

Simplicity of Life

In the last session, we looked at singleness of heart. What is it all about?

From Matthew 6, we learnt that Jesus encouraged the disciples to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. Because what you consider valuable shows you where your heart is, as we read in Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” We need to focus on one thing that truly matters, which is our relationship with God. As Christians, we are called to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind” – singleness of heart focused on God.

However, most of us may find it hard to trust God because of our family backgrounds and experiences in life. Just like Adam and Eve, after sin entered the world, fear, guilt and shame moved into their hearts. They found it hard to trust God so they tried to use fig leaves to cover their nakedness; we too can use money, possession, position and performance to cover our own nakedness.

We mentioned how our beliefs can affect our perspectives in a positive or a negative way. They can create false lenses in our hearts, which causes us to view the world, others and God in a wrong way.

Remember, how we see determines how we live. That is why it is important for us to pay attention to our inner world. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6:22 -23, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

How can we become a single-minded Christian?

1. Stop running after worthless or empty things

In Ps 115:8 ESV “Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.” - we become what we worship. If we worship emptiness, we will become empty.

Jeremiah 2:5 ESV “They walked after emptiness and became empty.”

What am I pursuing that is filled with nothing but emptiness? Is it fame, a bigger home, fancier cars, job promotions? Am I ready to forsake that pursuit and turn to the living God who is the only One who can satisfy the soul?

2. Stop running on empty

Jesus says in John 15:5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

If we are not connected to Jesus, there is no life, no fruit, and we are running on empty.

3. Shift of perspective from temporal to eternal

Stop building up treasures on earth but learn to build up treasure in heaven. To be a part of our Father’s business here on earth.

*Illustration on eternal life.

4. Shift our pursuit from material to spiritual

If we truly believe in eternal life. What are we carrying across? I can’t bring my AUD across. Some Chinese who practice Taoism burn fake paper money because they believe the dead on the other side can use it.

I can’t bring my house, my car, my boat.. But I can bring with me my character, my fruit of the spirit, my knowledge and identity in Christ.

5. Shift our place of hope from men to God

Whatever that men deem impossible, it is possible with God. It brings you to a place of rest and peace knowing that everything is under control when we surrender before God.

Singleness of heart will lead to simplicity of life!

During Covid, “tidying up with Marie Kondo” became phenomenally popular on Netflix. Her famous phrase for decluttering is: “Does it spark joy in your heart?” was on everyone’s lips. As Christians, we don’t have to ask ourselves this question, but what we need to ask ourselves is “Do I trust God?” “Do I have faith to believe what the Bible says is true?”

Matthew 6:33 “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” With divided allegiance, life becomes complicated. Will you be willing to lay aside the heavy load we are carrying, and return back to the simplicity of life which is to seek first the kingdom of God?

Inward reality results in change of outward lifestyle

Simplicity of life involves a radical reconsideration of these three areas: time, money, and stuff.

1. Time

Let's look at Psalms 23, The Antithesis by Marcia Harnok

"The clock is my dictator, I shall not rest.

It makes me lie down only when exhausted.

It leads me to deep depression, it hounds my soul.

It leads me in circles of frenzy for activity's sake.

Even though I run frantically from task to task,

I will never get it all done, for my "ideal" is with me.

Datelines and my need for approval, they drive me.

They demand performance from me, beyond the limits of my schedule.

They anoint my head with migraines, my in basket overflows.

Surely fatigue and time pressure shall follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration forever."

We can laugh about this, but we all know there is an element of truth in this antithesis. We need to look at what we are doing and why we are doing. Are we giving our time a good use to serve the purpose of God in our lives?

To simplify our time, we should not be focusing on cutting down but centring down.

Cutting down	Centring Down
Deals with our busyness	Deals with our lostness (Why I'm doing what I'm doing)
Questions our capacity	Questions our confusion (What is my purpose in life)
Offers us a consolation	Offers us a compass (God should be our compass - Jesus has an inner compass in His very busy life)
Focuses on relief	Focuses on restedness
Outward of life	Inner life

	(Dealing with busyness inside our hearts)
Helps us catch our breath	Helps us recapture our vision
Blames the external environment	Examines the inner roots
Is all about creating margins	Is all about cultivating anchor (is God the anchor of my life?)
Seeks to add Jesus to our crowded schedule	Anchors Jesus as Lord of all our schedule

If we look at Jesus' life on earth, He was busy, but He always had time for everything. He was never rushed because He lived with a clear sense of priorities based on the purposes of God. Let's centre our time back to the purposes of God.

2. *Money*

When Mammon (in hebrew, means money) rules, we are preoccupied with the anxiety of life. When things increase, life becomes complicated. The answer to our freedom is not poverty, but a lifestyle of simplicity and stewardship.

There are several ways we can choose to live:

- a. **Live above your means** – These are the people who “buy the things they do not need with the money they do not have just to impress the people they do not know.” They end up with big possessions and even bigger debts. They have lots of gadgets but no generosity.
- b. **Live with your means** – We spend all we have by the end of the month and wait eagerly for the next pay check to arrive. The philosophy is “eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die.” Very stressful indeed!
- c. **Live within your means** – This is the one who lives with some degree of wisdom and they still make sure that they have something left aside for a rainy day. They give thought to things like insurance and investment.
- d. **Live below your means** - The man who is skilled in the spiritual discipline of simplicity comes to this point where even though they can well afford something, they choose to do without so that they may have more to share with others. They have learnt to say: “Enough is enough.” They have found a place of contentment in God.

Which one are you?

3. *Possessions*

Beware of the subtle power of things in our life! “Luxuries once enjoyed become a necessity.” What are the examples of luxuries which have now become necessities in your life?

- Eating out
- Bigger house
- Nicer car

Simplicity is freedom! It sets us free from an attachment to things and from the obsession to accumulate more.

What’s some stuff you need to clear out from your life?

Questions:

1. What are some key insights that you take home from today’s session?
2. How can you put the simplicity of life teaching into action?

Examples:

- a) I will adjust my time to keep family devotion with my kids every Sunday (30 mins). Share 1 central thought from my personal devotion.
- b) Cut down on internet time and emails: choosing not to answer emails on demand (unless it is within my job scope). Have set timing to answer all the emails at one go. Limit internet time to 1 – 2 hours a day.
- c) Plan a monthly budget and stick to it. Pray and ask God on how to steward His resources wisely. (Divide income to percentage you want to spend/set aside for savings, elderly healthcare, living expenses, insurance, tithes and offerings, children household, utilities, etc)

Now list 3 others. Write when you would start making these changes.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

3. If you find it hard to do this exercise, are there any areas you find hard to let go?

Does it have something to do with how you see God?

Eg. I see God as being distant from me. It leads me to feel and believe that I have to do all these things to look after myself and my family.

