

Draw Near 12

Simplicity, May 19

Purpose

The practice of simplicity is meant to take our minds, hearts, and bodies focus off of material things and move that focus onto God. It helps us to reorient our lives from all the clutter that surrounds us to the “most important thing” as Jesus says in Luke 10:42.

Sharing Time

Review Devotionals: Has everyone completed some devotionals from this past week? There is no penalty for not completing them. They are there to help you and guide you. Let’s share for a minute what we have learned from those you have done.

Learning Experience

Introduction: I remember well our Christmas tradition growing up, and then also when my children were small. We would all gather around the tree, then all at once begin opening packages. In about 15 minutes everything would be opened from the huge mound under the tree and we would all look around and say those inevitable words, “Is that all there is?”

It was when my children were 3 or 4 and this happened that Laurie and I began the process of slowing down our Christmas tradition and worked to focus more time on the gifts. Because we knew without altering this tradition, our children would forget how precious each gift was at Christmas.

As humans we all have cravings, desires, and wants for more. It is a danger that is constant. When Paul was writing Timothy and Titus what we now call the “pastoral letters” he warned them of many things that their churches would be facing. So he advises them to evaluate the churches by using the word “sound” or “healthy.” In 1 Timothy 1:10 it says, “whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine...” Paul is urging Timothy to be careful of things that can take the church away. In 2 Timothy 1:13 he writes, “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.” He is urging Timothy to follow the sound and healthy words he gave him over time. In Titus 1:9 he asks the elders to “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute

those who oppose it.” Paul is encouraging them to be careful of what influences church members.

And the opposite of this sound teaching can be many things: being a lover of self, being unholy, being brutal - all sins Paul refers to in the three letters. But Paul also points to another one often:

- 1 Timothy 3:2-3 - Now the overseer is to be above reproach, ... **not a lover of money.**
- 1 Timothy 3:8 - In the same way, deacons are to be ... **not pursuing dishonest gain.**
- 1 Timothy 6:10 - **For the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
- 2 Timothy 3:1-2 - But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, **lovers of money...**
- Titus 1:7 - Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be ... **not pursuing dishonest gain.**

Paul is concerned that the leaders of these young churches be men who are not preoccupied with making money or focused on money. He understands how money distracts us from the Kingdom of God. It keeps us oriented toward the physical here and now and not trusting God Almighty. So the leaders of these churches are to be men who are not dependent on money, but independent.

Jesus warns us against the same sort of things in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6:19 and 6:24 he warns that we must be wary of trust in money and that we have to choose - will we trust our material things, or will we trust in God? This is a constant temptation - especially for wealthy people such as ourselves.

Therefore Paul would say we may have a fantastic worship, and a well organized congregation, and an engaging preacher, but to be sound and healthy, we must not focus on wealth, but focus on something else. If we are preoccupied by wealth, then we are not sound, or healthy.

Abundant Life is the alternative: John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” You all know this verse well, Jesus is pointing out how he offers us an abundant life, whereas ours has become cluttered. The abundant life is about having a little and loving a lot. The abundant life is focused on Jesus and people and not the things that surround us.

CS Lewis uses the ancient Greek words “Bios” and “Zoe” to describe the difference. Biology, Bios, “Life” is a reference to natural life which will always run down,

decay, and will need constant care to stay renewed. Spiritual life is from God, for all eternity, it is Zoe. Bios is similar to Zoe, but not the same. We want to be focused on Zoe - spiritual life. (From Mere Christianity, pages 139-140)

How do we make sure we are not preoccupied with wealth? How do we choose God and not Mammon? Christians have traditionally attempted several different options, but today we are going to focus on one idea which we think will help all of us a lot: Simplicity.

Constant Craving

Christians today have too many constant cravings for the next car, the next meal, the next movie, the next book. We are consuming and thus collecting things. And as we collect all these things, our hearts are more and more focused on the things around us.

It is amazing that among some of the most valuable real-estate in San Antonio we find storage facilities being built. That we as Americans have so much stuff that we pay so many companies that they can afford to build on valuable real-estate for storage! What does that say about us?

