

Trust

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- [0 : 0 0] This is a very exciting time in the life of our church for a couple of reasons. Number one, as I said a little while ago, it is the season of Lent, and I personally love Lent.
- It's a great time that comes along every year where we have an opportunity to really focus on our relationship with God, our relationships with one another, and to figure out what's getting in the way.
- And it's always such a wonderful preparation for the coming celebration of Easter, behind the kind of darkness and the somber tones of Lent. You have the coming sunrise of Easter, and it's a wonderful contrast.
- So I love it for that reason. It's also a particularly exciting time in the life of our church, really unprecedented in many ways. This has been a time where we have together been reflecting who we are as a church and why we're here.
- As we look back over the last 12 years and then as we look ahead to the future, remembering our core values and the core reasons why we started this church and have felt called to be a part of this church for over a decade now.
- [1 : 0 5] From the beginning, our goal as a church, our hope was never just to build a great church. It was to see D.C. become a great city, to become a great home for all of the people who live here, the people who move here, the people who grow up here.
- And this vision that we have tried to live out over the last 12 years, this vision requires a long-term commitment.
- It requires a commitment that goes far beyond our lifespan. In order to make that kind of commitment, Church of the Advent needs a home, a place where we can serve this city and love this city in God's name for generations to come, long after all of us are gone.
- And so we are embarking now on the Home Campaign, which is an effort to secure a home for Advent where we can serve the city for multiple generations to come.
- And we have never done anything like this before as a church. I mean, for many of us, this is our first time ever being a part of something like this. And so I think for some of us who have been around for a while, this can feel a bit odd or a bit strange.
- [2 : 2 0] And it is. This is new ground for us. I have already been talking to many of you about this. And some people have been very excited. And they've wanted to come and meet with me. And so I've been having lots of conversations about this.
- And over 50 people in our church have already made commitments to the Home Campaign. And many of those people have actually told me that this is the single biggest financial commitment they've ever made, which to me is amazing.
- And it's been reminding me again and again and again that this is an extraordinary opportunity for us to grow as a community of people who follow Jesus, especially when it comes to the area of financial stewardship and generosity.
- If you look at Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, Jesus actually talks more about wealth and stewardship than almost any other topic, save for the kingdom of God.

He talks about it way more than sex or heaven or hell. It's one of the most common themes in all of his teaching. And yet as a church, we hardly ever talk about it.

[3 : 27] For those of you who have been here for a while, you know, I could probably count on one hand the number of times over the last 12 years that I have directly preached on stewardship and generosity.

It's so easy to come up with so many other things that we would probably rather focus on. But because this is such an important time in the life of our church and because it's the season of Lent and a time where we are called to reflect on the state of our hearts and our relationship with the Lord, we're going to spend the next five weeks looking at what Jesus has to say about stewardship and generosity.

We're going to do this on Sundays here together. And then we're also going to be doing this as a special material that we're going to be working through together in all of our core groups. So if you're part of a core group or would like to be part of a core group, for these next five weeks, this is what we're going to be focusing in our core groups as well.

And there's going to be a connection between what we do here on Sundays and what we're looking at in core groups throughout the week. Now, if you're not a Christian and you're hearing this and you're thinking, well, none of this applies to me, I would say that I think in some ways this applies to everybody in this room.

Because if you look at the core of Jesus' teaching about this stuff, it's really about what it takes to live a life that is free from fear and anxiety, free from things that might grab hold of our hearts, free from the kind of sort of nagging fears that take hold of our spine and control us.

[4 : 59] Jesus is talking about how to be free from that stuff. And I don't know a single person who doesn't want that. So I think it's relevant for everybody. This week we're going to be looking specifically at Luke chapter 12. We're going to be looking at this encounter that Jesus has with a man who has a dysfunctional relationship with his possessions, with his wealth.

And we're going to see how Jesus responds both to this man, to the crowds, and then his teaching to his disciples about these things. And I know you may be hearing this and thinking, well, if this is about a man and his wealth, this definitely doesn't apply to me because I definitely don't have any wealth.

But I would say that it's important to remember that Jesus is teaching people who by any standard were profoundly poor. He's teaching about a rich man, but he's teaching people who are very poor.

In other words, most of his audience, most of his original audience are probably people who live hand to mouth. And at most, maybe they own one additional outfit besides the one that they're wearing.

So, if this applies to them, how much more might it apply to us, who compared to that standard would all be wealthy in this room.

