

Rhythms of the Soul

Title: Part 4 – The Freedom of Simplicity

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Transition: Paul Prays & Seats

While everyone here in the house is saying “Hi” as always we want to take a moment to say “Hi” to you if you are joining us online or on our app. No matter what you might have going on in your life right now know that we are FOR you so let us know how we can pray. You can always submit a confidential prayer request from our app or website.

So, I have to confess my recent epic fail with everyone. For the past four weeks now, we have been in a collection of messages called, “Rhythms of the Soul.” If you missed any of this I would encourage you to take some time and go back and watch it from our app or website because we are talking about the rhythms of a healthy soul. We’ve said it is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.

BUT after I preached the opening message where I talked about not allowing busyness to distract us and how busyness was a choice we make and... well, I blew it! It was Thursday and I was supposed to pick Sophie my oldest daughter up from soccer camp at 11, but I also had a lunch appointment at 11:30. But not just a lunch appointment. I was meeting with a group of local pastors. We gather each month for encouragement and to help hold each other accountable. But by the time I showed up I had pretty much allowed my brokenness and busyness to earn me not just the worst pastor award but the worst dad award!

You guys want to hear my dirty laundry? Well, it was Sophie's last day of soccer camp and the coach was letting things go a little longer so the girls could celebrate with ice pops, exchange phone numbers and just celebrate all their hard work. But see I was told things got over at 11. You see where this is going? So, 11 comes and goes and no Sophie. 11:05 comes and goes and no Sophie. So, at 11:07 I start blowing her phone up. I am sending text after text. Then I started calling because she is not responding, like three times I called back-to-back-to-back. You every do that? Like why did I get you a phone? Then when I finally see her coming she is walking! Are you kidding me? So, now I am yelling from my truck to hurry up! She gets in and now I am driving like a maniac to take her home and pretty much slow down just enough for her to jump out. By the time I get to my lunch Cheryl is now texting me asking why I made Sophie cry, and how she didn't get any phone numbers, and that she actually had a foot injury. Way to go pastor! How many of you know how I was feeling at that moment?

It was a reminder that if we don't change our direction we will arrive exactly where we are going! Where you're at today, play that out, just fast forward the tape 1 year, 5 years, 10 years from now you'll be even more busy. You'll be even more dysfunctional. You'll be even more burned out. SO, let's make the changes we need to now! Let's get in a good rhythm for the soul! Amen?

I'm calling today's message:

The Freedom of Simplicity.

Because the truth is we live in a world of complexity. A world of distraction, chaos, and endless choices.

Our lives are cluttered with stuff – material possessions we think will make us happy but only leave us wanting more. Our minds are cluttered with worries, obligations, and the incessant noise of technology screaming for our attention. BUT what if I told you the path to true joy, fulfillment, and peace is actually through simplicity? Through stripping away the excess and focusing only on what really matters? That's what we are going to dive into today.

AND to get us rolling I have a question for you.

How much stuff do you have?

Take a quick inventory. Think about the stuff in your bedroom, your living room, your kitchen, your closets, your garage, parked in your driveway... AND don't forget the storage unit you pay for, the one off-site that holds all the stuff that couldn't fit in the garage, the attic, or the closet. How much stuff do you have? Like if you needed to move this week, what size truck or semi would you need to fit all your stuff and make just one trip? Do you have a mental picture of that?

Here's my next question:

How much stuff do you actually need?

It's a smaller list isn't it? How much stuff do you actually need? Food, clothing, some kind of shelter... that's what you actually need. Like, if you had to move what you actually needed, would you even need to rent a truck?

So, a few disclaimers before we get any deeper into this now that our minds are rolling.

First, today is NOT a guilt trip about how much stuff you have. We all have different needs and families and social obligations. There is no one size fits all step by step to a life of simplicity. The point of today is to simply bring us to a place where we can stop and consider if some of the stuff we have, that we think brings us happiness and joy, is actually contributing to the hurry we feel in our lives. That there is a true cost to things that we pay not just in dollars and cents but a price we pay in our time and freedom.

Second, simplicity—some people call it “simple living” or “frugality”, more recently the word “minimalism” has become vogue, we could just call this the way of Jesus but—simplicity isn't just about getting rid of material stuff, as attractive and freedom-giving as that feels. But **simplicity, at its core, is about creating space.** Space to breathe, to be present, to focus on what really matters most.

The third disclaimer I have is making space for simplicity isn't just a one-time decision, it's an ongoing spiritual practice and rhythm for life. It's something we have to keep coming back to, course correcting again and again. Because if you are like me I declutter and simplify for a season, but then the stuff gradually accumulates again until I'm weighed down by possessions and overwhelmed by chaos and complication.

