

Have you ever stopped to notice the things that you worry about? If you were to make a list of the last three things you worried about, what would be on it? I ask this question because most of us live fairly protected lives. We have a place to live. We have enough food to eat. We are not in danger of starvation or homelessness or dying from a simple infection because we can't afford antibiotics. We are insulated from the dangers of extreme poverty that afflict about 689 million people worldwide. That's almost 10% of the world's population, just in case you were doing math in your head.

The problems most of us complain about are a little less life-threatening. In fact, our problems are so minimal in comparison to the rest of the world that they have earned a strange nickname: "FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS." *First World Problems are inconveniences, not threats.* They come from having too much of everything and not enough gratitude for anything. **All of us are familiar with Third World Problems: poverty, hunger, lack of adequate health care, etc.** *But what about First World problems-WHAT ARE THEY??*

A blog writer nicknamed Cheeky Kid collected a list of "**100 Funny First World Problems.**" I'm only going to read a few of these. I won't ask you to raise your hand if you've ever worried or complained about any of these. But I think most of us will recognize ourselves somewhere in this list. Have you ever made any of these complaints?

- My house is such a mess! There's stuff everywhere.
- My walk-in closet is not big enough.
- The portion sizes in this restaurant are too big.
- There's nothing good on TV right now—EVEN THOUGH YOU HAVE CABLE...
- I can't believe I bought a toaster with no bagel setting.

Believe me, those are only problems in the First World!

Our Scripture Lesson today is about a man who suffered from First World problems. And though we may not have the same problem as the man in this story, we may have the same mindset he did. **And according to God, that is the biggest problem of all.** *So, I hope you'll open your mind as you hear this story today from Luke.*

Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of people, and someone in the crowd says to him, "**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.**"

Jesus is so wise here. He could have made money, or goats, or vineyards—whatever counted as half of this man's inheritance—appear out of thin air. He could have easily solved this man's problem. The man would have been thrilled. The crowd would have been impressed. **But no one would have learned anything about God.** And that is the greatest need any of us have in life. Jesus knows that. We need to remember that the next time we question why God doesn't solve our temporary problems. **Jesus didn't come to make our life better; HE CAME TO LEAD US FROM DEATH TO LIFE.** In the Book of John, chapter 17 verse 3, John writes, "**Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**" Read through the first four books of the New Testament—the Gospels. When Jesus doesn't give people what they want in life, it's because he's about to give them what they REALLY NEED. **A greater understanding of God, the Source of true Life.**

Back to our Scripture lesson. "**So (Jesus) replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' 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.'**" "**And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'**"

"**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. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'**" "**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?'**"

"**This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.**"

Author Martha Beckman tells of dipping out a bowl of ice cream for her granddaughter. Beckman asked, “*How much would you like?*” The little girl thought for a second, then said, “*Give me too much!*”

I can relate to her granddaughter. Can there ever be too much of a good thing? Apparently, there can be. Too much of a good thing can be a bad thing. **Epecially if the good things we pursue distract us from the life God intends for us.**

There is something unique in this story in Luke that I can’t find in any other parables in the New Testament. **This is the only time in the Gospels when God directly calls someone a FOOL.** In Jesus’ stories, there are lots of people who do foolish things. **But this is the only one of Jesus’ stories in which God speaks up and calls someone a FOOL to his face.** That’s pretty serious stuff. **The Greek word used here for “FOOL” literally means “without inner perspective.”** The Bible contains many vss. about FOOLISH LIVING versus WISE LIVING. And the foolish behavior almost always boils down to living without the perspective of God. Fools live only for themselves and only for the moment. *Do you want to reach the end of your life and have God call you a fool?*

I DO NOT!! **So, let’s take a serious look at the difference between the fool’s perspective and God’s perspective.**

The first thing we learn about FOOLS is: the fool saw his wealth as a storage problem; God saw his wealth as a mindset problem. Only in the First World do folks have to rent warehouses to store the overflow of stuff. If you have a storage problem, you might also have a mindset problem.

Author Joy Davidman was raised in a prosperous family. She was an atheist until sometime in her thirties when she became a follower of Jesus. In her book *Smoke on the Mountain*, she wrote, “*There is . . . only one way to stop covetousness and the destruction of body and soul that spring from covetousness, and that is to want God so much that we can’t be bothered with excessive wants for anything else.*”

There is only one way to change our mindset of more wanting, more wealth, more stuff. And that is in wanting God so much that we can’t be bothered with lesser things.

Our love for God creates two changes in our mindset that keep us from living like a fool. The first change in mindset is an increased sense of gratitude for the things that money can’t buy, like love and hope and peace and joy. The gifts of the Holy Spirit that come with finding new life in Jesus Christ.

The second change in mindset is a deep desire to share God’s love with others in practical ways. That’s why you will find hospitals and orphanages and homeless shelters and soup kitchens all over the world that were started by Christians.

