

Sermon Series - Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ: Simplicity

10/4/2026

Rev. Murray's message on **Simplicity** explores what it means to cultivate a Christ-shaped life by making room for what matters most. Drawing from Luke 12 and Ecclesiastes, he contrasts cultural ideas of decluttering with **biblical simplicity**, which is not primarily about owning less but about **creating space for God, relationships, joy, and gratitude**.

The Problem Jesus Names: Pleonexia — the Endless Appetite for “More”

Jesus warns, *“Life is not measured by how much one owns.”* The sermon highlights how the parable often labeled *“The Rich Fool”* is actually rooted in a family dispute over inheritance and Jesus' caution against **greed that expands without limit**. The farmer's repeated “I...my...mine” reveals a life centered on accumulation. The issue is not barns or savings—it's when **possessions become identity, security, and purpose**.

Ecclesiastes reinforces this truth: the desire for more has no natural stopping point. The finish line keeps moving. When we chase “enough,” we never arrive.

Receiving vs. Possessing

Rev. Murray draws a sharp distinction:

- The farmer says, *“I have enough stored...now I can enjoy life.”*
- Ecclesiastes says, *“Eat, drink, enjoy your work...because life is short.”*

One approach tries to **possess enough** before living; the other **receives each day as a gift**. Biblical simplicity is learning to enjoy what God has already placed in our hands.

The Danger of “Bigger Barns”

We all have our version of “bigger barns”—the *after this, then I will...* promises that postpone joy, rest, family, generosity, and spiritual life. Jesus urges us not to wait. We are not created to build barns; we are created to build **God’s kingdom, relationships, presence, and love.**

Simplicity as a Spiritual Practice

Rev. Murray offers a three-step practice:

1. **Notice** — Pay attention to what you have and the gifts of today. The opposite of simplicity is distraction.
2. **Release** — Prune what no longer serves growth. Pruning is not punishment; it creates space for life.
3. **Share** — Simplicity frees us to give: time, welcome, service, generosity.

To be **rich toward God** is to cultivate a life overflowing with what matters most—love, presence, gratitude, and relationship—not possessions.

Living a Spacious Life Rooted in God

The sermon closes with a reminder that abundance is not something we must acquire. We already have it in God’s love and grace. A simple life is one that is:

- **attentive enough to notice,**
- **open enough to receive,**
- **generous enough to share,**
- **spacious enough for God.**

Simplicity is not about scarcity—it is about **making room for the fullness of life God intends.**

Transcript

10/4/2024

Luke 12: 13-21

Sermon Series: Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ - Simplicity

As you're able, please remain standing for the reading of the gospel.

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us. ¹⁴ But Jesus said to him, Who said I should judge or decide between you? ¹⁵ Then Jesus said to him, Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed. Life is not measured by how much one owns. ¹⁶ Then Jesus told this story. There was a rich man who had some land which grew a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, what will I do? I have no place to keep all my crops. ¹⁸ Then he said, this is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store all my grain and other goods. ¹⁹ Then I can say to myself, I have enough good things stored to last for many years. Rest, eat, drink, and enjoy life. ²⁰ But God said to him, foolish man, tonight your life will be taken from you. So who will get those things that you have prepared for yourself? ²¹ This is how it will be for those who store up things for themselves and are not rich toward God.

This is the word of the Lord.

God is still speaking.

Please be seated. So we continue our sermon series today, Cultivate a Life in Christ. And in this series, we've been exploring and focusing on what it means not simply to believe or to have faith in Jesus, but to cultivate a life that is shaped by Jesus's life and teaching.

Because A cultivated life doesn't just happen, just as a garden doesn't grow simply because you bought seeds at the store. A relationship doesn't deepen simply because we have good intentions. A life of faith doesn't mature simply because we attend worship on Sundays. Cultivation requires attention. It requires deciding within our own lives what we will nurture and what we will pull up by the roots. And today we're focusing on cultivating simplicity.

Now, when you hear the word simplicity, Perhaps you think about decluttering, almost like spring cleaning. There's television shows where a person is hired to come into the house and they examine your house and they look in the closet and they go, you have 47 pairs of shoes. How many do you actually wear? Six? Okay, we'll get rid of 41. Eight? Okay, we'll get rid of 39. Or perhaps you think of simplicity from a minimalist approach. If you haven't used it in a year, get rid of it. At the start of 2026, my wife turned all of her hangers backward. And

every time she wears an outfit of clothing, she turns it around. And her plan is at the end of 2026, anything that she hasn't turned around to give away, to donate. Me, on the other hand, that's not the punchline. But me, on the other hand, I hold on to things for a long time, 7, 8 years. And as soon as I get rid of it, it's the exact thing I need next Tuesday. Those are ways to simplify your life, but biblical simplicity is something different. And this kind of builds on the priorities we talked about last Sunday.

