In our text, the aggrieved brother is concerned about his share of an inheritance. He is not the only one we meet in the gospels who seems preoccupied with money. Remember the so-called “rich young ruler”? He could do just about everything in life except part with his financial assets. The religious leaders had money in their pockets when they asked Jesus whether it was okay to send taxes to Caesar. Jesus asked them for a coin, which they lent him, and on which Jesus noted the head of Caesar as he famously said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21).

How different things are today in what is virtually a cashless society! The concept of *currency* is radically changed. We pay bills online or via automatic payments. We buy and sell online. We use Venmo, Zelle, Apple Pay or PayPal to send money to someone or contribute to the church. But we are less and less likely to pay in cash. Some speculators make billions *by investing in currency itself.* They buy foreign currency low and sell high. But the big money is in cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, which allow investors to operate without a central monetary authority like a government or bank. Buying and selling cryptocurrency is a $3 trillion industry that produces nothing, except more money.

**The “Greater Fool” Theory.** Investors tout cryptocurrency as the currency of the future and are lining up to invest now before they become more valuable. The problem is that cryptocurrency is highly speculative. Cryptocurrencies generate no cash flow, so for you to make a profit, *someone must pay more for the currency than you did*. This is called “the greater fool” theory of investment. Jesus seems to reference the greater fool theory when he says to the angry brother, “‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God” (v. 21). Jesus is not anti-money or anti-rich; he is anti-greed, anti-worry, and anti-shortsighted thinking.

**The Greater Fool Is Greedy.** Jesus was not anti-rich; he was anti-greed. “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (v. 15). “Take care,” is a Greek word meaning “to see,” as in to *understand* and *comprehend.* Jesus is saying, “You don’t get it! Open your eyes, you dimwits, and guard against greed in all its forms.” Security was important in the ancient world when thievery was common and easier than it is today with all our hi-tech protection options. “Peer into the darkness; make sure no one is lurking in an alley with a baseball bat. Keep your wits about you. Do not let greed grab you by the throat and rob you of your life.”

Greed is a detour that quickly becomes a one-way street to a dead-end road. There is no cul-de-sac; no easy way to turn around. Once greedy, always greedy. This is the dark, dirty little secret about greed: Once it grabs you, it’s got you and you are hooked. You will always be unhappy; what you have will never be enough. No wonder that Jesus says, “For one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (v. 15).

The alternative to greed is *generosity,* like that of the widow whom Jesus and the disciples watched as she donated at the temple. She showed that generosity is more than an *amount*, it is an *attitude*. It is measured not by how much we give, but by how much it cost us. “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:3-4).

Another word for greed is “covetousness.” The late Dr. Haddon W. Robinson, president of Denver Seminary, defined *covetousness* “as simply craving more of what you have enough already.” To combat greed, why not start being generous? You have enough already! Begin by sorting through the “abundance of your possessions” and start giving things away. You probably will not miss them. What is there to miss when you let go of possessions you did not need in the first place? You are a fool if you do not. Like Jesus says, “You fool!…So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God” (v. 21).

**The Greater Fool Is a Worrier.** Jesus was not anti-rich; he was anti-worry. He wanted us to simplify our lives. We tend to make life complicated. This happens, according to George Carlin, because we accumulate “an abundance of possessions” or what Carlin calls “stuff.” In his famous riff on stuff, he says: “That’s all your house is — a place to keep your stuff. If you didn’t have so much stuff, you wouldn’t need a house…A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it.…Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore.”

The man our story is riddled with anxiety: “He thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’” (v. 17). In other words, “I have no more room for *my stuff*!” Then he gets this insane idea: “I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store my grain and my goods” (v. 18). More stuff. What a fool! The man’s passions were possessions; but his possessions were also the source of his anxiety.

