It is just past the middle of the summer. Congress just started summer recess. DC has officially gone into slow-down mode and the freeways are packed every Friday with folks headed to the beaches. For many of us, these weeks are built into our lives and our culture as a sort of sabbath, a break in routine, a chance to rest. When we are on vacation, hopefully we clear our minds and hearts of the worries that tend to burden us. We read books for fun, do puzzles, play games and take naps. We often try out new leisure activities too. That was the case for me a few weeks ago on vacation. After months of seeing little pieces of candy with requests on my Facebook page, I decided to see what this Candy Crush thing is all about. For those of you who don’t know as I didn’t know, Candy Crush is essentially a video game that you can play on your smartphone or computer and the object is to get three-matching candies in a row and they are eliminated or crushed. And the whole point is to eliminate them and move them down.

The more I played Candy Crush, the more I noticed some parallels with life, some funny and some not-so-funny. And I also noticed some parts of my life that I started neglecting. So, I’ll get to that in a second. First, my Candy Crush Saga Life Lessons.

1. Nothing in life is ever free, including “free” games.
2. Sometimes you have to ask for what you need—like when you need more lives or tickets to get to the next level.
3. It’s good to set limits. Candy Crush only gives you five lives at a time.
4. It’s important to first clear all the sticky stuff out of your life.
5. Always be prepared. Charge your phone or device before long meetings or doctors appointments.
6. Don’t take the easy way out. Spending money will advance you a level, but perseverance and patience are the rewarding ways.
7. Be open to possibilities, you never know what is going to fill the empty space.
8. Positive affirmation goes a long way—even when it’s “sweet, and tasty”
9. Look outside the box, or beyond the obvious flashing move.
10. Carpe Diem, yes…but sometimes you need to Carpe Candy

So those are some of my Candy Crush life lessons. There are lots of good things to learn from recreation. And I like how candy crush is connected to social media so I can see how my friends are doing and say “Congratulations Holly, you finally beat level 125.” But I think all the positives about playing make it hard to see the negatives. The biggest negative being, can you have too much of a good thing. Along with my zen life lessons, I started thinking about the serious when I saw this meme. (It says sorry kids, dinner will be a little late tonight. I’ve only got five lives left and this candy ain’t gonna crush itself.) It rang a little too true for me. There certainly have been times when I was not as attentive of a parent as I could have been because I was playing Candy Crush. What else was I missing, what else was I neglecting? Was I putting too much into this game? Was I losing my perspective at times? Was I being selfish?
Those are important self-reflective questions to ask with anything and everything in our lives, especially the things that take a lot of time and focus. Are we in balance? These are questions that, in today’s parable, the rich man came nowhere close to asking.

Jesus told this parable in response to a man coming to ask him to settle a financial dispute between two brothers, how to settle their inheritance. This was probably somewhat of a legitimate request, but Jesus used it to launch into a discussion about greed. He told the parable of a man whose harvest was so abundant that he did not have enough room to store it all. What does he decide to do? Obviously, he decides he will tear down his old barns and build new bigger ones to house the crop. Then he says to himself, “now eat drink and be merry for you have plenty!” And God says, yes but you forgot this one little detail. God says “You fool. This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

So obviously this parable is a warning against the excess of material abundance at least on the surface, but it seems to me that it is also about isolation and selfishness. More deeply it is about ALL the things that cause us to withdraw from God or from others: a lust for wealth in his case, or an unhealthy addiction, a debilitating self doubt or a “harmless” video game pastime.

Crops and even good crops are not the enemy here. In Jesus’ time, a good crop like that would have been interpreted by most as a blessing from God, a sign of God’s favor on the person. So the appropriate response would have been extreme gratitude. Was the man grateful? So, does he thank God for such an abundance? No. Does he express gratitude and reach out to share his abundance with others? No. Does he even involve God or others in the discussion about what to do with the grain? Nope. He is completely isolated and driven to isolation by greed.

The sins of the rich fool were many, but here are some of the biggest:
1. He forgot who is the author of life and death, the author of love and the author of time. When we forget about God, it is easy to lose perspective on everything else, floating adrift without our anchor. He forgot that ALL things belong to God, from every piece of grain to every minute spent playing candy crush. There is no “Self” or “Soul” apart from God.
2. He forgot his neighbors and God’s call to care for them, especially the poor who have no land or livelihood of their own. He kept to his own isolated and self-absorbed ways.
3. And in forgetting those imperatives of God, to love God and neighbor, the man created an idol out of his grain and built an altar to it in the form of beautiful barns.

Keep in mind that we have been following along Jesus ministry in Luke. This parable follows the parable of the Good Samaritan with the challenging question, “Who is my neighbor?”; the story of Mary and Martha, in which Martha was distracted from her connection to God and to others; and the Lord’s prayer, highlighting our close spiritual connection to both God and to one another. And then this parable. All those that precede it help us to see that this parable is about so much more than money.

This is about the GOSPEL, the great challenge we have of putting love and justice into the world and the very short life we are given in which to do that. This is about FOCUS and PURPOSE asking ourselves the hard questions.

If my life is over today, where was my focus?
Was I concerned with building up the kingdom of God, loving neighbor, making the tent bigger, extending love, protecting the poor?
Or was I crushing a whole lot of candy?
Now this sermon is not an indictment on playing video games any more than Jesus was indicting farming. We all need times for restoration and relaxation and I probably will not quit playing Candy Crush altogether. Self-care and Sabbath are important. But those times of relaxation also belong to God and they are meant to refresh us for the work ahead. As we do the things we enjoy, we must retain the urgency of faith. We cannot sit back and ONLY build our wealth or ONLY play games or only do things for ourselves. That was the sin of the rich fool that he did things only for himself, he became unbalanced. That is when anything we do can become sinful, if it tears us away from others and tears us away from God.

We don’t have time to lose focus and to lose purpose.

Jesus wants to remind us that there is work to do. There are neighbors in need of help, there are injustices in need of light, and a world in need of renewal.

May we challenge ourselves on this path that is all too short. May we seek that balance. May we remember to love God and neighbor. Amen.