Biblical simplicity is not primarily about having less. It's about making room for what matters most. So answer for me. What's most important to you? Family. Family. Right. What else? Friends. Friends. Friends that are family. God. God. Sight. Sight. I'm learning that. I had to start wearing reading glasses recently. But those things like joy. That's important. Rest. generosity, gratitude, God, friends, family, family or friends who we consider family. Absolutely. And it's important to ensure that our possessions do not possess us. And that's really Jesus's teaching for today.

But before we get into the actual story, I want to take a moment to talk about something you see probably every time you open your Bible. You'll see those subheadings, those titles above a selection of verses. Jesus didn't say that. Jesus didn't teach that. Jesus didn't begin by saying, let me tell you the parable about the rich fool. No, those headings and subheadings have been added by editors and other translators as an attempt to help us navigate the text. And while they can be helpful, when you read that heading, it also shapes the way you read the text. In other words, it limits what we can read and what we can understand because it's already told us that summary. For example, take the parable that we often call the prodigal son out of Luke 15. It's often called the prodigal son because that's how generations of preachers have interpreted the text, through the lens of the younger son. But Jesus doesn't start the story by saying there once was a younger son who was prodigal. He says there's a father who has two sons. And when you read the whole story, you discover the father's extravagant love and mercy are central to the story because it's also expressed to both sons. Take Matthew chapter 20, the parable we often called laborers in the vineyard. which is odd because the focus of the story is not the laborers, the workers in the vineyard. The story is really telling the perspective of the landowner who repeatedly returns to the marketplace. And when he sees someone standing around, he says, what are you doing here? The reply comes, well, nobody hired me. Then come work for me. And then at the end of the day, he pays them generously. So when we come to today's story, we need to be careful about this heading over those selection of verses that say the parable of the rich fool. There is foolishness in the story, don't get me wrong. But I think Jesus is pushing us towards something deeper. Because the story doesn't begin with foolishness. It doesn't begin with a foolish farmer. It actually begins with a question about possessions. Jesus says, beware of all kinds of greed as a response to the call, Jesus, tell

my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Now the family inheritance, if you don't know, came to the eldest son at that time, and it was the eldest son's responsibility to distribute it with the brothers. Daughters didn't, sisters didn't get anything at that time. They couldn't own property. Deal with that another week. But the eldest son could take his sweet time in dividing the possessions. And so we find a family dispute. We all know that happens. Everything goes fine until the reading of the will and then it spirals out of control. But Jesus says, beware of all kinds of greed. And Jesus goes on to tell this story. But listen again to the speech of the farmer. He has just hit a bumper crop. And he says, I am going to tear down my barns and I will build myself larger ones for all of my crops. Me, And Jesus says, be on your guard against all kinds of greed because one's life is not measured in the abundance of possessions. That's the real issue. Now the word that the author of Luke uses is pleonexia. Pleon, the Greek word, means more. But it doesn't just mean more. The word describes that limitless desire for more and more. The appetite that says, I will never have enough. Think of King Midas. He loved gold so much that when he was given the opportunity that he could touch anything and turn it to gold, he took it. And so he touched everything he could. But I want to be clear. Jesus here is not saying money is evil. Jesus does not say that possessions are bad. Jesus is not even saying that having resources for that rainy day is a bad thing. He says one's life is not measured by the abundance of possessions in other words, life is more than. stuff. The problem isn't putting something away for the future. The problem isn't even the barn. The problem is what the barn has become. The late comedian George Carlin used to talk about our stuff. He'd say, that's all your house really is. It's a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house. You would be free and you could just go wherever you wanted to. A house is just a pile of stuff with a roof. And when you leave your house, you have to lock it up because you wouldn't want somebody to come by and take your stuff. She knows the quote. Your home is just a place to keep your stuff while you go out to get more stuff. And sometimes you have to move because you've got to get a bigger house because there isn't enough room for all your stuff. For this farmer, this is his focus. How can I store more? The farmer has become the center of his own universe and Jesus says therein is the danger. When we allow things to define us, when accumulation becomes our security, when possessions become our identity, when more becomes the goal. And that's where Ecclesiastes joins the conversation. Because Ecclesiastes says in effect, those who love money will never be satisfied. Those who chase wealth will discover that the finish line keeps moving. And when we tell ourselves, if I could just get to that point, then I'll be content. If I could just make a little bit more, if I could just get through this season, then I'll be able to enjoy life. Then I'll be able to breathe. But when we get there, we find the finish line has moved again and again. Ecclesiastes is explaining human nature, that the appetite for more has no natural stopping point. And that's why simplicity matters. And Ecclesiastes

