

## Series Title: “Making Change”

### Part 3: “Investing for the Long Haul”

Who here is greedy!? Would you raise your hand if you are greedy? [ok; you need this sermon today; I’m glad you came.] The rest of you who didn’t raise your hand, next week I’m talking about denial and lying, so that’ll be your week, all right? ☺

The NY preacher, Tim Keller, tells the story of a season when he was doing a 7-week series for a men’s breakfast on the 7 deadly sins.

His wife said, “I’ll bet the week you deal with greed you will have your lowest attendance.” She was right.

People packed the house for “lust” and “wrath” and even “pride” ... but, Keller writes, “Nobody thinks of themselves as greedy.”

It’s true.

Why can’t anybody get a grip on greed? The tentacles that comes up around us?

As Keller writes, everyone tends to live in a particular socioeconomic bracket. Once you are able to afford to live in *that* neighborhood, you send your children to *that* school, then you participate in *that* social life, and you find yourself surrounded by quite a number of people who have more money than you do.

Like we said last week, when it comes to money and stuff, which way do we tend to compare? We compare *UP!* We always compare to those who have more – not those who have less than we have.

Subsequently, most Americans think of themselves as “middle class.” I was reading this week that only 2% call themselves “upper class.” But the rest of the world isn’t fooled. They are staggered by the level of materialistic comfort most of us have come to view as a necessity.

All right, so there’s your lead-in. That’s where we’re going. This one isn’t for wimps.

Turn in your Bible to Luke Chapter 12. And as you turn, I’ll give you the background. We learn in verse 1 of Luke 12 that this day Jesus was teaching thousands of people, and it’s a very important subject he’s teaching them.

And there's a man in the crowd, listening, but he clearly wasn't paying one bit of attention to what Jesus was saying. We know he wasn't paying any attention, because suddenly he jumps in and interrupts Jesus' teaching. He just blurts out in the middle of the sermon and he says something – which changes the whole trajectory of where Jesus was going, but Jesus improvises, as we'll see.

So let me read it to you, and why don't we do this: in reverence for God's Word, would you stand up right now? Why don't we stand as we read:

*<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

*<sup>14</sup>Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" <sup>15</sup>Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

*<sup>16</sup>And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*

*<sup>18</sup>Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'*

*<sup>20</sup>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?'*

*<sup>21</sup>"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

All right, why don't you be seated, and let's talk about it.

So as I said, Jesus is teaching along, and this man just interrupts, totally changes the subject, and says, *"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

And you can imagine the other people are like, "What?! That's not even what Jesus is talking about! Are you paying any attention over there?"

*<sup>14</sup>Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"*

Jesus was stating clearly, "Look, I didn't come to this earth to settle estates like this. But, look, since you brought it up, and since you interrupted my whole sermon anyhow, I'm going to use this as a teachable moment about a very **real problem** you're wrestling with inside your soul, because it probably applies to everybody else as well."

And then He goes on and says these words in verse 15: *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed."*

Now that's interesting. I was thinking about that phrase: "Watch out!" Nobody uses those words unless there is danger close by, right?

You don't go to a movie and say, "Watch out! That's a sweet movie. I really like that one." You wouldn't put those together, would you?

I looked up all the times that Jesus said, "Watch out!" – and they always had to do with deceptive situations. Usually of false prophets and teachers who Jesus could see through, and He wanted to make sure the disciples could see the difference.

But you notice, Jesus never said,

- "Watch out! Be careful not to murder!"
- "Watch out! Be careful you're not committing adultery."

You know why? Because He didn't *have* to say watch out about *those*!

He knew when you're in bed with someone else's spouse – you would know it. Halfway through you don't say, "Wait a second! This would be adultery, wouldn't it?!" It doesn't happen.

Nobody gets halfway into a killing and says, "Whoa! Time out! This could count as homicide; maybe we should go the arbitration route after all." It doesn't happen.

Murder, adultery, stealing, lying – all of those are very clear cut. You know when you're doing them. But apparently not greed.

And so He says, "This one you've got to 'Watch out!' This one can sneak up on you." It was serious; you hear the urgency in His voice.