Simplicity is also NOT poverty! It isn't a bare home, an empty closet, or a joyless life with no freedom to enjoy material things. Poverty is not a virtue. Being poor is hard! Being middle class is a gift up unto a certain point. That point by the way is a household income of \$105,000 a year. In a study conducted of over 450,000 people they found no matter how you live; your emotional well-being is as good as it's going to get at a household income of \$105,000 a year. After that it either plateaus, or worse, declines. But simplicity is not poverty. Simplicity is simply about living with less.

And finally, simplicity is not being better organized! Organizing is actually the opposite of simplicity. If you have so much stuff you have to box it, label it, and stack it to cut down on space then odds are you have too much stuff. Simplicity is not about getting better organized; it's about not having so much stuff that you have to organize in the first place. Can I get an amen from a tired mom today?

SO, what wisdom can we gain from Scripture on all this? Lots of places we could have gone today, but let's let Jesus be our guide. Because Jesus actually had a lot to say about money and material possessions and its impact on our souls. In Luke 12 Jesus said this:

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” [Then He went on to say this] **Sell your possessions and give to the poor.** (Luke 12:15 & 33)

So, immediately I step back from verses like that and I'm like, “Whoa God, for real? I gotta get rid of my stuff? Like isn't this stuff good? Isn't it all a blessing from You? What about retirement? Don't you know social security isn't going to be around by the time I turn 65?” This sounds irresponsible, right? Jesus goes on:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”
“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else.” (Matthew 6:25 & 33)

But that's exactly what we worry about isn't it? “Does Jesus know how much bacon is these days? Has He bought a gallon of milk lately? What am I supposed to do, sit around the house and pray all day hoping magically these things appear in my fridge?” What about this:

But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Mark 4:19)

“Are you saying Jesus that wealth is by nature deceitful? That it has a suffocating effect on the soil of my heart, choking out the life of Your Kingdom? That wealth makes it harder to experience the life You intended for us, not easier?” This doesn't make sense does it? Because let's be honest, the more money we make the better life seems, right?

If this all sounds crazy to you, then join the club, you are not alone. For most of us in the West, the words of Jesus on the topic of money and possessions are the most foreign to us. We can get behind a lot of what He says, but this just seems counter to everything we believe in America. AND maybe that's because we believe in the Gospel of America more than we believe in the Gospel of Jesus.

The Gospel of America says: the more you have, the happier you will be. Get the new dress and matching shoes, get the new iPhone with all the fancy lenses, get the new SUV with the LED lights and you will be happier. Sell your house and buy a bigger house! Work your way up the corporate ladder and get the promotion, the raise, the bonus! Pay for your kids to get on that traveling league! And when you do, you will be happier! Duh. Everyone knows that. Happiness is out there, it's just two clicks and two days away!

But let me tell you what we also know. The carrot dangling out there in front of us is attached to a stick! The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard (jeen bow-dree-laard) has made the point that in the Western world, materialism has become the new dominant system of meaning. He argues atheism hasn't replaced Christianity; shopping has. We now get our meaning in life from what we consume. We get our identity from what we buy. Even though we don't like to admit it, I am where I shop, what I wear, what brand my phone is, what car I drive or what neighborhood I live in. These are not just things, these are identities.

BUT it hasn't always been this way in America. Go on a little trip with me and I promise there is a payoff coming. Roll back the clock to the early 1900's, or little more than a century ago, and 90% of Americans were farmers. 90%! People lived off the land and traded with their neighbors for anything else they needed, and money rarely was even used. Most of the things you owned fell into the needs category. I've got a few pots and pans. I've got a change of clothes. I've got a roof over my head for me and my family. And I've got the tools to do my daily job. But today, instead of 90% of the US population being involved in agriculture, today only 2% of the US population works on a farm.

So, what happened? Industrialization and urbanization brought on by the Great Depression and the first World War. As our country emerged from the war we turned our "military-industrial complex" into a consumer goods industrial complex. They went from making tanks to T-shirts. American corporations were rich and powerful by the end of war, but they were worried about the danger of overproduction. What if people acquired enough goods and simply stopped buying?

One Wall Street banker of the day said this in 1927, they have been conspiring against us for 100 years now, he said:

"We must shift America from a needs to a desires culture. People must be trained to desire, to want new things even before the old has been entirely consumed. We must shape a new mentality in America. Man's desires must overshadow his needs." - Paul Mazur, senior partner at Lehman Brothers, Harvard Business Review 1927

This conspiracy, enabled by new sophistication in advertising (things not learned by Madison Ave but by the Nazi's in Berlin and adopted by advertisers, true story...) all of that with the full support of the US government was shockingly effective. Fast forward to today and our economy is built around people spending money on things they don't actually need. Don't believe me? After 9/11 what was the big plan? Go donate blood and do what? Go shopping! Don't let the terrorist keep you from spending money because that is what our economy is built on.