speaks to this as well. After reflecting on the futility of endless accumulation, the author of Ecclesiastes points us to simplicity. Receive the life that God has given you. Eat, drink, work, appreciate the fruits of your labor, enjoy the ordinary gifts of life now. And I want to highlight that the author of Ecclesiastes and the farmer of Jesus' story use very similar words, but there's an important distinction. The farmer says, I have enough good things to last many years. Now I can rest and eat and drink and enjoy life. Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, says, eat, drink, and enjoy your work because the life God has given you is short. One is about possessing enough. The other one is about receiving enough. And that, in a nutshell, is biblical simplicity. Enjoying what matters most here and now. It's being able to wake up every day and say today is a gift. My family is a gift. This meal is a gift. This moment is a gift. And when we say that, we are enjoying life to the fullest. Now, as a pastor, sometimes asked to officiate a funeral or memorial service from someone in the community that I don't know. And so I seek to sit down with the family. And yeah, some of it's about the logistics, the scripture passages, the hymns, but mostly I want to eavesdrop. I want to eavesdrop on the family's conversation as they talk about their loved one. And that makes me wonder what it might have been, what it would have been like for the rabbi who went to visit the widow of this farmer. I can almost hear her saying, God, he loved his family, but he didn't always have time for them. He was always preparing the land or working the dirt or harvesting. Often in between seasons, he would say, there will be a day when I can build bigger barns and then I'll be able to enjoy my family. The rabbi might even follow up with, well, did he have any hobbies? he talked about taking up water painting and traveling the world, but it was always after the bigger barns were built. Here is a man who is postponing enjoying his life, enjoying his family, enjoying his relationship with God until he could build bigger barns. We all have our own version of the bigger barns. We say, after this, then I will. But through this story, Jesus is saying, don't wait to build bigger barns before you enjoy your life. Because we aren't created to build barns. What are we created to build? Lots of good answers. God's kingdom, our lives, and our lives are measured by our relationships. how we love, the presence we have, the generosity we give, the attention we offer, our relationship with God, that is how our lives can be measured. Instead of asking what else do I need, we can learn to enjoy who or what is already here. When our lives get so full, and it can be good things or bad things, when our life is so full that there's no room left for silence, or prayer, no room for family or neighbor, no room for joy or generosity, no room for God. That is when simplicity must become a spiritual practice. Simplicity as a spiritual practice is 3 steps. Notice, pay attention to what you have. Before worrying about tomorrow, notice the gift of today. Because the opposite of simplicity is distraction. So look, Pay attention and notice. Number 2, release. What can you get rid of? When we're talking about cultivating a life in Christ, sometimes pruning is necessary. And pruning can hurt or it can be hard. But pruning isn't punishment. Pruning promotes growth. Three,

sharing. Simplicity isn't merely about having less, but it is about the opportunity to be able to give. maybe of our time, maybe of our service, maybe of welcome because somebody needs it. And that brings us to Jesus's final words. So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God. And Jesus emphasizes this, be rich toward God. And that's a different kind of wealth. Because rich toward God doesn't reflect what you have in your bank account. I've known people pour as dirt and those with deep, deep pockets who are rich toward God because rich toward God is about sharing a life overflowing with who matters most. Life is not the abundance of possessions. And we cultivate simplicity every time we choose gratitude over comparison or generosity over accumulation, enough over more or trust over fear. The farmer asks, how big can I make my barn? And I hear Jesus asking, How much room can I make in my life for God and others, loved ones and others? How much life can I cultivate? There's a story I thought of this morning. It's about a friend of mine who I have the deepest respect for. When his kids were teenagers, instrumental in this story, he's a firefighter. So he works 48 hours straight and then he's off 96. So he would pick up extra shifts. So extra 48 hour shifts through the school year. But he would end up trading shifts with somebody that they would then pick up one of his shifts during the summer. So he would end up being off with his family for 2 1/2 to three months. And they would travel and they would enjoy the day. They would play. and being around each other that much, they would probably cause some tension too. But there were around each other enough to be able to do that. is the simplicity that I'm talking about here. It's about discovering that fuller life, not waiting until the bigger barns are built, but living in the present. It's realizing we don't have to possess to experience abundance because our identity is grounded in God. You are already loved by God. That grace has already been given. So live a life simple enough to notice, open enough to receive, generous enough to share, and spacious enough for God. Amen.