15 . . . "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

What does that mean? To "consist" of your possessions – what does that mean? It means to be defined by what you own and what you consume. The term describes a person's identity based on possessions.

"Yeh, I own that! Yeh, it's mine. We bought it several years ago. That one? Yeh, that's ours, too. It's been in our family a long time. Yeh."

You know, as I was thinking about it, it occurred to me here's what's scary: a lot more of us consist in the abundance of our possessions than we would like to admit.

And then when He has their attention, Jesus tells them this parable. Verse 16:

16 . . . "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

Notice this: obviously the man has worked hard, he's a farmer, and he's successful. There's no reason to think he's been anything but honest, so there's nothing wrong yet.

<sup>18</sup>"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." '

You know how many times he says "I" or "my" in those two little verses? We put them in red for you. It's 12 times! You can count them, you can circle them in your own Bible.

What does that tell us? That tells us this man has some serious problems, but I'll mention two:

The first problem is this. He really thought that all he had was really his. He already had barns. The verse says he had barns plural (more than one barn) – but he's consumed with how to store all the extra, so now he's planning tearing down those barns and building even bigger barns.

Jesus was driving home the point: this man was really focused on what he thought was his.

Sort of like a lady I was reading about the other day. This woman was going through an airport and waiting to get on an airplane. She stops by one of the vending machines and she buys a little bag of her favorite Oreo cookies and she sits down to wait for the airplane.

And there's a man sitting in the chair next to her. She doesn't know that man and he doesn't know her. On the little armrest between them is this little snack bag of Oreo cookies. Without saying a word, the guy sitting next to her reaches in, takes out a cookie and starts to eat it. She's a little perturbed by that!

So she reaches in the bag, and she takes out a cookie and she eats it. Apparently not able to speak any English, he just smiles and nods at her, and he reaches in and he takes another cookie. And now's now she's angry; so she reaches in and she takes another cookie.

They keep doing this back and forth until there's only one cookie left. The man reaches in and he takes the last cookie, and he breaks it in half and offers half to her. She's disgusted as he chews the half of the final Oreo cookie.

Several minutes later she gets on the plane, sits down in her seat, reaches into her purse where she's getting her stuff all adjusted, and she discovers the bag of Oreo cookies she had purchased and never opened.

Not only did he not eat any of her cookies, she was eating his cookies in the airport and she didn't even realize it!

I was thinking as I read that, that's very much what all of us do from time to time if we're not careful, with God. We fail to realize, "it's really His stuff what I have here." It's His stuff,

but we actually think it's *ours*, and we think to ourselves if we're honest, "God, get Your hands off of this, this is *mine!*"

Last week we talked about 10-10-80, which is a message we've done here many times over the years. As always happens, whenever we talk about money, I got a wide range assortment of feedback; perhaps the harshest word came from a man whose name I did not recognize. The gist of what he said is, "I can't **believe** you would talk about the 10% tithe in this current economic situation!" Well, I don't know who he is, but I know that there are people who are needing work and are out of work. Times are hard, and I understand that and I'm certainly sympathetic to that.

I didn't respond to that email, though, because I'm thinking to myself, "Okay, if you got upset last week by my telling you that 10% belongs to God, you're *definitely* not going to like *this week's* sermon!"

But here's the thing: I have to tell you what God's Word says. We have to look honestly at it. And He says, "Look, it's *all* Mine – 100%, not 10%. You give back 10% just to remind yourself that it's *all* Mine, and I could call for any of it anytime I want. You're just my steward, you're my trustee! You're just keeping it while you have breath and life right now."

Verses like Psalm 24 that say "[The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,...](#)" – it's all *His*, not *ours*. And all you have to do to know what I'm saying is true is to die – and 5 minutes after you do that, what you always thought of as yours will now begin the process of being entrusted into the hands of other people.

Okay, so the first problem this guy had is that he really thought it was all his.

The second problem this guy had, is that he wasn't planning far enough ahead. By that I don't mean he wasn't thinking 20 or 30 or 40 years ahead. That's all he was thinking. But what he wasn't thinking is hundreds or thousands, or hundreds of thousands of years ahead. Long after his life had ended on this side, and long after he'd been separated from the stuff that he'd always thought of as "his."