[6 : 11] So, what we're going to see as we look at this passage are three things. We're going to see the signs of dysfunction, signs that you might have a dysfunctional relationship with your wealth, the source of that dysfunction, and then the cure for the dysfunction.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that every week we get to come here and not just rely on human wisdom or teaching or the latest principles for living, but rather we get to open this word with expectation that through it and the power of your Holy Spirit, we would come face to face with you, Jesus Christ.

It is in your presence and your grace and your love that our hearts change. And that's what we need this morning, Lord. We need to see you. We pray that you would do this, Lord, for our good and for your glory.

In your son's name. Amen. So, as we look at this passage together, signs that we might have a dysfunctional relationship with our possessions. The first thing we see is that if you have this kind of dysfunctional relationship, money tends to get in the way of your relationships with other people.

It tends to cause conflict in your relationships with other people. Jesus is in the middle of teaching, and ironically, he's teaching about freedom from fear and anxiety. And this man comes and interrupts him and says, Teacher, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

[7 : 30] The man's obviously not paying attention to anything Jesus has to say. And he says, can you settle this family dispute that we're having? And it's clear right off the bat that this man's father has recently died, and instead of grieving the death of his father, he's fighting with his siblings because he doesn't think he got enough.

This is maybe a younger brother in this day and age. The older brother would have gotten the bulk of the inheritance. And this guy thinks he deserves a little more. I have seen this, and you probably have too.

I know personally several families that have been completely torn apart by this exact situation. The mother or the father dies, there's an inheritance, and the siblings squabble over it, and in some cases get to a point where nobody's speaking to each other.

Right? If you're married, you probably know that money is the number one topic that couples fight about. It's the number one source of tension in marriage. Certainly, Laura and I, especially in the early years of our marriage, really had to work through this stuff.

It was hard. Because we were coming from very different places in terms of what money means to us and the kind of anxiety it can cause. Right? I've seen money come between roommates when the bills don't get paid or when some people feel like they're spending more on groceries than other people.

[8 : 50] Right? I've seen money come between friends. As you get older, further out of college, some people start making more money. You were kind of all the same in college or grad school, and then when some people start making money, their lifestyle follows that.

And so you have some friends that want to go out all the time and go party and go to nice restaurants and order lots of expensive things, and you have other people who just can't keep up. I've known some people who have gone into debt just trying to keep up with their friends.

Right? Going out on Thursday, Friday, Saturday night. Dysfunctional relationships with wealth also lead to all kinds of injustice. Class discrimination.

Right? Inequity. The things that tear the social fabric apart in D.C. Dysfunctional relationship with wealth also leads to overconsumption and the production of enormous amounts of waste, which not only hurts the environment, but it actually disproportionately impacts the poorest of the poor in the world.

Right? So in all of these ways, a dysfunctional relationship with wealth hurts our relationships with other people. That's the first sign that the relationship may be off.

[9 : 58] The second sign is, I already alluded to it, excessive anxiety over your financial security. In verse 22, Jesus says, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.

This isn't just talking about a kind of passing anxiety, it's talking about a pervasive anxiety. You think about this a lot, you dwell on it. Right? So let me ask you, how much do you spend time and energy worrying about your finances?

How much do you spend time and energy worrying about or pursuing financial security? If you look at the decisions that you make, the things that you say yes to, the things that you say no to, how much of that is driven by your desire to have more financial security?

And if you're hearing this and you're thinking, well, I don't know that I have that much anxiety over this, let me ask you in a different way. Are your financial priorities aimed at minimizing anxiety, and that's why you don't feel it, or at reflecting God's priorities?

To put it another way, would you be willing to dip into your savings account or your retirement account to help somebody in need?

[11 : 16] Right? These are the kinds of questions that we should be asking ourselves. Is anxiety over these things a pervasive issue in our lives? And then the third sign that our relationship with wealth might be dysfunctional is that we tend to operate out of a scarcity mentality.

Verse 29, And do not seek what you are to eat, what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things. Seek after, of course, here, seek after means a kind of tunnel vision, all-consuming pursuit.

A single-minded pursuit. If you have a scarcity mentality, you tend to have tunnel vision. In other words, you are so focused on what you don't have that you can tend to be blind to the things that you do have.

You're focused on what's not there rather than what is there. And people with a scarcity mentality tend to operate as though life is a zero-sum game. There's a very limited amount of precious resources, and you have to grab what you can while you can before it's all gone.

And so if you live with this kind of mentality, it leads to a number of other things, right? People with a scarcity mentality tend to regularly compare themselves to other people.

