

“Simplicity and Contentment”

Simple Life Sermon Series | Week Two | Newbreak Church

November 20th, 2022

Newbreak's Sermon Study Guide is an in-house resource that serves sermon-based Life Groups and/or individuals who want to reflect further on how the message contributes to our spiritual formation.

In this week's study, we talk about how simplicity is the pathway toward contentment.

Icebreakers for Life Groups

- How many times can you eat Thanksgiving food before you are over it? For example, Thanksgiving with immediate family, extended family, and then a “Friendsgiving”?
- When was the last time you took some stuff to the local donation center? How did it feel to declutter some stuff?

Going Deeper Into the Message

How does simplicity help me make room for what matters most?

Read Luke 12:13–21

Point 1 – Determine what I really want *more of* in life.

In Luke 12, a man asks Jesus to arbitrate a dispute, something common for Rabbi's as authoritative and respected figures of the community to do. However, Jesus saw something even more pertinent to attend to rather than what the man asks.

Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15, NIV).

Notice what Jesus did here, he broadened the audience. It was no longer about just this man, it was about everyone. Dare we include ourselves in the audience? We ought to. Why? Because although we live in a different time and different place than Jesus' original audience, we struggle with the same root temptations to make subsidiary things into ultimate things. What happens here is we fall for a trap of selling our soul to the pursuit of things that are vain and possibly even empty.

Notice how we are not being asked to guard against money or making money. We are told to guard against greed. Greed is the all-consuming god likened to a perpetually empty stomach. No matter how much is consumed, it's never enough. Greed makes us hoarders of what we have and how much we have. It makes us egocentric—with our primary aim being our own personal happiness and security. But even greed—with all its ambition—cannot obtain happiness the way the simplified life can. Jesus is inviting us to see our meaning not as measured by what we own or what we consume. The goal isn't just to declutter your stuff but to declutter your life!

Greed thinks that the good life is found in things, but this is a distorted perspective. When we invest our entire life on getting more things, then we put our security in those things. But just like anything in this world, it can all be taken away in an instant. When the things you find security in are gone, so is your security.

John Mark Comer, the author of *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, poses this great rhetorical question: **“What if the formula ‘more stuff equals more happiness’ is bad math? What if more stuff often just equals more stress?”**

The American Dream and the Gospel are not synonymous. Yet, many think they run parallel to each other, but this is hardly the case. The “gospel of America,” so to speak, claims: The more you have, the happier you'll be! What does Jesus say? **“It is happier to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)**. These are two divergent paths—a fork in the road—a dichotomy.

More stuff won't satisfy. Implicit in this verse and clear elsewhere in Scripture is the idea that only God can satisfy the human heart. Everything else can be compounded and multiplied *ad infinitum* but it's never enough.

What do you really want more of in life? The surface answers often are related to stuff or things... but if we are willing to dig deep, we will find that there is something richer to life than the things society says will make us satisfied.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Wealth and “stuff” are not inherently bad. But the pursuit of them, if fueled by selfish motivations, can become a negative or even sinful pursuit. Ask yourself this: Is the stuff I am wanting (or pursuing?) getting in the way of what God has for me?
- Have you, or a friend or loved one, ever lost everything in a catastrophe? How did you/they react? What did this show you about what is truly important?

- Have you ever been disappointed by a big purchase, maybe something you saved and waited for? What was that like? Looking back, what do you wish you had done with your time and money?
- Ultimately, what is the lie behind “more stuff equals more happiness?” How have you been tempted to believe the lie?

How does simplicity help me make room for matters most?

Read Philippians 4:10–13; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; Luke 12:31–32

Point 2 – Find contentment in the Creator, not merely in what’s being created.

The truth is, you don’t need the destination to experience happiness. The journey is full of joys that are often overlooked. And that seems to be Paul’s great secret that he speaks of in Philippians 4:11–13. Paul didn’t let his culture tell him what was the key to contentment. Lest we be confused, the Roman way of life was just as materialistic as our culture, just minus the amount of technology and opportunity to be materialistic as we have today!

Simplicity gets us to see that materialism doesn’t foster contentment. The appetite for materialism widens as you feed it. On the other hand, contentment comes when we see Jesus as the source of our strength and the satisfaction of our heart (as in Philippians 4:10–13).

Paul wrote: “I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little” (Philippians 4:12, NLT)

Paul didn’t have an existential crisis when his material welfare ebbed and flowed. But wouldn’t you? Doesn’t this provide a gut check that we do place a lot more worth in the quality of our life in our possessions than what we really should?

Contrary to popular belief, contentment isn’t settling for a lack of fulfilled desires; it’s living in such a way that your unfulfilled desires no longer determine your happiness. And that’s where Philippians 4:13 comes in to tell us Paul’s magisterial secret. Through the power and partnership of Jesus we can find contentment and journey through this life without a sense of lacking. In essence, biblical simplicity sees the sufficiency of Jesus in all matters of life, which, in turn, reorients all of our lives’ pursuits.

A simple life is not seeing how little we can get by with—that’s poverty—but how efficiently we can put first things first. And while the word “gratitude” or “thanksgiving” isn’t in this verse, the concept certainly applies! We can seek God’s kingdom first

because God's intent is to make us heirs of His kingdom. We are sowing into what really matters—and also into our destiny (both now and into eternity).

As we bring this to a close, we think about what time of year it is. Thanksgiving is a time where we might—albeit, even by obligation—express more thankfulness than a standard day. But here is our great challenge to you...

Practice thanksgiving daily, not just annually.

“Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NLT).

Paul reminds us that thankfulness is literally God’s will for your life! Not just a holiday once a year followed by Black Friday, a notorious day of wants and greeds!

Practice thanksgiving daily and watch how much your perception of life changes as you ground your attention in the person and work of Jesus.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- How does Paul’s mindset in Philippians 4:10–13 challenge you, personally?
- Why do you think gratitude, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:18, is an integral part of “God’s will” for our lives?
- How do you feel led to take action from this message to find a life of simplicity and gratitude? What do you sense the Lord leading you to take away from this?

Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NIV) ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

How are you going to think or live differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?

How does this week’s message shape or nurture your relationship with God?

BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids in a way that they would relate to or understand?