



**LC STUDY GUIDE**  
**On the Road Series**  
 The Passage: Luke 12:13-21  
 Week 1 (Feb 21-27)

**Intro:** Welcome to the first Lenten Study in our "On the Road" series. We will be rooted in the Gospel of Luke—reading, processing, and gleaning from the parables Jesus told as he made his way to Jerusalem and eventually, to the cross.

Lent is a time of reflection and preparation. One passage that helps us do both is the Parable of the Rich Fool. Here we find a man who has worked hard on his farm and has become so successful that he has to build bigger silos. And Jesus has a problem with that. At first sight, we might find this perplexing, but a deeper look gives us perspective—hence the power of the parables.

## **Luke 12:13-21**

**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."

**Context:**

Jesus is traveling with his disciples through Samaria and soon after will be on his way to Jerusalem. On the road, his ministry is on full display. He's been performing miraculous signs and wonders, rebuking the Pharisees, and teaching his followers and his observers in the form of direct words and also with parables.

We pick up the story in the second half of Luke 12 when a brother comes up to Jesus and demands he share his inheritance. To briefly summarize ancient Jewish inheritance rights, we look to Deuteronomy 21:15-17. Here we see the inheritance was divided three ways, and the first son always got a double portion.

However, there are scholars who have theorized based on secondary, rabbinical readings (and perhaps their own speculation) that some rabbis were teaching their Jewish male audience to split their inheritance equally. This could have been as a result of the exile and the current Roman occupation—there simply was not as much to divide and so a double-portion would leave too little to the younger sons.

Though we have no concrete evidence, perhaps this is why the man in the crowd asks Jesus to tell his brother to divide their inheritance equally.

**O** – What do you find interesting in verses 13-14?

*(It seems odd that a man seeking justice in what we assume is his fair share of the family inheritance gets the cold shoulder from Jesus. Jesus' initial answer is terse but then he moves to a voice of cautionary wisdom.)*

**I** – Clearly Jesus is not enthused to mediate the brothers' inheritance. But why do you think Jesus uses this as a teaching moment warning against greed and materialism?

*(Throughout Jesus' ministry, he pushes back on the pursuits and understandings of the world and flesh. Here he continues to press the themes of not living for the things of this world but for the ways of God. To paraphrase Jesus, "You think it's about the inheritance. Let me tell you a story of a man who had so much that he God regarded him a fool and took his life.")*

**A** – Jesus warns his followers about making life too much about the "abundance of possessions." In our modern, consumer lives, we have possessions that fall into a variety of categories ranging from provision to convenience to status and others. How do we find the balance of having and using possessions and not falling into the traps of materialism, self-reliance, and being distracted from the ways of God?

**O** – Looking at verses 16-21, what do you notice about the barn-builder/rich man?

*(He was already wealthy before the big harvest yield, implying that he was already without great need. This harvest was big even by his standards. According to the text, it never occurred to him to share his abundance with others. He relished the thought of retirement.)*

I – It seems excessive for God to call the rich man/barn builder "a fool" in the parable and then take his life. Why not merely knock down his barns or send locusts to eat the harvest? Why is Jesus' parable so severe?

*(The nature of parables is to make them severe enough to consider and remember their intended lesson. We ought to also remember that this is a fictitious account and not a guide of how God actually interacts with us. We don't actively see Him striking down people who yield successful gains in their lives. Again, the parable is both a warning and a calling how to live.)*

\* We are using Eugene Peterson's book, *Tell it Slant* as a resource in understanding Luke's parables. Peterson comments:

"The story that Jesus tells ignores the man's 'rights' and skewers the man's greed. But the story does it by indirection. Will the man out of the crowd recognize himself in the story of the barn builder?.... For a parable is not an explanation. A parable is not an illustration. We cannot look at a parable as a spectator and expect to get it. The parable does not make a thing easier; it makes it harder by requiring participation, by entering the story, in this case by taking on the role of the barn builder." (pp. 59-60)

**A** – We need to first be disturbed by the parable in order to take it seriously enough to consider its meaning. When understood this way, how do we wrestle with what concerns us and with Jesus' meaning?

**A** – Peterson's The Message translation interprets verses 20-21 like this:

"Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods – who gets it?'

That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."

The parable raises cautions against pursuing material possessions and self-reliance as the sole means to the end, versus living a life that seeks God first. The sin of the barn-builder was not that he yielded the abundant crop but how his self-reliance ignored God. As we reflect on our own self-reliance, are there areas in life in which we have not sought the ways of God first?

**Central Point – Jesus' parable for the barn-builder is a warning against self-reliance and the pursuit of material possessions in this life and it's also calling to seek the ways of God first.**

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?)
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching" rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.