

August 10, 2025

Pastor Delaney Beh “Soul Investment”

First Congregational Church

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Let us pray: *Everlasting and ever-loving God, thank you for the blessing of this day and the gift that is coming together as Christ's body to hear Your word. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to You and invoke Your Spirit in this place. Amen.*

I know this story might add a little fuel to the narratives about how spoiled my generation is, but I'll admit it: I received an allowance growing up. Rest assured, it wasn't just handed to us for nothing. My brother and I had the opportunity to earn a few bucks each week by learning necessary household skills: doing laundry, washing dishes, and picking up after ourselves. Although my parents appreciated the help, this system ultimately had a deeper purpose. They wanted us to learn how to manage money with intentionality. The handful of dollars we earned each week weren't just to accumulate in a piggy bank and spend at will. Instead, we had a set of 3 jars, marked: Save, Serve, and Self. Into the **Save** jar, went 70% — stored away for big future expenses, like cars and college (back when those still felt like they were light-years away). **Serve** got 20%, which we were expected to give away — whether to the local food pantry, the animal shelter, or most often, to our church. And the remaining 10% went into the **Self** jar — which for me funded more than a few summertime trips to Dairy Queen.

As I've grown older, I've become increasingly grateful for the financial wisdom baked into that simple system. But I've also come to believe that what my parents were instilling in us went far beyond mere money management. They were shaping our posture toward what we *have*, what we *give*, and what we *desire* — values that are far deeper than budgets and bank accounts. And yes, I know, *everyone loves talking about money in church*. But today's Scripture passage isn't just about finances. It's about **formation** — about the values we're cultivating, the voices we're listening to, and the kind of investment Jesus calls us to make with our very souls.

Our scripture today starts with someone who thinks that questions about money and resources are just about those things in themselves. A man interrupts Jesus while He's teaching, asking Him to settle a financial dispute with his brother: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide our inheritance with me.” Basically: *Jesus, tell him to give me what's mine*. It's a request that feels pretty reasonable on the surface — clear, direct, practical. Honestly, I think a lot of us would love for Jesus to give us that kind of straightforward answer when it comes to money. *Just tell me what I'm supposed to do*.

But, Jesus being Jesus makes it clear that His job isn't to pick sides — it's to offer a bigger picture. To teach. To reframe the question entirely. And to offer a way of seeing that often conflicts with the way the world teaches us to operate. He uses this man's request to instruct the crowd to avoid, “Greed in all its forms.” So right away, we see this is about more than just wealth. It's not just about money or stuff — it's about our relationship to those things.

Jesus is setting the stage for a story that's not just about hoarding possessions, though that's part of it, but about what wealth reveals in our hearts. The parable that follows challenges us to ask a bigger question: **What do we want and why do we want it?** Because while wealth points to *things*, greed points to a *mindset*. An inner posture versus an outer state. So if we really want to understand what Jesus is saying in this passage, we've got to look past just the size of the farmer's barns. We need to pay attention to the *attitudes* he carries. The way he thinks, the way he talks, and the direction his heart is facing.

Ultimately, I think there are four things the farmer fails to do when confronted with his abundant crops. Firstly, *he fails to seek counsel*. When faced with the question, “*What will I do?*” the farmer quickly settles for the first answer that comes to mind — *store it all away*. He doesn’t consult any friends or fellow farmers. He doesn’t pray about it. He just decides. He talks only to himself, and takes his own advice as final. There’s no seeking wisdom. No pause. No reflection. Just a self-contained echo chamber of one.

Secondly, *he fails to acknowledge that he didn’t get here alone*. I’m sure you noticed how many times he uses the words ‘I’ and ‘my’ in just a couple verses — “my harvest,” “my bins,” “my grain,” “I’ll say to myself.” There’s no recognition of the workers who surely helped him plant and harvest, no gratitude toward the land itself or the God who made it fruitful. Just “me, myself, and I.”

In line with this self-centered attitude, thirdly, he *fails to consider generosity*. His first impulse is to store his abundance away and then kick up his feet — to eat, drink, and be merry. Now, there’s nothing wrong with saving or planning ahead; a little wise preparation can be a good and godly thing. However, what we encounter in this parable is someone who can feed himself for many years, and not once does he stop to ask: “*Who else could this help?*”. There’s no curiosity about the needs in his community, no sense of responsibility beyond himself. His abundance becomes a private luxury rather than a shared blessing.

Finally, *he fails to be rich in God*. That’s how Jesus sums up the entire parable: “*This is how it will be for anyone who accumulates riches for themselves but is not rich in God.*” The farmer has everything he thinks he needs — full barns, years of security, the chance to relax and enjoy life. But when his life is demanded of him, it becomes clear just how little he actually invested in what matters most.

To be rich in God is to live with an awareness that our lives are not just about us — not just about our comfort, our future, our plans. It means seeing ourselves as part of a wider community, a greater story, a kingdom where generosity and grace rule the day. You can have everything, but without connection to humanity, to interdependence, to the God who gives you these blessings, you end up with nothing.

These four failures show us what greed really does. Greed doesn’t just make us selfish, it makes us small. It shrinks our world down to the size of our own desires, and in doing so, it rejects the foundational truth of the Gospel: that we were made for **belonging** to God and to each other. That’s why Jesus warns us to guard against it in all its forms because greed is a distortion of the life we were created for. It runs directly against His vision of love, unity, and a world where everyone has a seat at the table.

Now, this would all be easier to absorb if greed were just a *personal* issue — if this were simply about one farmer, one mistake, one parable. But I think what makes this passage so challenging is that it speaks into a much bigger pattern, one that shows up not just in individual hearts, but in systems and cultures too. Because the reality is, greedy attitudes have this ability to encroach on us all, even when we’re striving our best to live generous, God-centered lives.

For instance, I guarantee there’s not one person in this room who hasn’t felt the pressure of the rapidly widening wealth gap in this country that’s only accelerated since the pandemic. We’re living under a system that thrives on the illusion of scarcity. If it seems like there’s not enough to go around — not enough money, not enough housing, not enough stability — then we’ll be more likely to cling

tightly to what we do have. To buy more. To save more. To worry more. Meanwhile, a handful of people and corporations continue to profit off that fear.

Even the most well-meaning among us can get lured into the same kind of thinking as the farmer in this parable that our security rests solely on what we can do for ourselves. That a bigger barn or a padded bank account will finally give us the security we're craving. But this is the great lie of greed: that if we just accumulate enough for ourselves, then we will find peace.

But friends, the gospel tells a different story. Jesus Christ offers a vision of abundance. The promise that we belong to a God who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field, so why are we wasting our time worrying and competing against one another? "To whom will all your wealth go?" What do all these things matter if they separate us from that which will extend into eternity — our relationships with each other and God above?

So how do we resist this pull — this lie that security comes from self-preservation and stockpiles? We begin by asking better questions.

Not "How much can I gain?" but "How can I give?"

Not "What's mine to keep?" but "What's mine to share?"

Not "Do I have enough?" but "How is God already providing?"

To be rich in God is to reorient our lives, not around fear and scarcity, but around an abundant faith. Not around rabid accumulation, but around sacrificial love. It's choosing to live with open hands in a world that tells us to tighten our fists.

May we be people who remember we are already part of a greater story — one where abundance flows not from larger grain bins, but from the God who holds us all. May we invest in what lasts and may we be rich in what truly matters. Amen.