

Christ Community Covenant Church
Simplicity: From Overwhelmed to In Control
Pastor Dave Scherrer - April 26, 2015

Lifestyle changes . . . Sheesh

I have been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. That is the kind of diabetes that comes on in adulthood. It is a kind of silent killer. You have no real pain or symptoms that you can particularly feel. However over time diabetes, which is related to the body's ability to balance glucose or sugar and insulin. The end result is that sugar and carbohydrates act as a kind of slow burning poison. My mom had type 2 diabetes and so I come by it naturally. The end result of this condition is that if you can't control it, it can have devastating effects. It impacts the small capillaries and oxygen doesn't get where it is supposed to. There is something called diabetic blindness – that is a big deal for me. Diabetes is responsible for kidney failure – and that is a big deal for me. It affects a person's ability to heal, and I seem to hurt myself all the time so that is a big deal for me.

As a result, the docs have said those words no one wants to hear; "Dave you are going to have to change your lifestyle." So I have discovered first hand that even with really good motivation, it is difficult to change. For one thing, I like bread with butter, milky-way bars, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn on the cob, that sort of thing. I'm not a sugar fiend, I'm kind of the run of the mill carbohydrate addict, but I am finding that losing 10 pounds, exercising and drinking lots of water are a big deal. I have to have it on my mind all the time right now as I seek to make this new lifestyle less of a moment by moment decision and more of a new natural way of doing business. Knowing me, my guess is that I will always have to act according to my new knowledge of the truth regarding my health than by my wants and simple desires.

I have found that my self-will to be and act better is not sufficient in the small things. Imagine how difficult it is for us to be good in the big things. I have found that without God's divine power and grace to transform my life, I am helpless to move forward toward goodness and holiness and health.

My life depends on God transforming my will and my behavior. And here is the good news, I am fine with that. He longs to change me in the most powerful and significant ways. He longs to change my heart, he longs to change my eternal destination, and He longs to change how I see the world and myself and others. The theological word is to be transformed. To be radically made new. All at once *and* moment by moment. Both! As the Bible says, to be made into the image of the Son (Romans 8:29).

In our effort to simplify it would be wrong of me to not talk about our need to deal with money and the hold that materialism has on our culture and our lives here in America and at 4Cs. The love of money and the false sense of security and significance that it offers keeps us from knowing and loving God and from enjoying abundant life in Christ. It is one of the great distractions and we can know that by how often the Bible and Jesus in particular, talk about the false hope of wealth.

It is dangerous and it is a life and death struggle to let God change our lifestyle when it comes to money. It is not that wealth is intrinsically evil, or that poverty is blessed. ***Rather, a devotion to gathering wealth is incompatible with devotion to God. God must always be the most important thing in our lives:***

***'No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.'* (NLT, Luke 16:13)**

The craving for wealth and possessions can lead us into all kinds of temptation. While we spend evenings and weekends earning extra money, we are depriving our families of our love and attention. We may take unfair advantage of our customers, employers, or employees. We may attempt to rationalize our greed by closing our minds and hearts to the needs and rights of others. In the process, we could end up being stingy, bitter and isolated.

Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (NIV, Proverbs 23:4-5)

We need to nurture an impulse toward simplicity rather than accumulation.

Let's look at our passage for today:

Luke 12:13ff³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?"¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully,¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'"¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."³² "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys."³⁴ For where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

A moment ago I said we need to nurture an impulse toward simplicity rather than accumulation. Verse 33: tells us, ***"Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys."***

Focus for a moment on the words, "Sell your possessions." Who was he talking to? Verse 22 gives the answer: "Then Jesus said to his disciples." Now these people were by and large not wealthy. They didn't have a lot of possessions. But still he says, "Sell your possessions."

He doesn't say how many possessions to sell. To the rich ruler in Luke 18:22 Jesus said, "***Sell everything*** you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Sell all your possessions. When Zacchaeus met Jesus, he said (Luke 19:8), "Look, Lord! Here and now ***I give half of my possessions to the poor,*** and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." So Zacchaeus gave fifty percent of his possessions. In Acts 4:37 it says, "Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." So he sold at least one field.

