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~ **On Guard Against Greed** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Luke 11:37-12:1-21.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Luke 11:37-12:21 NASB	Luke 11:37-12:21 NLT
<p>³⁷ Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee *asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined <i>at the table</i>. ³⁸ When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. ³⁹ But the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.</p> <p>⁴² “But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every <i>kind of</i> garden herb, and <i>yet</i> disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over <i>them</i> are unaware of it.”</p> <p>⁴⁵ One of the lawyers *said to Him in reply, “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.” ⁴⁶ But He said, “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and <i>it was</i> your fathers <i>who</i> killed them. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build <i>their tombs</i>. ⁴⁹ For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and <i>some</i> of them they will kill and <i>some</i> they will persecute, ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’ ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering.”</p> <p>⁵³ When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many</p>	<p>³⁷ As Jesus was speaking, one of the Pharisees invited him home for a meal. So he went in and took his place at the table. ³⁸ His host was amazed to see that he sat down to eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony required by Jewish custom. ³⁹ Then the Lord said to him, “You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and wickedness! ⁴⁰ Fools! Didn’t God make the inside as well as the outside? ⁴¹ So clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor, and you will be clean all over.</p> <p>⁴² “What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore justice and the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.</p> <p>⁴³ “What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you love to sit in the seats of honor in the synagogues and receive respectful greetings as you walk in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Yes, what sorrow awaits you! For you are like hidden graves in a field. People walk over them without knowing the corruption they are stepping on.”</p> <p>⁴⁵ “Teacher,” said an expert in religious law, “you have insulted us, too, in what you just said.”</p> <p>⁴⁶ “Yes,” said Jesus, “what sorrow also awaits you experts in religious law! For you crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden. ⁴⁷ What sorrow awaits you! For you build monuments for the prophets your own ancestors killed long ago. ⁴⁸ But in fact, you stand as witnesses who agree with what your ancestors did. They killed the prophets, and you join in their crime by building the monuments! ⁴⁹ This is what God in his wisdom said about you: ‘I will send prophets and apostles to them, but they will kill some and persecute the others.’</p> <p>⁵⁰ “As a result, this generation will be held responsible for the murder of all God’s prophets from the creation of the world— ⁵¹ from the murder of Abel to the murder of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the</p>

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subjects, ⁵⁴plotting against Him to catch *Him* in something He might say.

^{12:1} Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

⁸ “I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. ⁹ But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

¹¹ “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”

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

sanctuary. Yes, it will certainly be charged against this generation.

⁵² “What sorrow awaits you experts in religious law! For you remove the key to knowledge from the people. You don’t enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from entering.”

⁵³ As Jesus was leaving, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees became hostile and tried to provoke him with many questions. ⁵⁴ They wanted to trap him into saying something they could use against him.

^{12:1} Meanwhile, the crowds grew until thousands were milling about and stepping on each other. Jesus turned first to his disciples and warned them, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees—their hypocrisy. ² The time is coming when everything that is covered up will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. ³ Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear!

⁴ “Dear friends, don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot do any more to you after that. ⁵ But I’ll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into hell. Yes, he’s the one to fear.

⁶ “What is the price of five sparrows—two copper coins? Yet God does not forget a single one of them.

⁷ And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.

⁸ “I tell you the truth, everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, the Son of Man will also acknowledge in the presence of God’s angels. ⁹ But anyone who denies me here on earth will be denied before God’s angels. ¹⁰ Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

¹¹ “And when you are brought to trial in the synagogues and before rulers and authorities, don’t worry about how to defend yourself or what to say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what needs to be said.”

¹³ Then someone called from the crowd, “Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father’s estate with me.”

¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?” ¹⁵ Then he said, “Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”

¹⁶ Then he told them a story: “A rich man had a fertile farm

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<p>have prepared for yourself?</p> <p>²¹ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”</p>	<p>that produced fine crops. ¹⁷ He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’ ¹⁸ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. ¹⁹ And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’</p> <p>²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’</p> <p>²¹ “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”</p>
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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

The following insights are from Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*.

- The man in the crowd calls him “teacher” or “rabbi”. A rabbi would be expected to rule on civil affairs.
- In the original language, Jesus addressed him as “O, man” which would be a sign of disapproval. Jesus is asked to be a judge, but he refuses to go along with it.
- The fact that the man is asking Jesus to side with him in the dispute shows that a relationship has been broken. There is a play on words in the Greek language. Jesus has not come to be a divider (*meristes*). He has come to be a reconciler (*mesistes*).
- When Jesus says, “Who made me a judge over you?” the word “you” is in the plural. Jesus realizes he is being asked to be a judge between the man and his brother.
- Concerning this story, Ambrose said, “the rich man has storage available in the mouths of the needy.” Augustine said, “a man stores grain on a damp floor and needs to move it above,” i.e. to heaven. See Ecclesiastes 5:10.
- In this society, men dialogued with one another. They did their thinking in public and make decisions after spending hours with friends talking. But this man had no friends. He did his dialoguing with himself only. He was rich enough that he did not need anyone else. And not needing anyone else, he comes to a decision by himself which usually leads to ruin.
- He has now come to the great goal of his life and he makes a speech but no one is there to listen. He can only address himself, “Soul”. The Hebrew word for soul, *nephesh* refers to the whole person. He believes he has met his complete needs by his material possessions.
- The Greek has four words for fool – *anoetos*, mindless; *asophos* – without wisdom; *moros* – moron; *aphron* – fool/stupid. The last two are the strongest. The rich man thought the many things (*euphoreo*) produced the good life (*euphron*) but it really produced stupidity (*aphron*).

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These insights are from *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* by Malina and Rohrbaugh

- Jesus speaks of secret things being exposed in verses 1-3. Most things were done in public in the ancient world and privacy was viewed with suspicion.
- Hypocrisy meant a perverse teaching of Torah.
- The two coins used to buy five sparrows were assarions. An assarion was 1/16 of a denarius which was a day's wage.
- Rivalry among brothers was endemic to the ancient world.
- An underlying cultural assumption is that the brother asking Jesus to intervene is not a victim of injustice but is trying to get more than his fair share. An honorable man is interested only in what is rightfully his.
- Another underlying cultural assumption is that anyone with a surplus will share with others to avoid community shame. Anyone acting like the man in the story would be considered a fool.

3. Answer these reflective questions.

The first part of this story is from Luke 11:37-53. How would you describe the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees?

In Luke 12:1-3, Jesus warned against the yeast of the Pharisees. What is “the yeast” of the Pharisees? How can verses 2-3 protect us from it?

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In Luke 12:4-7, Jesus gave comforting words for those who were faced with real dangers. How did these words bring comfort? What fears do you face in your life? How do these verses bring comfort to your life?

What do you think was the main point about the story of the rich man?

Jesus told the crowds to be on guard against every form of greed. In what ways can greed show up in a person? Do you have any greed in your life?

What does it mean to be rich towards God?