Here is what you need to know. Modern marketing is nothing but propaganda! It might not be trying to get you to kill Jews or snitch on your neighbor who is hiding them, but it is a multi-billion dollar industry that is intentionally designed to lie to you—to get you to believe that if you will only buy this or that product, then you will be happy or happier. It turns out we have been the real-life guinea pigs in one huge economic experiment in consumption. None of us want to admit it, but we have all fallen for the bait!

SO, what do we do? Go back to a hole in the backyard for a toilet? Burn our debit cards? Start sowing our own clothes from animal hides? NO! Because that wouldn't fix the problem because the problem isn't the stuff. The problem is we put no limit on the stuff due to our insatiable desire for more, fueled by all the marketing. It's not about the stuff, we think we need all sorts of things to make us happy, but actually we need a lot less.

AND here is where all of this has landed us:

We are more hurried and less happy.

One of the reasons happiness is dropping year after year in our country, even as the Dow goes up and up and up, is because materialism has sped up our society to a frantic, unsustainable pace. The drive to possess is an engine for hurry. WHY? **Because every single thing you buy costs you not only in money but also in TIME.**

For example, maybe you have heard the statistic that the average American house is now double the square footage of the houses in the 1950's. Think about it, how much space do you actually need? Can a family of 4 live in a house under 1,000 square feet? Sure, they can! Most of the world lives in smaller spaces than that! Most people in our country did until the last century! And I get it, my house is 1,900 sq ft and it feels small to me! But true or false, we all could LIVE in a smaller house? True! But you know what wouldn't fit in a smaller house? All of our stuff!

SO, because we have to fit all of our stuff and because we derive some of our value from where we live, we buy the biggest house we can afford. BUT here is what we don't take into consideration when the Realtor

and loan officer are walking us through what we are pre-approved for. Maybe we can afford the \$2,400 a month mortgage (which is the national average currently), but with a bigger house comes bigger utilities, bigger furniture costs, there is a bigger cost of upkeep, bigger repair bills, bigger HOA bills, bigger taxes all of which means you have to work even more at a job you already hate.

AND don't forget it will take you longer to clean it, it will take you longer to mow the grass and keep up with the landscaping, because the HOA is even stricter, and has sent you two nasty letters in the mail, which you ignored because you don't have time to pressure wash the driveway, because you are so busy working to pay for the house in the first place!

Here's my point. When you run your cost-benefit analysis, don't forget to calculate you're paying for that experience not only in cash but also in time. As a culture, instead of spending *money* to get TIME, we have opted for the reverse, we spend *time* to get MONEY to pay for all our stuff. We have chosen money and stuff over time and freedom.

SO, here is a crazy idea. You ready?

What if Jesus was right?

What if the Gospel of Jesus is actually the way to happiness and joy? What if all those things Jesus said about money and stuff, what if He actually knew what He was talking about? What if Jesus teachings were laws no different from scientific laws, they are statements about how the world actually works. And when we ignore them, not only do we hinder our relationship with God, but we also go against the grain of the universe. You know what happens when you go against the grain of the universe? You get splinters! What if Jesus was telling us things about the way the world actually is?

For example, Jesus said: (Acts 20:35)

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Notice that's not a command, it's a counterintuitive observation about the human condition. It's an observation about how the universe works. Jesus also said this:

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

Notice again, not a command. He didn't say, "You shouldn't..." He said, "You can't..." Jesus made a statement about the way life works if you want to be happy and free and full of rest. Jesus is teaching what is true whether we believe Him or like it. There is actually a better way to live.

So, what if the formula "more stuff equals more happiness" is bad math? What if more stuff often just equals more stress, more hours at the office, more debt, more time wasted cleaning and maintaining and fixing? What if more stuff actually equals less of what matters most? Less time, less financial freedom, less joy, and less peace.

"Is there a way off this merry-go-round from hell" you are probably asking about now. Is there a practice from the life of Jesus we can adopt to break free from the soul-draining habits of American materialism and live the reality of how life actually works? Of course, there is and that's the value of simplicity.

SO... WHAT IS SIMPLICITY? Here are a few definitions, you pick your favorite:

Simplicity: The intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts us from them.

Simple, right? The goal isn't to declutter your garage but to declutter your life! To clear away the myriad of distractions that ratchet up our anxiety, feed us an endless stream of mind-numbing drivel, and inoculate us to what really matters. The goal is to live with a high intentionality around what matters most.

