seeing this list some of you are saying to yourself, “*now I’ve got even more things to worry about that I never thought of before!*”

Jesus says, “*Do not worry about your life,*” but for some of us, He may as well say, “*Don’t breathe in and out*”—getting rid of worry seems a near possibility. In fact, it is an impossibility unless we adopt Jesus’ kingdom strategy for living.

Jesus reminds us that the raven doesn’t worry, and neither does the lily. “*But,*” we may protest, “*that’s not a fair comparison—ravens and lilies are incapable of worry.*” Do you know why humans worry? Because we can. We worry because we experience a world where pain is just as plentiful as pleasure—we want to avoid the pain and grab hold of the pleasure. We tell ourselves that if we just had more time, more money, more things, more power, more ingenuity, we could avoid pain and control the outcomes that cause us to worry.

Many of us wear our worry like a badge of honour—it’s a sign that we care, a sign that we’re involved in something important. We might go so far as to say, “*it’s a parent’s job to worry about their kids,*” or “*it’s a CEO’s job to worry about her company,*” or “*it’s a pastor’s job to worry about his/her people.*” No one enjoys worrying, but we’re not ready to turn our back on it—we see worry as our ally,

it keeps us alert to danger, helping us to steer clear of potential pitfalls.

Over and over again Jesus's kingdom vision clashes with culture's vision of the good life. Culture tells us that we ought to chase after wealth, status, and freedom from pain. Our culture also tells us that we're all on our own, that we need to look out for ourselves, control what we can, and fight for what we want.

There is a massive downside to worry isn't there? Stress, sleeplessness, the attempt to control everyone and everything. Worry is more enemy than ally. Worry is an enemy of the Kingdom because it stands in the way of rest, trust, and hope—worry keeps us feeling isolated and alone.

The truth is that you've never been alone, not for one moment of your life. In your triumphs and failures, God has been present; in your joys and your sorrows, God has been intimately involved. Jesus reminds us that God the Father feeds the ravens, He adorns the lilies—He even clothes the grass of the fields. If He is this engaged in the world, then you can be certain that He is lovingly watching over your life.

Jesus asked a question that we need to wrestle with—“*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*”

Jesus offers an alternative to the life of worry. **Seek first God's kingdom. Stop trying to control outcomes. Put your trust in God**

—**He knows what you need.** Tom Wright puts it like this, “The kingdom of God is, at its heart, about God's sovereignty sweeping the world with love and power, so that human beings...may relax in the knowledge that God is in control.”²

illus: Last Fall, I was being bombarded with the word “courage.” When I prayed, the Spirit would bring this word to mind; in my Bible reading, it seemed like “courage” was on every page; even in conversations with random people, the subject of “courage” would come up. Finally I said to the Lord, “*Ok, I get it, you want me to be a man of courage. But what does that mean? What am I supposed to do? Where do you want me to be courageous?*”

Not long after, I was talking with Dan, and he mentioned that he was praying for me—he asked if there was something specific that he could pray for. The first thing that came to mind was this word “courage,” and I shared it with him. And Dan said something really wise and helpful. He said, “*Courage is a really abstract concept. Have you thought about asking God to give you an image, or a picture of what courage looks like? That might give you a hint of where God is leading you.*”

A few days later I asked the Holy Spirit for an image of courage, and in my mind's eye, I saw a father and his son—a toddler—walking along a path. It wasn't long before the son grew tired and the father reached down, picked up his son, and the boy—utterly exhausted—lay limp against his father's shoulder. Without missing a step, the father continued down the path, holding the son.

² N.T. Wright, *Luke For Everyone*, 153.

When the vision came to an end, I said to the Lord, “*That’s it? What does that have to do with courage?*” And I sensed the Spirit say, “*Mark, this is what courage will look like for you—complete trust, utter dependence, a letting go.*”

When we put our hope in things that can be lost, stolen, or destroyed, worry will be our constant companion. Following Jesus doesn’t mean that things will get easier, or that pain will disappear; we follow Jesus because life is difficult and pain is present. We ask God for strength and courage to keep going, when we don’t understand what’s happening, and can’t see the way through.

You’re never going to find a pain-free life, but you can find a Presence-Filled life. In Jeremiah 29:13, God says, “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*” The Christian deals with worry by attaching to the One who is never worried, never surprised, never out of control—this is the God who loves and watches over you.

3. Watchfulness—vs. 35-48: We’ve looked at Jesus’ teaching on wealth, we just looked at His teaching on worry, I want to conclude with a brief look at His teaching on watchfulness.

Jesus said, “**35** *Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes...40* **You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**”

illus: Jesus paints a picture of watchfulness that reminds me of family road trips. If you’ve ever been on a long road trip, at one point or another you lose sight of the destination and wonder why on earth you’re stuck in the car. *Are we there yet?* When you’ve run out of things to say, when your electronic device run out of batteries, or the signal is lost, how do you pass the time?

In our family, we begin to play games that typically involve trying to find something. Who can find the next blue car? Who can find a vehicle with an American license plate? Who will be the first to sight an animal on the side of the road? These games keep us alert, engaged, and scanning the horizon. It’s this kind of scenario that Jesus has in mind. *Are you ready and waiting for Jesus’ return? Are you living today, like He’s returning tomorrow?*

The moment we lose sight of Jesus’ return, we begin to live poorly, putting off what’s important, forgetting who we are and where we’re going. Have you ever thought to yourself, “*I’ll get serious about God later; I’ve got lots of time and other priorities right now?*”

The question is, how much time do you have? Do you know how long you’ll live, or, when Jesus will return? That prompting within you right now—to seek God—will still be present if you ignore it for three weeks, three months, or three years? The wise servant is ready for her Master’s return; she chooses to live for Jesus in this present moment, because she does know what the next moment will bring.

The wise servant also remembers that he is a manager, not an owner. What God has given remains His to command—my life is not my own, I belong to Him. And if my life belongs to Him, if it’s His

breath in my lungs, how much more does my time, my work, my relationships, my possessions, belong to Him? Will you steward what God has given you for His purposes?

Conclusion: I want to conclude this morning with a few moments in silence. We have opened the Scripture together this morning—where is the Holy Spirit shining light upon your life? Do you sense a specific invitation this morning? To give? To let go of worry? To live in light of Jesus' return? **Silence/Prayer**

The Lord's Supper: This morning, through our participation in the Lord's Supper, we participate in a symbolic meal that has been celebrated for nearly 2000 years. As I said last week, in nearly every culture throughout history, a shared meal is understood as a powerful sign of welcome and friendship. And is this not why Jesus gave this meal to the church? We eat this meal as a reminder that God loves us, and welcomes us as friends on the basis of what Jesus has done for us at the cross.

This bread symbolizes the broken body of the Lord Jesus Christ; this cup symbolizes His blood that was shed when He died on the cross. This is a holy meal, and through it we remember the Holy One, Jesus Christ. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "*God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*" When Jesus died on the cross, He died bearing our penalty for sin—He made a way for us to be forgiven and welcomed into God's family.

All that I've talked about this morning—a life of giving (instead of greed), a life of trust and dependence (instead of worry), a life of

watchfulness, is not possible apart from the love and power of Christ. We eat this bread and drink this cup, knowing that Christ Himself is what we need—He is the Source, He is the Supply.

As you come this morning, celebrate the height and depth, and length and breadth of God's love; come and receive His generous forgiveness; come and be filled again with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

At this time I'd like to invite those serving the Lord's Supper to come forward and take your place.

Worship

Healing Stories/Call to Prayer Ministry

Benediction