I see both these mindset shifts in the life of a man named Joshua Becker. Becker was a pastor in Vermont. A few years ago, he was cleaning out his garage, piling stuff in his driveway. Becker’s son was playing in the front yard alone. And his neighbor struck up a friendly conversation with him. But in the midst of the chitchat, Becker made an offhand comment along the lines of, “The more stuff you own, the more your stuff owns you.”

And the neighbor replied seriously, “Maybe you don’t need to own all this stuff.” That comment really stuck with Joshua Becker. He noticed his young son playing alone in the yard. And he wondered why he was working so hard to clean up his stuff when he could have been playing with his son. Not long afterwards, Becker and his wife, Kim, committed to living a minimalist lifestyle, giving away most of their stuff and cutting back on shopping. **Since that time, Becker has written best-selling books on the minimalist lifestyle.** And the Beckers have started a non-profit organization called the **Hope Effect** to build family-style orphanages in Mexico and Honduras.

One comment changed Joshua Becker’s mindset: “*Maybe you don’t need to own all this stuff.*” Once he and his wife began giving away their stuff, they discovered an even greater desire and ability to help those in need. They gained God’s perspective on their wealth. Generosity toward the poor is in perfect alignment with the character of God. And aligning our mindset and actions with the character of God is a sure way to avoid foolish living. **So, the first reason God called this man a fool was this: he saw his wealth as a storage problem whereas God saw his wealth as a mindset problem.**

The second thing that made this man a FOOL... was that he talked to himself about his money situation rather than talking to God about it. Let's read verses 17-19 of our Bible story again: *"(The rich man) thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 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. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"*

The rich man proved himself to be a fool because he lived as if there were NO God. HE LIVED AS IF THE HIGHEST PURPOSE OF HIS LIFE WAS TO PURSUE HIS OWN PLEASURE—NOTHING MORE!!!

In reality, God is our Creator. We were made by God's hands and in God's image and for God's purposes. Wise people know this and they daily work to align their values, priorities, desires and actions with the character and will of God.

Tricia Mayer is the Senior Director of Research at Microsoft Corporation. She is also a follower of Jesus. In her senior position at one of the world's most successful companies, Mayer says she has seen how the "shackles of wealth choke the life out of people." In contrast, Mayer and her family have found that generous giving leads to joy and freedom. Author Randy Alcorn interviewed Tricia Mayer, and two quotes from the interview really stand out to me. She said, *"Being loved by God and knowing Him is to have riches beyond measure. Having all the money you need on this earth is merely having another full-time job. There is no comparison."* And the second quote is, *"Every time we give, we acknowledge that everything we have has been given to us by God. He is our lifeline, our source for everything."*

"He is our lifeline, our source for everything." Tricia Mayer follows Jesus' teaching and example in the way she uses her wealth because she knows it is actually God's wealth that she is giving back to God's work.

AND THAT BRINGS ME TO THE FINAL THING THAT MADE THIS MAN A "FOOL:" he saw his wealth only as an opportunity for pleasure; God saw his wealth as an opportunity for GIVING. Look at verses 18-21 again: *"Then (the fool) 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. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"* *"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?'"* *"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."*

I cannot stress this enough: every blessing from God is an opportunity for greater GIVING. We have an opportunity to partner with God in meeting the needs and healing the hurts of others. We have the opportunity to be the presence of Jesus in real life. *And we do that by sharing with others. But we also do that by giving ourselves away.* If God gave you strength and health, use it to help those who are sick or impaired. If God gave you love, use it to help the lonely or rejected. If God gave you influence, use it to help the powerless or the oppressed. There is always some way to give to the work of the Lord.

Dr. Scott Addison was a successful physician in a family practice in Wisconsin. He and his family enjoyed the rewards that his success and security brought them. And then one day, Dr. Addison was asked to take on the role of the director of Global Partners Health Network, a Christian medical ministry that operates hospitals in Haiti, Zambia and Sierra Leone, and sets up temporary clinics in some of the poorest communities in the world.

This new position came with new challenges Dr. Addison had never faced before. Sometimes the demands seem overwhelming. But Dr. Addison knows that God gave him this opportunity to use his resources for a greater purpose. He says, *"You get one shot on earth. You want to do what you can to advance the kingdom. Whatever it costs to get yourself in a position where you're really using your gifts to serve God is well worth it."*

We don't want to reach the end of LIFE and discover that we have wasted it. OR discover that God had a greater plan and purpose for US and WE ignored it. **So how do We see God's PLAN, God's VIEW for our lives? By giving OUR life to God today. By accepting Jesus as OUR Lord and Savior and commit to following Jesus DAILY.** God has greater plans for our lives than the pursuit of the things that bring us pleasure. But we will never know what those plans are until we TRUST Him with our lives AND TURN OUR LIVES OVER TO HIM. ARE YOU READY? Amen.