[12 : 35] You tend to be threatened when people close to you are successful. Because it's a zero-sum game. Their success diminishes you, right? People with this kind of mentality tend to hoard their possessions.

They tend to be stingy with their money. They tend to also struggle with a kind of perpetual discontentment because they're focused on what they don't have. And Jesus says this is the way of the nations.

In other words, he says most people live this way. And in my experience, I think that's definitely true. This is psychologically, for me, the path of least resistance. It's easiest to focus on what you're lacking.

But it shapes the way you see everything else. So as we look at this passage, if money has ever gotten in the way of your ability to love or have healthy relationships with other people, if it's ever caused tension in your friendships or in your marriage, if financial security and the desire for that causes anxiety for you, if you tend to operate in some ways out of a scarcity mentality, then chances are you have a dysfunctional relationship with your possessions.

And so the question then becomes, what is the source of this dysfunction? What is it rooted in? Jesus responds to the man in the crowd by saying, man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?

[13 : 56] And I love this because at first glance, it looks like Jesus is just putting him off. Right? I don't care about your trivial little issues. But in reality, what Jesus is doing is actually he's cutting right to the heart of this man's issue.

He says, you think that you need me to come and resolve a family dispute, but you need way more than that. You need me to resolve a heart issue in you.

And he says in verse 15, take care and be on your guard against all forms of covetousness. All covetousness, which means all kinds or all forms.

For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. So right there, Jesus names the source of the dysfunction. And the word that the Bible uses is the word covetousness.

Earlier when we read the Ten Commandments, you notice that last commandment is, you shall not covet. That's what Jesus is talking about here. And covetousness is, simply put, an inordinate desire for material things.

[14 : 56] An inordinate desire for material things. It's disproportionate. It's out of whack. It's out of bounds, right? And it takes different forms. This is why Jesus says, be on guard against all covetousness, all kinds.

So sometimes covetousness shows up as greed. Sometimes the struggle is we just want more money, or we want a nicer house, or we want, you know, a better paying job, or we want nicer things.

Sometimes it just takes the form of greed. Sometimes it takes the form of envy. You know, you look at your friends who move from their starter house into their really nice house, and you think, man, what I wouldn't give for another bedroom, you know?

Bigger kitchen, right? You look at your friend's job, and they're like, man, we have the same skill set. We came out of the same grad school, and they're making twice as much as me. I want a job like that, right? So that's a form of covetousness, right?

Sometimes it takes the form of fear. We don't often associate being covetous with being fearful, but it often manifests, I think, as fear. Fear of not having enough. Fear of what you have running out.

[16 : 05] All of this can be covetousness. But the lie under all of this is the same. The lie under all forms of covetousness is this. If I just had a little more, then I would arrive.

You know you have thought that. I have certainly thought that. If I just had a little more of this or that, whatever resource you're focused on, then I would arrive.

Then I would be satisfied. Then I would be secure. I wouldn't feel anxious anymore. I wouldn't worry about this stuff anymore. We wouldn't have to fight about this anymore. Your satisfaction isn't far away.

The lie is it's just around the corner. You're not there yet, but it's just over the horizon. It's like a carrot on a stick. And we just chase it and chase it and chase it and chase it. So this is the source of the dysfunction, right?

So then the question becomes, if that's the source and that's hurting our relationships, leading to anxiety and all of this stuff, what do we do about it? And someone might say, well, just get rid of your stuff.

[17 : 12] But that's not the answer. Because the truth is we do need some stuff, you know? I had a roommate one time, a friend, strong believer, who said, I'm going to get rid of all my stuff and live without all my stuff, right?

I'm getting rid of everything. I don't need it, right? Because that's what Jesus calls us to do. And then guess what he did? He used all my stuff, right? I mean, I would go to the grocery store and buy enough groceries for the week, and I would come home a day later, and it would all be gone.

Like the peanut butter jar would be scraped clean, right? He would wear my clothes, right? And I mean, I'm happy to share my stuff, but I'm like, dude, you don't get to feel spiritually superior to me and eat all my food.

Like you don't get both, okay? So the truth is we do need some stuff. I mean, you need a place to live. You need a way of getting around. You need clothes to wear.

Many of us, for our jobs, we need nice clothes to wear. You need a computer and you need a phone. Some of you couldn't do your job without these things. So then the question becomes, what's the solution?

[18 : 17] And, of course, the answer is we have to change the relationship that we have with these things, the meaning that they take on in our lives and in our hearts.

And that, as we look at this passage, that transformation of our relationship with our things requires three things. Number one, as we see here, it means that we have to recognize the truth about our wealth.