There have been many studies done of this particular issue. Thom and Art Rainer, respected sociologists, asked Americans about their pace of life. They found people were desperately overworked and lived hectic lives. Respondents wanted relief in four main areas:

- Simpler Schedules - Better balance in our schedules so we have time for areas of life that really matter to us
- Simpler Relationships - Closer and stronger relationships and friendships
- Simpler Finances - Lives free from past-due bills, increasing debt, etc.
- Simpler Spirituality - Better connection with God and desire for a simpler way to worship and relate to Him

We cannot accomplish, we cannot connect, we cannot save, and we cannot grow deep in God because our lives are too complicated. Money is a real problem for us, we lead life-styles that are too expensive for our income, and we believe - whether true or not - that we must maintain it. Jesus' vision for our lives meant living fulfilled, abundant, contented lives. And to achieve that he definitely modeled a simpler life. So let's talk about that some more.

How to gain Contentment?

Richard Foster offers some good advice in his book on the disciplines. He writes that contentment comes from three perspectives:

1. We learn to view possessions as gifts from God. Everything we have is a gift from God, given from above. An act of grace.

2. We view these gifts as things to be cared for by God. They are actually God's, and not ours, so God will take care of them. We don't have to fret over their care because God will watch over them.
3. The gifts from God are to be made available to others. We do all we can to supply the needs of others through what God has given to us.
4. Now if you were to take the opposite of each of these you get the lives we typically live: filled with fretfulness and stress. We view things as our possessions alone, gained by the fruits of our labor, and something we alone must protect, and not make available to others.

A Life of Simplicity:

Moving into a life of simplicity is a process. We take small steps, just as in all the practices. Here are several suggestions for possible ways to simplify your life. Choose some for action this week.

- If you haven't used it in a year or more, get rid of it.
- Reduce your wardrobe.
- Reduce your entertainment expenses.
- Simplify meals when you have others over.
- Turn off the television.
- Cancel most magazine subscriptions.
- Don't answer the phone just because it's ringing.
- Simplify gift-giving.
- Allow purchases on only 1 day per week.
- Delay major purchases for two weeks.
- Get rid of all but one credit card.
- Always split a restaurant entre into two.
- Make water your drink of choice.
- Pack your lunch.
- Drive the speed limit.
- Don't multi-task.
- Say "No"
- Resign from any organizations whose meetings you dread
- Welcome delays as an opportunity to relax.
- Do nothing from time to time
- Take time for lunch.
- Develop a habit of giving things away
- For a week, eat your food slowly
- Get in the longest check-out line.
- If you haven't worn it in a season, get rid of it
- If you have to do complicated logarithms to justify something, don't buy it.

Simplicity is Attained by Focus: Only One Thing

Grand Canyon Lesson: When my family visited the Grand Canyon several years ago I was surprised by the number of signs cautioning people about hiking and water and being very careful about getting off trails. And I marveled at the pictures! There was this picture of a vibrant, young, strong man with the words, "This is a picture of one hiker who died in the canyon this year." When we asked about it we were surprised to find many of the accidents and problems in the Grand Canyon come from young, strong hikers who take too little water or wander off trails and get lost. They underestimate the challenge and it overwhelms them. This is why so many have to leave so much stuff at the bottom of the canyon. It is easy to go down into the canyon, it is hard to walk up out of the canyon! So many leave their backpacks, sleeping bags, hats, walking sticks, down vests, etc. that must be left because they don't have the strength to carry them back out. Too much clutter.

This is a metaphor for our life. If we have too much stuff, we are distracted from the most important thing. Have you ever noticed that Jesus did not heal everyone? He did not teach every single person on earth while here. He did not travel to every place. He said "no" to so many people because he knew WHAT he was saying YES to - the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

When our heart is focused only on seeking His kingdom, it is easier to make some of the decisions we have to make about what to keep and what to leave behind. What to say "no" to. Our hearts and lives need to be focused on the one thing: Love God and Love People. When we live a life of simplicity, we can actually do the tasks we have talked about.

Conclusion: The practice this week will be to spend time, four days this week, looking over this long list of possible simplicity practices, and deciding what is for you. What you can accomplish in your life. What is for you will be different than what is for me. We are all in different places in life. Pray, visit with others, and then simplify your life to bring it more into focus and see what happens.

Practice

1. I cannot emphasize enough that these practices are not to be done for God's approval - God already loves you as much as He will ever love you. These practices are for you! They will help you come to love God more, love life more, love others more, and love your possessions less.

2. This week you have a devotional on the back of the sermon outline. It has instructions on how to do it four times this week. Next week, as we come to class let's talk about what we experienced this week with God.
3. We have been given a wonderful gift. We have four great opportunities to use this gift this week. Be sure to find the 10 minutes on four days this week to practice this marvelous gift. Start today and do it!