Having all this stuff induces worry, and worry becomes a burden that gets heavier with time. As he keeps accumulating stuff, he becomes ill with worry. That worry, like a tumor in the brain, does nothing but give you raging headaches that drive you crazy. The remedy for worry is simplification. When we learn to be happy with the simple pleasures of life, a lot of anxiety melts like ice on a hot day in July, and gives you pleasure in the process. As someone said, “Success is getting what you want; happiness is wanting what you get.” Jesus said it this way: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing” (vv. 22-23).

**The Greater Fool Is Shortsighted.** Jesus was not anti-rich; he was anti-shortsighted thinking. The rich fool says: “And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry” (12:19). He really has no thought to the future. Jesus does not pull any punches. “You fool!” he says. “This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (v. 20).

“You fool!” The Greek word is *aphron*, meaning without reason, senseless, foolish, inconsiderate. It is closely related to the word *phren*, which refers to the diaphragm and the process of breathing, inhaling, and exhaling. It is as though Jesus is saying to the fool: “You big bag of wind! You are partying like there is no tomorrow, when in fact, for you, there is no tonight. This very night, your soul is required of you. It is over.” The man is not just a fool, not just a greater fool; he is the greatest of fools. Why? Because he is shortsighted. His priorities are a mess. He has no awareness of risk, downsides, trends, or dangers. Worst of all, he is not “rich toward God” (v. 21).

Jesus is not anti-rich; he is simply aware that wealth is not without its problems. Jesus knew the trouble was not about money, but the love of money; not about possessions, but the abundance of possessions; not about working hard, but about working only “for ourselves” (v. 21); not about being rich, but about not being “rich toward God.” Jesus is against greed, worry, and shortsightedness; and in favor of being “rich toward God,” by which he means using our wealth ethically, responsibly, and compassionately, remembering that “the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

Prayer: Living, Loving God, you care about all aspects of our lives, so we bring to you the big things and the little things, the worries which keep us awake at night, the worries which only you know. Reach out to all those for whom the future brings fears and uncertainties. Assure them that you are with them, even when that future seems dark, and circumstances feel like they are spiraling out of control. Remind them that you can transform the bleakest situations, bringing healing and wholeness. Lord, we make our prayers in faith, for we know your Spirit is at work making all things new. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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**Was Jesus Anti-Rich?**

Sunday, July 31, 2022 [Luke 12:13-21](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12%3a13-21&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Sam Polk, in *For the Love of Money*, talks about his experience as a trader on Wall Street:

“In my last year on Wall Street my bonus was $3.6 million — and I was angry because it wasn’t big enough. I was 30 years old, had no children to raise, no debts to pay, no philanthropic goal in mind. I wanted more money for exactly the same reason an alcoholic needs another drink: I was addicted.

Eight years earlier, I’d walked onto the trading floor at Credit Suisse First Boston to begin my summer internship. I already knew I wanted to be rich, but when I started out I had a different idea about what wealth meant.…

I worked like a maniac and began to move up the Wall Street ladder. I became a bond and credit default swap trader, one of the more lucrative roles in the business. Just four years after I started at Bank of America, Citibank offered me a “1.75 by 2” which means $1.75 million per year for two years, and I used it to get a promotion.…

But in the end, it was actually my absurdly wealthy bosses who helped me see the limitations of unlimited wealth. I was in a meeting with one of them, and a few other traders, and they were talking about the new hedge-fund regulations. Most everyone on Wall Street thought they were a bad idea. “But isn’t it better for the system as a whole?” I asked. The room went quiet, and my boss shot me a withering look. I remember [him] saying, “I don’t have the brain capacity to think about the system as a whole. All I’m concerned with is how this affects our company.”

I felt as if I’d been punched in the gut. He was afraid of losing money, despite all that he had. From that moment on, I started to see Wall Street with new eyes. I noticed the vitriol that traders directed at the government for limiting bonuses after the crash. I heard the fury in their voices at the mention of higher taxes. These traders despised anything or anyone that threatened their bonuses. Ever see what a drug addict is like when he’s used up his junk? He’ll do anything — walk 20 miles in the snow, rob a grandma — to get a fix. Wall Street was like that.”

Sam’s experience proved Jesus’s words to be true: “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”