We have to recognize the truth about it. It's a hard truth. The man who interrupts Jesus. Jesus, he believes that if he can just get a little more of his father's inheritance, then he's going to arrive.

Then he will be satisfied. Jesus responds to this man by telling a parable. And if you notice, what's this parable about? It's about a rich man who has finally arrived.

Right? He finally got what we all want. Right? This rich man, he's already rich. But he has this great year and he ends up with more than he even knows what to do with. His problem is he doesn't know where to put all of his money.

[19 : 24] So he decides to build bigger barns. He tears the old ones down, builds bigger ones. So this is a story about a man who, imagine Jesus says, hey, there was a guy who was already insanely wealthy.

But he had a huge year and so he added to his already bulging retirement account. And because of this, because he's finally arrived, this man, he says this in verse 17.

He thought to himself, what shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops? Listen to the language here. And then he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones.

And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

Right? It's all mine. It's my money. It's my stuff. It's my time. And I read this and I think, how often is that my default way of thinking about the things in my life? It's all mine.

[20 : 21] And this is the seed of covetousness. Right? The seed of covetousness, the thing that gives rise to the lie is, all of this is mine and it belongs to me. It's rightfully my possession. And this parable shatters that illusion like a hammer striking glass.

God says, fool, this night your soul will be required of you. And all of this stuff, whose will it be then? This man's going to die in his sleep.

You don't have to believe in God to believe in what we all know to be true. That one day all of us are going to die a premature death.

And God says, tonight, tonight is your night. The truth is, we never arrive. We never get over the horizon.

Because our wealth is not ours. You know, we don't own anything in this world. The hard truth is, we don't even own our own souls. We have no control over when that day is going to come.

[21 : 33] And that's a very hard truth to swallow. But it's the kind of truth that will begin to set you free if you let it sink down into your heart. Because how can I, or why should I covet something that can never be mine?

That never belonged to me to begin with. Because everything in truth belongs to God. So that's the first thing. We have to recognize the hard truth about our wealth. It's not ours. The second thing that will begin to transform the relationship that we have with our stuff.

Is to begin to rest in God's abundant generosity. Jesus says, consider the ravens. And you can imagine, they're standing there in a field. And he looks around, he points out to the ravens.

And he says, consider the ravens. They don't plant at all, and yet God provides for them. And then he points to the, you know, this area. There's gorgeous wildflowers. All different varieties of wildflowers.

Wildflowers that grow uncultivated on the hillsides. So he points to some of those wildflowers. And you can imagine him saying, consider the lilies. They neither toil nor spin.

[22 : 38] And yet I tell you, even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now the reference to Solomon is not an accident. Solomon spent seven years building the temple of the Lord, which was the dwelling place of God.

Seven years. How long did Solomon spend building his own house? Thirteen years. How much more time and energy and money do we pour into building up our own situation, our own financial security, our own portfolio, right?

Our own retirement account than we do on the things of the Lord. That's the question that that's meant to provoke. And yet Jesus is saying, look, a common wildflower is more beautiful than anything Solomon ever built.

A scarcity mentality tends to focus on what we don't have. Jesus invites us into the opposite mindset.

What you might think of as an abundance mindset. Jesus invites us to focus instead on God's abundant generosity all around us. He says, look all around you.

[23 : 50] Your life is filled with blessing. It is filled with things that God has given you. It is filled with beauty that you didn't create. It is filled with amazing things that are here simply for your enjoyment.

Just a stroll through a field. Just an afternoon hike will remind you of that. It's filled with God's generosity. Focus on that.

And he says, also recognize that as beautiful as all of this is, in God's heart it's worth nothing to him compared to you. That when God looks at you, he sees the most valuable, most precious treasure that he's ever created.

And that will begin to make this illusion of covetousness evaporate. Like mist being burned away by the morning sun. And you say, well how do I know that I'm worth so much to God?

I'm not sure I am. Sometimes I feel like God just sort of puts up with me. But most of the time he's disappointed in me. And that's why it's so important to see what Jesus says next. Beyond all the blessings around us, Jesus says the most important thing of all.

[25 : 03] Luke chapter 12 verse 32. He says, fear not little flock for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. He's saying that God's greatest delight is to give you something that can never be taken away from you.

To give you his kingdom. To give you a place in his eternal kingdom. And God doesn't do it. He doesn't roll his eyes and say, well I guess I'll let you in. Right?

You meet the minimum standard. God delights to give it to you. Because you're worth that much to him. And we see Jesus Christ, the one who's teaching this.