And so he says, "[I'll build bigger barns to store all my grains and goods.](#)"

[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 anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."](#)

This is a sobering passage, isn't it?

See friends: You and I can't build barns sturdy enough and strong enough to carry the stuff we call "ours" into the next life.
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People have tried it, haven't they. You go back in ancient history and you look at the Egyptians, and look at some of the leaders in China – they tried, boy did they try! But not

one person has ever gotten out of here with their stuff. Give it a few thousand years and some archeologists will come and dig it all up!

But we think of it as ours, don't we, and we think, "Somehow I *could* take this with me!" But it's *not* ours. We just have it for a little season.

Sort of like a rental car! Have you noticed nobody ever takes a rental car to get a carwash? Why? Because you have it for a day or two, or a week or two.

We do it every summer when we go up to my parents' place up in Colorado. We usually rent a big one, like a van or a Suburban, so we can get all the stuff and the people in one car. We'll be up there for a week or two, sometimes about 17 days or so.

The interesting thing is, Colorado is dry and dusty in the summer, but where we go there's usually a rain shower about every afternoon. So it rains and it gets cakey and sort of muddy-like all up on the car. You give it a week, you give it two weeks, I'm tellin' ya, I drive one dirty-looking Suburban, but – do I ever take it for a carwash? No way! Why would I? It's not mine! I'm gonna drop it off here in a day or two!

And that's essentially what God is saying to us about all of the stuff we call "ours." He says, "Look, it's not yours, it's *Mine*. So you don't need to clutch onto it; don't let it create your sense of identity; don't get proud about it when it piles up; don't get anxious about it when it dwindles down.

Randy Alcorn illustrates this principle really well in one or two of his books. He illustrates by saying: imagine you lived at the end of the Civil War. So that would be 1861-1865. So you're right there at the end of the Civil War, more than 100 years ago. Suppose you're living in the South, but really you are a Northerner. You plan to move home once the Civil War is over.

Now, while living in the south you've actually accumulated a good bit of Confederate currency to meet your needs. But suppose you know – and not "think" know, but you *know*, know – that the Civil War is about to be over and the North is going to win. *What would you do with all that Confederate currency?*

Randy Alcorn says: If you're smart there's only one answer. If you know the war is going to come to an end and the North is going to win, you should immediately cash in all the Confederate currency for U.S. currency – the only money that will have value once the war is over. You would keep only enough Confederate currency to meet your short-term needs.

So that begs the question, how do we take the currency of this world, our earthly currency, and how do we get it converted into Heavenly currency? How do you do that? Well I'll tell you: We quit hanging onto it. **We give it away.**

Somehow there's a conversion that happens in the spiritual realm as we give it away.

Many of you know our 5-year old son is named Wesley. Some of you know why he's named Wesley; we named him after one of my heroes of the faith: John Wesley.

He lived back in the 1700's, and he was quite an amazing man, quite an amazing minister. He's actually the person to whom our church and other churches in our denomination – and actually a lot of denominations – find their heritage stemming back to this man who lived in the 1700's in England.

This was a man who preached some 40,000 sermons. He preached about 15 times a week for years, just riding his horse all around England. But in the midst of all the preaching he was doing, he was also going around and caring for poor people, people who were homeless, people who were hungry and thirsty and naked; he was visiting people in prison. This was a man who got a lot of stuff done!

So anyhow, when our Wesley was to be born, we knew we were going to go the direction of that name, and we actually thought about naming him John Wesley – but then we thought, "That'll be kind of weird when he gets old enough to realize that there's a church in the Champions area named after him – and all around the rest of the world," and so we just went with "Wesley."

Well let me tell you a little bit about *that* Wesley's life, because I think there's no person who modeled more effectively and more successfully this whole thing about greed and money and stuff, than John Wesley. He took very seriously what Jesus said, and he sought to act faithfully upon what Jesus taught.

Here's his story: John Wesley was the son of a preacher whose name was Samuel Wesley, so John was a PK himself (preacher's kid). Samuel had nine children (nine children who lived, I should say), and John was one of those.