So the Bible doesn't tell us how many possessions to sell. But why does it say sell possessions at all? Why? Giving alms - ***using your money to show love for those without the necessities of life and without the gospel (the necessity of eternal life) - is so important that if you don't have any liquid assets to give, you should sell something so you can give.*** But now think what this means in context. These disciples are not cash-poor rich people whose money is all tied up in bonds or real estate. Most people like that do, in fact, usually have fairly deep savings. But Jesus didn't say, "Take some of your savings and give alms." He said, "Sell something, and give alms." Why? ***The simplest assumption is that these folks lived close enough to the edge that they did not have cash to give and had to sell something so they could give. And Jesus wanted his people to move toward simplification, not accumulation.***

So what's the point? The point is that God desires there to be an inclination in the Christian life toward simplicity rather than accumulation. The impulse comes from treasuring God as Shepherd and Father and King more than we treasure all our possessions.

"To have what we want is riches, but to be able to do without is power." ~George MacDonald

Jesus said in Mark 4 that riches "choke" the word of God. But we all here at 4Cs want to enter the kingdom vastly more than we want things. And we don't want the word of God choked in our lives. So there must be a compelling impulse in our lives to simplify rather than to accumulate. Jesus tells us here that selling things and giving alms is one way to show that God is real and precious as Father and King.

I want you to understand that when it comes to matters of possessions and wealth and nurturing an impulse to simplify that Jesus doesn't meddle in our lives. It is much worse than that. He outright commandeers!

Jesus doesn't meddle - He commandeers!

Jesus demands that you place all wants and needs at His discretion and that you willingly give into His will not your own. But this is good news. Remember what the evil one wants?

John 10:10a

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy . . ."

Now remember what Jesus longs for you to enjoy?

John 10b

" . . . That you might have life and that life is more abundant."

Do you remember when President G W Bush spoke in 2002 of an axis of evil in the world referring to the three countries that had evil intentions; N Korea, Iraq and Iran. I want to suggest that there are three allies of the evil one in his attempt to steal life and joy from you using possessions as his weapon.

The Axis of Monetary Evil is Hoarding, Indebtedness and Stinginess.

The 'Axis' of Monetary Evil Hoarding

How does this differ from saving? That's easy - saving is good and hoarding is bad. Hoarding is stockpiling and accumulating having no ultimate good except for the perceived false good of the accumulation itself. Saving is a Biblical concept, with ants being a somewhat common word picture used by scriptures for saving to protect your family from catastrophe. Hoarding just collects stuff because it looks good and seems powerful and bigger and better than others.

There are 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage in America, or more than 7 square feet for every man, woman and child... It's now "physically possible that every American could stand--all at the same time—under the total canopy of self-storage roofing," boasts the Self-Storage Association. There are about 51,000 storage facilities in the country—more than four times the number of McDonalds.

The storage shed is a symptom of our cluttered lives. Clutter is the cholesterol of the home; it's clogging the hearth. We're crowding ourselves out of our houses. Somewhere in there, between the physical and virtual clutter, we are losing the ordinary qualities of home—the solitude to recollect, the time for families to talk. Clutter is choking the sanctuaries of our homes. There isn't any room left for us in our own houses. ~ Howard Mansfield in *"An American Dilemma: Your Clutter or Your Life"* from the *Denver Post*, September 29, 2013.

When you buy something, give one thing away. If you have lots of things you may need to buy one thing and give two or three things away to make any progress on your clutter.

Indebtedness

Debt is what happens when you want something or have an expense today but don't have the money saved for it. So you borrow from someone and take on an interest rate so that someday you will pay back the debt as well as some extra money to the lender for the privilege of using their money for a period of time. As Wimpy used to say to Popeye, "I will gladly pay you Tuesday . . . for a hamburger today."



"The borrower is servant to the lender." Proverb 22:7

And in America debt is out of control. The average American with a credit card owes \$7,950 in revolving debt. According to the Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank, the average person carrying student loan debt owes \$25,745, and dividing total auto debt and mortgage debt by the total number of open accounts for those types of debt, as reported by the New York Fed, indicates that the average American with this type of debt owes \$10,392 on their car and \$100,197 on their home, respectively.

