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Ask the bigger questions

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Being rich towards God

A cost benefit analysis of following Jesus:

What does Jesus require of me? Is it worth it?

- Session 3

To consider what it means to be "rich towards God" - from Luke 12:13-34

The words of Jesus

Luke 12:13-34

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "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."

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 splendor 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.

Q1. Why does God call the rich man a fool? Isn't he just being financially savvy?

- Society teaches us that if you don't look after your own interests, no one else will.
- You can save and save, and ignore God – but when you die you can't take your wealth with you.
- The problem with greed is that wealth gives us independence and self-sufficiency. We think we don't need God, we rely on ourselves, we seek our satisfaction in our possessions, and we fail to be thankful towards the one who gave it to us in the first place. The rich man may have planted and received a bumper crop, but it was God who caused the bumper crop.

Q2. Does being rich toward God mean giving away all our money and possessions?

- It is an attitude that we have towards God – that we treat him as the maker and giver of all things. God cares about our heart, and it's about having a right relationship with him – treating God as God.
- We can tell whether we are being rich toward God, or whether we are being greedy by how we deal with our money and possessions. Are we able to give it away or give it up? Are we able to be content with what we have?

Q3. What causes us to be anxious?

- Not knowing about the future
- Not knowing what we will eat or wear? What about in terms of living in Sydney today? (We can discuss that for many of us it is the lifestyle or experiences that we are anxious about, e.g. overseas travel, fine dining ...)
- Although Jesus is talking about possessions, is it possible to extrapolate this to status anxiety and approval from others? (e.g. what others think about us)

Q4. Is Jesus saying it is wrong to be anxious?

- Note that Jesus does not condemn anxiousness; rather he tells them "do not worry". Jesus is kind towards us, knowing that we do worry, but he gives us good reasons why we should not worry.
- The problem of being anxious is that at the heart of it, it is a lack of trusting a good and able God who cares for his people. (We don't trust God is good, and/or we don't trust that God is able.)
- When we worry about something, our focus is on the think we are worrying about – it is our priority – it takes up our time and energy and we make sacrifices for it. God disappears from the picture.

Q5. What is the link between the two passages – why does Jesus talk about greed, and then turns to tell his disciples not to worry?

- Note the link: Then Jesus said..."Therefore I tell you"...
- When you're busy looking after your own interests, your focus is on those things: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". If your focus is on those

things as opposed to God, you will experience the consequences of the fool. So focus on God, trust him – and in doing so, don't worry about what you will eat or wear...

Q6. What can we do about our worries?

- "Seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well". Seeking God's kingdom means to seek to live with God as our king – living in right relationship with him, trusting and relying upon him as the one who is willing and able to provide, and to recognise that he is the powerful one who is able to give and take away.
- If we don't look to our interests, who will? – God will.
- It doesn't mean we won't worry anymore, but we take our worries to God.

Grace's story

Grace is a ministry apprentice at City Bible Forum. She works part-time as a paralegal.

From a young age, my family called me a "master worrier". I was anxious about whether people liked me, whether I would do well in exams, and I was even anxious about how we were going financially as a family.

When I was around 11 years old, my father gave me a book called "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living". Unfortunately, while it is said to be very helpful for many people, it didn't work for me but only caused me more stress. All I remembered from it was "prepare to accept the worst" (which just gave me more feelings of impending doom) and fill your mind with good thoughts (which made me very tired after a few weeks of trying). I didn't get up to the point where it said the perfect way to conquer worry was to pray – and even so I certainly wouldn't have trusted that God would respond or look after my best interests.

As I entered university, I worried because everyone else seemed to do much better than I did, and everyone appeared much more confident than I felt. I had joined a Bible study group to make friends and understand more about what I proclaimed to be my faith. But towards the end of my first semester I was thinking of giving that up, as I planned to put all my efforts into studying harder even though I was already studying pretty hard.

Thankfully, a Christian girl who was meeting with me encouraged me to keep finding out more about the God that would take care of me. Although I didn't quite believe her, I respected her and kept going. As I got to learn more and more about God's character and that he cared so much for me that he sent his only son Jesus to die for me – taking the punishment that I deserved for turning away from him so that I could live in right relationship with him – I slowly came to trust that God genuinely had my best interests at heart.

Did my worry then simply disappear? I wish. But it is a constant struggle. When it came to looking for a job after university, I was anxious to the point of tears for fear of not getting what I wanted, even when I told myself it would be ok because God would look after me. Now that I'm working part-time at City Bible Forum and part-time at a legal office, I'm already worrying about the next step and whether I will make the "right choice". I don't think my worry will ever completely go away, but I have learnt to take my worries to God, to ask him to help me overcome my

doubt of him, and I find my anxiety becoming lesser and lesser as I learn to trust him more and more.

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