

Care-Fully Living possessions  
Small Group Study June 2021 BCUC

Opening Prayer:

**"I Lack Nothing"**

**A prayer based on Psalm 23**

You Lord are my shepherd,  
Even though I am surrounded by a world  
that advertises for my attention and money,  
I lack nothing.  
My cup is full.  
Even in my rush to be busy;  
Jesus you make me stop, lie down, smell the wonder and notice nature.  
You lead me onto still lakes of beauty that reflect your brilliance and refresh my weary soul  
like the reset button of a frozen screen.  
Even though the pop-up screens of life paralyse me with options;  
Holy Spirit, you help my feet to lift,  
to guide me through the maze towards your pure path of righteousness.  
You are leading me closer and closer to your holiness.  
Even through the darkness of the night,  
the fears of failure and rejection,  
the overwhelming responsibilities  
and the towering hurt that threatens to tumble on top of me;  
You give me courage to walk on and walk through,  
you never let me go.  
Your love drives away the fear.  
Evil is but a blip compared to your infinite kindness,  
Your mother hen protection,  
Your gentle encouragement.  
You stick up for me, even when I don't deserve it.  
You throw me a master chef banquet, even when I seem to fail you too many times.  
You set me apart as special, even when I feel less than ordinary.  
You take my meagre cup and fill it to overflowing.  
Jesus, friend of sinners, thank you for staying with me, even when this life is over. Your  
eternal vision for me gives me hope, far beyond today's gifts cards and takes the shine  
away from any plastic fantastic money can buy.  
I long to know you more and forever,  
my eternal shepherd Lord.  
Amen.

**Question:**

Share with each other what is the last 'expensive' thing you bought? Did you wrestle with the decision and research it thoroughly, or buy it on a whim?

**Or (for those who want to be a bit active):**

Direct the group to stand up and move to either side of the room based on your preferences between two options of words associated with possessions. For example, indicate that if you prefer "disposable" move to one side of the room but if you prefer "keep forever" move to the opposite side. See the floor between the two walls as a spectrum between the two. Get people to line up according to the spectrum then discuss why they stood there. Here's some suggestions, realising there many exceptions, try to think generally and with your first instinct. The aim is to generate conversation and have some fun with it.

*Disposable or keep forever*  
*Repair or buy new*  
*Give or receive*  
*Food shopping or clothes shopping*  
*New car or travel holiday*  
*Cheapest or most expensive*  
*Buy now, pay later or Save for it*

**Read Luke 12:13-34 together.**

Jesus audience included rich rulers, tax collectors and also the poor. Many who came to listen to Jesus only owned an extra tunic to wear and not much else. He had made friends with many of them and needed to help teach them a new way to live with different values. Jesus himself owned very little; at the cross, the soldiers gambled for his only 'worldly' treasure, his cloak. Jesus said "life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15b). He is proposing to help answer the philosophical question that has captured humanity for millennia, a question Plato once raised: "What is the measure of a man/human life?"

Jesus was asked to act as judge in the same way Moses did (eg. Exodus 18:13) to sort out a dispute regarding inheritance of land between family members. Instead, Jesus tells a parable about greed and worry. In the parable Jesus paints a picture of a life that pursues the hedonistic dream to 'eat, drink and be merry' as chasing a phantom life that leads to greed, selfishness (note how many times the rich man refers to himself in verse 17-19), anxiety and ultimately death.

**Discuss with each other how much our possessions can define us and give our life meaning. What do you think Jesus means in Luke 12:15? To what extent do you agree with Jesus portrayal?**

**Now read Luke 12:22-34 together.**

**What is the alternative, abundant life that Jesus offers?**

As the Christian scholar Alan Culpepper writes "*Luke reminds the reader repeatedly that the secrets of one's heart are not hidden from God*".<sup>1</sup>

The Psalmist writes "The fool says in his heart, "there is no God"" (Psalm 14:1). In many ways, the rich ruler in Jesus parable is the ultimate self-made person. Yet it is God that grows the seed and provides the rain for the abundant crops. **When it comes to ownership of the things we possess, from real-estate to clothes, how much do you see them as 'mine' or a gift from God given to our open hands to steward for a time?**

Another way to understand it is: 'do our possessions possess us or the other way around'? What is your understanding of ownership? Have you acknowledged the original custodians of the land on which you meet now?

**Discuss who really 'owns' the place you are meeting on for your group?**

God lovingly gives us gifts for us to hold for a time in our open hand and says: "here you go, let's see what you do with that'.

Jesus urges us not to be worried about what we will eat, or our body or clothes. Things that people would use their money for.

**On a scale of 1 to 10 how worried do you get about money? Discuss.**

**Being honest, how real do you think Jesus can help with our finances?**

**When it comes to important life decisions, how much of an influence is money in comparison to seeking God's direction? Are you happy with your balance?**

When preparing couples for marriage, I find financial matters and a love of 'stuff' can be an issue couples need to work through. It can be like there are three 'people' in the relationship: the two people and the motorbike or antique car or collection of expensive handbags etc.. I have at times asked: "*what you be willing to give up to make the relationship work?*" When Jesus met with a rich young ruler who asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus responded "*Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.*" (Luke 18:18-27).

**When it comes to our possessions, what 'stuff' might be hindering your relationship with God? What would you be willing to give up to make your relationship with Jesus work?**

Jesus said to observe the ravens. Ravens are some of the smartest creatures in the animal kingdom. They have been observed mimicking wolf calls to attract other wolves to a carcass to help break it up so they can feast on the left-overs. They are omnivores,

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Culpepper, New Interpreters Bible Commentary on Luke, p 256

scavenging carrion or finding fruit. **Discuss what do you think Jesus meant for us to observe the raven?**

In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul says "*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*". **How does Jesus instruction to not worry and the instruction given to Timothy either conflict or relate to each other?**

The great Christian pastor and writer John Stott says: "Jesus forbids worry, not prudence. Faith in God is not inconsistent with making sensible provision for the future."<sup>2</sup>

By asking us to consider the ravens and the lilies Jesus paints of picture of contentment with the provision of God. This contrasts with the pursuit of the rich farmer who wanted to build the ever-bigger barns. Our consumer brains seem trained to want more, want bigger, want better. **Being deeply honest, quietly consider how content are you are with your material possessions. Discuss together what you might understand as 'downsizing' and 'simplifying' life regarding possessions, and whether this is an appropriate personal response to these teachings of Jesus.**

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<sup>2</sup> John Stott, "The Birds Our Teachers".

## Application:

Check your relationship with stuff. Where is your focus? Here are three suggested activities to help us.

- 1) **Worship with abandon.** Life and values change when our eyes turn away from ourselves, our own selfish desires. This is what worshipping God the trinity does for us. Worship requires sacrifice. In a world before Hillsong, Fanny Crosby and Wesley, worship was just the offering (Genesis 4:3). As Jesus said, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also!" How might you worship sacrificially with abandon and not just convenient worship?
- 2) **Simplify or sell.** What steps can you take cut the excess and simplify your life?
- 3) **Give generously.** Live generously with a open hand not a closed fist. Remember who owns it. John Wesley wisely said, "Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can". Generously giving helps us detach from our materialism. Take time to prayerfully re-assess your giving to others, including the local church in worship, and make that step to give generously.

### Finish with the words of Wesley's covenant prayer:

I am no longer my own, but yours.  
Put me to what You will, rank me with whom You will.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by You or laid aside by You.  
Exalted for You or brought low for You.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine.  
So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.