His father Samuel pastored a very poor parish, and he was seldom out of debt. In fact, young John even saw his father marched off to debtors' prison.

So it probably came as a surprise to John Wesley that when God called him to follow his father into ministry, he wasn't also going to call him to follow his father's steps into essential poverty, because John Wesley was no poor man. He made money: honorariums, book royalties.

The interesting thing was, though, before he was 28, as a young man John would spend his money the way many of us spend our money: whatever he wanted, he just spent his money.

But this interesting thing happened when he was 28 years old. It was a very pivotal experience that would change everything for him.

When he was still at Oxford, he had just paid for some artwork [pictures] for his room, and a cleaning lady came to his door. It was a cold winter day, and he noticed that she had nothing to protect her from the elements except the thin gown she was wearing.

He reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy a coat but found he'd just spent almost all of his money on the artwork, on the pictures.

In that moment he asked himself, "*Will my Lord say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward?' I have adorned my walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?"*

That was the pivotal day in John Wesley's life; and the interesting thing about what happened, he would go on to make a lot of money. In fact, back in that day a person could live comfortably, they say, on 30 pounds a year. At the height of his earning capacity with book royalties and all, he made one year as much as 1400 pounds, when people could live comfortably on 30. What is that, a ratio of 46 times?

This is a man who had generating power. The interesting thing is, he didn't adjust his standard of living to match the increase in income that he would make over all of these years. He lived off roughly 28 pounds, and he let it go over the decades up to 30 pounds, and he gave all the rest of it away.

It's a phenomenal thing!

You say, "Well why did he do that?" Well, the reason he did it is because he took very seriously what Jesus said, and he was afraid of laying up treasures for himself here on earth, so the money went out in charity as quickly as it came in.

He wrote, "[When I die] if I leave behind me ten pounds ... you and all mankind [may] bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber."

When he died, nearly 50 years later in 1791, sure enough, the only money they found were some spare coins in his pockets and dresser drawers.

What had happened to the rest of his money? What happened to the estimated thirty thousand pounds he had earned in his lifetime? He just gave it all away!

This is one of the many reasons I've always looked at him so admiringly, even to name our firstborn son after him. And I think to myself someday when I get to heaven, he is definitely one I want to meet – like really at the top of the list.

My only concern as I've thought about it, though, is it's probably going to be like, "Oh yeh, you too? Take a number! It'll be a few years!" because there's so many people who are around him because of the life that he lived.

Here was a man who went to the coal mines at 4:00 in the morning in England, and he would preach to the miners and help them come to saving faith. Then he'd go out and he'd serve the poor. You know that in every one of those acts of service to the hungry and the unclothed and the sick and such, what he was giving away was being converted into heavenly currency. Which means John Wesley stored up for himself a lot of treasure in heaven, though all he left behind here on earth was just a few coins.

That's really the way it's supposed to be.

So, as you can tell, I've been living with John Wesley this week.

I read through his sermon on money; one of his most widely circulated sermons. He preached it a number of times. It's a three-point sermon. You probably have even heard the points, but I'll just restate them in case you haven't:

**His first point in his sermon on money was: *Make all you can.***

There's nothing wrong with making money. Money can be used for incredible things. You can clothe people, you can feed them, and you can give them something to drink. You can get them healthy and healed if they're sick. You should make all the money you can, he said, but with a caveat: he said Christians must be careful not to damage their own souls, their own minds, their own bodies, or the souls, minds, or bodies of anyone else. He thus prohibited gaining money through any industry that polluted the environment or endangered workers. But other than that, he said you should make all the money you can – gain all the money you can.

**And then number two, he said: *Save all you can.***

This is the one that, if you've heard this outline before, you've probably messed it up. I know I had messed it up until I studied it. When he said to save all you can, he wasn't meaning to dump it into your Roth IRA or your 401K; that's not what he was talking about. You could translate the words, actually, "***cut your expenses!***" When you read the sermon, that's really what he was saying. He wasn't saying, "Save it all up for a rainy day. You never know." He was saying, "You should cut back. Who needs expensive food and fancy clothes and elegant furniture? Cut off all of that expense," he said.