Here's another definition:

Removing anything that does not add value to my life.

Again, if we have stuff to remove then that means we have more than we need and by definition that means you are rich! Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells his young protégé to tell the church in Ephesus, Paul says:

Command those who are rich [Tell your neighbor, "Hey that's you..." Those who are rich] **in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain... Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they MAY TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT IS TRULY LIFE.**

Did you see Paul quoting Jesus from Matthew 6? He is telling us the same thing Jesus was, simplicity is actually the way we reach out and grasp the "life that is truly life."

See, what we often miss is that Jesus understood this tension between money and simplicity and lived in that tension. In fact, simplicity is a practice based on Jesus life.

Maybe this is something you didn't know. But Jesus wasn't as poor as we often make Him out to be. He was a skilled tradesman and most likely made a living wage doing it as His work would have been excellent. Once He started teaching full-time, He was supported by a group of wealthy donors who paid for His food and travel expenses. He even needed one of His disciples to manage the budget (of course that didn't turn out too well). He was friends with both the rich and the poor, but there are lots of stories about Him eating and drinking at the home of one of His rich friends, so much so that the Gospel writers admit He was accused of being a "glutton and a drunkard." Even at the cross the Roman soldiers cast lots for His garments, meaning they were worth something. John even wrote, "this garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom." Meaning it was high quality and of excellent craftsmanship, not some filthy rag.

We see Jesus happily living in this tension. Enjoying a good meal at a friend's home one minute and warning about what money can do to your heart the next. To follow Jesus, especially in our western world, is to live in that same tension between grateful, happy enjoyment of nice, beautiful things, and simplicity. And when in doubt, to err on the side of generous, simple living. In God's economy, it's not about how much you have, it's about how you hold it. A wealthy person can live simply, and a poor person can live greedy and complicated.

SO, if you studied the life of Jesus what are some principles we can apply to our own lives? These are not rules that we should become legalistic about, that's not the point, the point is to slow us down so that we don't lose our freedom. Here's the first:

1. Before you buy something, ask yourself, what is the true cost of this item?

Think about what it will cost to clean, repair, maintain, insure, finance this thing. It's always more than the price tag. Ask yourself how much time will this cost me? Will this add value to my life and help me enjoy God and His world more? OR will this just distract me from what really matters? Finally, ask what this will do to the pace of your life, speed it up, or slow it down?

2. Never impulse buy.

It's amazing how much money we blow spur of the moment just because we see a new pair of shoes that we just "have to have." Even though we already have 10 pairs of shoes in the closet and these that we just "have to have" were probably made in some sweat shop in Vietnam. As a general rule, when you see an item you want, sit on it for a while. Often our desires pass as quickly as they come. ALSO the larger the purchase, the longer you should wait! Think it over, give your rational mind time to catch up with your irrational flesh.

3. Opt for fewer but better things.

God is not opposed to you enjoying nice things. Often what happens to us though is that in an attempt to save money, or just because we really want it now, we buy a lot of cheaply made items instead of living without for a while and buying a high quality one that will last. "Buy it once" is a great motto to live by. English designer William Morris said, "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."

4. Get into the habit of giving things away.

Remember Jesus on the subject of reality? "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It feels good to put on a new shirt, but it is really life giving to give away something you don't need to help someone who can really use it. Want a more blessed life? Give. Generously. Regularly. Less shopping means more money to share, which in turn means a more blessed life.

5. Live on a budget.

It always shocks me at how many people still don't have a written budget. A written budget is more than just a way of staying out of debt (which is a good thing) but a budget is to your money what a schedule is to your time. It's a way to make sure your treasure is going where you really want it to go and not being squandered. Lots of tools and resources for this, but the key is to do it and to stick to it! Have a rule in your house, anything over \$100 and you have to talk it over with your spouse first. Live on a budget.

6. Learn to enjoy things without owning them.

What a great time to be alive that you can literally ride in a car you don't own and vacation in a house that is not yours. We think we need to own it to be happy, but the truth is you don't always have to own something to enjoy it. Sometimes owning it actually takes some of the enjoyment out of it. On the flip side of this is when you can, share! If you have a power washer then all of your friends shouldn't have to, right? If you own a boat, share it! We don't have to own something to enjoy it and if you do, share it!

Last one: **{CUE SOUND}**

7. Cultivate a deep appreciation for creation and simple pleasures.

Speaking of enjoying things that are free, have you been outside recently? Last time I checked, oxygen was still free, and a state or county park was within a short drive. Creation—especially places that are yet