"You must gain control over your money or the lack of it will forever control you." ~ Dave Ramsey

Make a decision to let 2015 be the year that you make headway on your debt.

Stinginess

If materialism and longing for wealth is the disease then giving is the medicine. Giving not only puts God's money back into Kingdom purposes, it also helps to cure you from the trials of debt and hoarding. Greed is a deadly sin, and a lack of generosity is a symptom of greed.

Six things you can do today:

1. Pursue contentedness – Let God change your heart as to your need to have new things for the sake of new things. Some of you have the habit of shopping and buying simply for self-pleasure. You simply buy because you can. You recreationally shop. And I want to warn you. This is a dangerous habit. Even if you recreationally shop at garage sales, you are still tempted to buy things simply because you can. This does not nurture a heart of contentedness.

- **Hebrews 13:5**
Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
- **Philippians 4:11-13**
Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
- **1 Timothy 6:6-8**
Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

There are two ways to get enough; one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less. G.K. Chesterton

2. Plan your spending and get out of debt

It is called a budget. You need to have one and you need to see where your income goes and where your expenses are coming from. You know this. And this is freedom not legalism. If you budget and save and give you will feel powerful and free and like a cultural contributor not a societal taker.

3-4. Discipline your giving and consider giving sacrificially

From our text this morning we read this: **your heart moves toward what you cherish, and God wants you to move toward him.** Verse 34: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This is given as the reason why we should pursue treasure in heaven that does not fail: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If your treasure is in heaven where God is, then that is where your heart will be also.

This is why the offering is included in our worship service; the offering is an act of worship. Some churches have eliminated the offering, putting a basket in the back or making no reference. I have often heard this said by either the pastor of the congregants, kind of proudly - "We don't do an offering." OK, that's fine. But know my heart in this; we give at 4Cs so that we can extend the Kingdom of God together. I have been praying that prayer over our offering for ten years. It is not because I can't think of anything else to pray. It is because that is the heart of giving. I would happily say to anyone who cares to hear, equally proudly I suppose, "We take an offering at 4Cs and the church family gives generously, cheerfully and willingly."

The offering moment in our service will be worship for you, regardless of the amount - from the widow's mite to the millionaire's thousands - if by giving you say from the heart: I hereby trust you, God, as my generous Father and King, so that I will not be afraid when I have less money for myself in supplying the needs of others; and I hereby resist the incredible pressure in our culture to accumulate more and more and cast my lot with the impulse to simplicity for the sake of others; So therefore I hereby lay up treasure in heaven and not on earth so that your Kingdom can be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

5. Unplug from the marketing machine – Cancel all the apps that help you shop, cancel the apps that want to take your money, cancel the catalogs that tempt you to buy simply for the recreational value of buying and accumulating more things.

6. Go on a short term mission trip:

Pic 1

Pic 2

<http://www.confluenceministries.org/contact-us/volunteer/>

'Breaking free' – Transformed by the sacrificial love of Christ

Video - Transformed life

Prayer

Discussion Questions

Have you been confronted with the task of making a lifestyle choice of some kind? How has that been for you?

When God calls us to life in Christ he begins to 'clean house' so to speak as the Holy Spirit moves into our hearts and minds. How do you find that process?

Dave said we can't really do anything of worth by self-will. Do you agree with him that we need God to transform our lives? How have you experienced the transforming power of God recently?

Money is a tough subject. In simplifying our lives from possessions and in the matters of wealth we have years of habits that we have to fight against. Would you agree that wealth/possessions are a stronghold of temptation for Americans and for the church today?

Dave mentioned a three-fold Axis of Monetary Evil of Hoarding (out of control spending/shopping), Indebtedness and Stinginess. Do you struggle with one of these expressions? How so?

Dave mentioned 6 things we can do to help release the control that wealth and possessions have on us. Which of these is most important for you to address first? How do you think God or the church can help you?

1. Pursue contentedness
2. Plan your spending (budget)
- 3-4. Discipline your giving and consider giving sacrificially
5. Unplug from the marketing machine
6. Go on a short term mission trip