So he said "*Gain all you can,*" and "*Save all you can.*"

**And then the third thing he said: *Give all you can.***

He emphasized that one's giving should begin with the tithe, but it shouldn't end with the tithe. As he said, "All of the Christian's money belongs to God, not just the first tenth."

Now that's challenge in and of itself, but you read on a little bit more, and Wesley got very specific with his people in this sermon. He knew, as I know and as you know, all of us find ourselves when we're getting ready to buy something saying, "Should I buy that? No, I don't need it – yes, I think I do – no – yes."

He says: let me just give you four questions you can run through your grid when you're trying to figure this out.

I'll do them as slowly as I can, because I see some of you writing some stuff down. The first question is this:

1. In spending this money, am I acting like I owned it, or am I acting like the Lord's trustee [or steward]? (Am I acting like an owner or am I acting like a steward, and it really belongs to Him, and I'm just taking care of it?)
2. What Scripture requires me to spend this money in this way? (Ouch.)
3. Can I offer up this purchase as a sacrifice to the Lord?
4. Will God reward me for this expenditure at the resurrection of the just?

I'm like, "Oh my gosh, that's penetrating."

And then he goes on and he says, "Now, I know some of you will still be perplexed as to whether you should go forward and buy it or not," so he said to pray this prayer; and he writes this prayer and says to pray this prayer and just listen to the Spirit nudging inside your spirit, and then you'll know.

I'm paraphrasing it in simpler words for today. He said, "Just pray this prayer:

"Lord, You see I am now going to spend this money on that food, or clothing, or furniture. And You know that I only act as a steward of your goods, spending this portion to accomplish the purposes for which You entrusted this money to me. You know I'm doing this in obedience to Your word, as You command. So I ask You to let this purchase be a holy sacrifice, acceptable through Jesus Christ! And give me an assurance, that for spending this money now in this way, you will reward me for this expenditure at the resurrection of the just."

He was confident that any believer who prays that prayer and still has a clear conscience, that you should move forward, because God is definitely in it.

I'm telling you, that is hard. I'll tell you where I really had to wrestle this one through in my own life:

I told you last year we were building a new home. Our dream house! In a neighborhood perfect for us, with an incredible, expansive golf-course view, and about 2000 more square feet than our patio home.

I'm telling you, there's nothing like building a home from scratch, if you've never done it. Especially if you like to choose new stuff, "one of these and one of those." I lost track of how many minutes or hours Suzanne and I spent deliberating on these colors and these countertops, and these wood floors and this fireplace, on and on.

Even the electrical plugs – I got to choose where the plugs went. I'm like, "Okay, the desk is going here, so the plug – perfect! Put the plug there." I'm just telling you, it's really fun if you've never done that before.

So for the better part of 5-6 months we would pack the boys in the van every night after dinner and we would drive over to the new house; we would just walk around and see how it was coming along.

But there was a problem. Not with the house. The house was great.

The problem kept coming up in my soul: "Once this house is yours, you'll have used up all your financial margin." We could do it; we'd met with our financial planner a time or two and he said, "Well you know, you won't do that, and you won't do this, but you can definitely make the new house happen if you want to make this happen."

But still I would lie in bed thinking, "But what if we have an emergency? What if there's an illness or something unexpected? Those things can happen." It didn't help that our patio home wasn't selling, and so I'm already calculating, "Okay, I'll be carrying two mortgages; here's what'll happen if we carry it for one year, for two years."

And then one night I'm lying in bed staring at the ceiling thinking through these numbers again in my head, and the solution struck me! "I know what we'll do! We'll just pull back on our giving back to God a little bit if there's an emergency."

"Hey, for 11 years we've been blessed to give a lot; some years we've even given back more than half our income, which wasn't even six figures."

And it struck me, "All totaled, in the history of Faithbridge we've already given several hundred thousand dollars back to the Lord! *It's time for us to spend on us, baby!* If we hit a snag, I'll just pull back a little on the giving, and God is totally gonna understand that!"