Not long after he says these words. Jesus Christ to whom all things in the universe belong. Willingly gives it up and dies on the cross so that God can give us a place in his kingdom.

Which is the greatest act of generosity ever committed in history. And when you know in your heart that God has freely and joyfully given you everything you need for eternity.

[26 : 08] If you know that God loves me, he values me, and he's given me everything I need for eternity. That begins to transform your heart. And it gives you a kind of security that can never be taken away from you.

And if you have that kind of eternal security. You know that everything that matters is yours. That enables you to do the third thing. Right? So we have to recognize the truth about our wealth.

We have to rest in God's abundant generosity. And then number three. We then begin out of God's generosity in our life. We begin to cultivate a lifestyle of generosity.

It flows out of God's generosity. Verse 33. Sell your possessions. Give to the needy. Provide yourself with money bags that don't grow old. With a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.

He says, then you will begin to invest in things that are eternal. Rather than things that will end up in a trash dump. Generosity and a lifestyle of generosity cures covetousness.

[27 : 13] Because if you think about it, generosity and covetousness cannot coexist in your heart. Because every time you give something away, it reminds you that it was never yours to begin with.

And the only way for your heart to learn that is for you to do that again and again and again. To re-habituate and re-condition your heart.

To feel differently about the things in your life. It's not mine. It's God's. It was never mine. It's not mine. It's not mine. So let's bring all of this together. For all of us who have a dysfunctional relationship with our possessions.

Me included. This is very challenging for me to prepare for this. The hope is that Jesus is actually able to transform the relationship that we have with our things.

He can actually set us free. It requires that we recognize the hard truth that it doesn't belong to us to begin with. It requires that we begin to rest in God's abundant generosity.

[28 : 14] Just take time to focus on the incredible blessings in your life. The greatest generosity of all, of course, being the cross. And then finally to begin to find ways to cultivate generosity in our daily lives.

And, of course, all of this requires tremendous trust in God and his goodness. And, you know, as we think about this home campaign, which is totally new ground for our church, new territory for us, this is going to be, when all is said and done, an extraordinary act of trust.

Because all that is good and true and beautiful about our community has come from him. And moving forward, it means trusting that the God who has given us all of these gifts will continue to bless us and provide for us down the road.

It's only going to happen if God does it. So it's this new season of learning to trust God to continue to be the good, loving God that he has always been for us.

And, you know, this whole idea of trust reminds me of the time when our boys, who are now seven and nine, they're great swimmers, but not too long ago they were learning how to swim.

[29 : 22] And they mostly learned how to swim in this lake that we sometimes go over the summers. And I remember the first time that our oldest son, who's nine now, I remember the first time that he got out on the dock.

His name is Riley. And I remember the first time I got in the lake and I swam around to the front of the dock. And he comes out on the dock in his little bathing suit. And he's kind of clinging there to the pole.

And I say, okay, Riley, now what I want you to do is I want you to let go and I want you to jump in, okay? And he just stands there. Right? Just kind of stands there kind of shivering. Right? And I say, okay, now, Riley, do you trust me?

And he goes, yeah, Dad, I trust you. And I say, okay, now you want to let go and jump in now? And he goes, nope. I trust you. I trust you, but there's no way I'm getting in that water.

Yeah, I love that. I think about it all the time because I think that that's in many ways what our relationship with God is like. Right? Our Heavenly Father is sitting there with his arms open wide. He is inviting us to dive into this ocean of blessing and abundance that he has given us.

[30 : 26] And he's saying, do you trust me? Right? But, of course, in order to actually trust, we have to let go of the dock. As long as you're holding on to the dock, you may love the idea of trusting your Father.

But only when you let go does it actually become trust. So the question that I want to leave us all with as we go into a time of prayer is this. What dock are you clinging to in your life?

What is the dock that you're clinging to? What are the docks that you're clinging to? And how would your life change if you chose to trust God to let go and then to dive in?

Let's pray. Lord, we love you. First, because you've loved us. Everything that we are, everything that we do, all of the things that we most treasure are gifts of yours.

Because at some point, you entered into each of our lives, Lord. And you poured your grace and your love and your mercy into us because you're generous. And we pray, Lord, as we look forward that you would make our hearts grow in us a desire to reflect that generosity and that love in how we relate to one another and how we love this city, Lord.

[31 : 52] We pray this, Lord, again, not only because it would be good for us and good for this city, but because it would reflect your glory, Lord. And the radically countercultural love and generosity that you've shown the world.

And we pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.