



HOW MUCH DOES A MAN NEED?

January 2016

"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. 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."

Luke 12:16-21

This parable sprang to mind as I struggled to reduce the quantity of my belongings – books, pictures, keepsakes, my father's paintings, all the things I've collected over the past seventy years (forty of those in this house). It's impossible to move the contents of a big house into a much smaller condo without giving or throwing a lot of things away. I had to face the question: How much do I really need? Is all this "stuff" really necessary to be happy?

The farmer in Jesus' parable made me think a bit about my dilemma. He had an abundant crop and prepared to store it in bigger and better barns to hold it all. He stored it so that he would then be able to take life easy. What was wrong with that? He was providing for himself alone –

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thinking of how he himself could benefit. It was all about “me.” He did not think about what God might want him to do. He did not consider how he could help others by sharing his wealth.

Don’t we all have things we love that would be hard to part with after living a long life? What can we do with it all? Wouldn’t a life with less be simpler? But we’re human and we want to hang on to all we have gathered. It truly is hard to let go. The years’ worth of photography I’ve done is the biggest problem. But, burdened by the great amount of work, I look at the parable and think, “I don’t want to keep it all for myself like the farmer did.”

What’s the answer, Lord? How can I use my photos to benefit more than myself alone?

There is another story I’m reminded of, a bit different from what we’ve been talking about here, but one that is worth sharing. It also deals with greed:

Leo Tolstoy wrote about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a fantastic offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in one day. The only catch to the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown.

Early the next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run, knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost. As the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of the story was: *How Much Land does a Man Need?*

This is a good lesson for so many of us who long for more and more. Gathering more. Keeping more. It’s a lesson for those of us who have to downsize, reducing collections of precious things—or simply de-cluttering an overflowing household. What do we really need? How much do we need? What’s important? What will happen to our belongings when we leave this earth? Will they be valued?

There’s no question that decisions like these are difficult to make. We need to discuss them with our loved ones. And as we sort through our things, consider their value—their value to us and their value to God. We need to talk with God about it. He can help us decide.

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(photo contributed)