But then this other thought comes to my mind, and I'm just feeling this, "Do you really want to be like the rich fool in Luke Chapter 12, and build a bigger barn for yourself, when you have no other way to explain that someday when you stand before the Lord, but to say,

"Lord, we needed the extra space!" – as if we lived in a miniature cottage and our boys were 10 feet tall like the Jolly Green Giant and knocking holes everywhere they walked.

There was this tension in my soul! And it was compounded because I'm reading this book I told you about several times – the best book I read in 2009: *The Hole in Our Gospel*. I even gave it to some of you. I'm reading that book and I'm thinking about the poor, and how we've gotta do more for the poor, and Dan's now working on the poor and we're doing better on that.

And then we're driving over every night and we're looking at this house and I'm thinking about it.

But then, you know, I have some charismatic friends, Pentecostal friends, and they're like, "You *deserve* this!" and they'd start giving me verses, and I'm like, "Okay, I like you! Let's keep going, preach your sermon!"

I was talking with a preacher friend in Florida, and he's like "You *deserve* stuff like this, Ken!"

But then I'd go back by myself and I would think to myself, "That's not what the Bible says! I know, because I've been to seminary. It sounds good, but it's not biblical."

But the clincher came for me one morning. You know how it is when you're waking up and you're not quite up and awake; I started to think to myself,

"What if someday when I stand before the Lord, He were to say, "I never knew you!" [Matt. 25] And I would say, "Lord, Lord, whoa! Whoa! I mean, didn't we do a lot of ministry over at Faithbridge" and all this kinda stuff. "I put my faith, my trust in You, Lord!" – but what if He said, "No you didn't; you talked a lot about putting your faith and your trust in me, and you even helped other people do it and go across the bridge . . . but you never really came across yourself. You talked about trust and you talked about faith, but at the end of the day you always trusted in your *stuff more*."

And I knew it was over. So Suzanne and I had several heart-searching, teary conversations, and then a night or two before Thanksgiving we put both boys in the van and we drove over to the new house.

It was a dark night; because the electricity didn't work yet the only light came in through the windows from the street light. We walked in, and sat down on the stairwell, and explained to ourselves again, "We can't *afford* to do this – in more ways than one."

I remember I started crying first, then Wesley started crying, and then Suzanne started crying. William never started crying, but he's only 2. But he said "shhhh" a lot, which we figure when you're 2, he'd had a lot of people say that to him.

After a while then, we said a prayer for the family who was going to move into that house we thought was going to be ours. And we walked through the different rooms . . . and we told the new house "goodbye" . . . and then we drove home.

We walked into our patio home and looked around and said, "It's not really so bad. It's really very good. Look how God has blessed us. Look at all that we have. Maybe we could move this over here and we'll move that over there; we'll get a little more space that way. We'll paint that over there; I bet this can last us five more years."

I don't know, maybe it will be a few more, maybe a few less – but I just knew I couldn't move forward in the situation we had gotten ourselves into. Not with a peaceful heart, and not if I was going to stand up in front of you and say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." I knew I couldn't.

So you ask: "What's the action step for me?" I don't know. That's the hard part about a message like this. All I can do is tell you what God's Word says. And all I can do is tell you my story. But now you have to go with God's Word, and you've got to wrestle through your own situations with Him."

So let's pray about it:

*God, thank you that You do indeed want us to come and to wrestle with You. You tell us so many things so clearly in Your Word. Forgive us, God, for the many times that we twist it just a little bit and change it just a little bit to sort of make it say more of the way we like to hear it. We even gravitate sometimes to the speakers and preachers who say that a lot, and it makes it somehow feel better; and yet, when we really let Your Word work on us, it's very penetrating and very convicting – especially to those of us who live in this part of the world, in this part of the city, because we've got it good. We know we do – if we're honest, we know.*

*And so, God, I pray for each person who is here, knowing how much I wrestle. And even though we had victory there, we know there'll be another challenge to come along tomorrow, or next week or next month. I pray, God, that You would give Suzanne and me grace.*

*And I pray, God, for grace for every person here, and that You would help them as they wrestle through what it is that You want from each of us to whom You have entrusted so much in the way of what we're supposed to be stewards of.*

*God, won't You help us? Give us Your wisdom and Your grace.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*