

Spiritual Disciplines: Simplicity

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Date: 14 February 2021

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome to our online service for Sunday, February 14th, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor of Braemar Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

And it's a joy to be with you this morning. Thank you for joining us, whether you're joining us now live this morning on Facebook or in future days on Facebook as well. Please like us and follow us on Facebook.

If you don't know how to do that, just ask someone you know who is Facebook familiar and they will help you do that. We'd love to have you be aware of when we're posting things live, when we're posting anything new for the church and so on on Facebook.

So please like and follow us there. If you'd like to know more about our church, you can visit our website at braemarbaptist.com. Or if you'd like to receive a weekly message from me and as well as our weekly e-newsletter, send an email to info@braemarbaptist.com.

And we'll make sure that you're added to the list for that and you receive those. So welcome this morning. We're glad to have you here as we worship God together in this place where you are, in this place where I am and where we are at together.

[1 : 13] Let's open this morning in prayer and I'd like to open by reciting the Lord's Prayer together. I don't think we do that enough. So let's do that together this morning.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen indeed. Well, let's join together in singing three worship songs.

And as always, the worship leader will lead us with his voice and music. And you'll also see the lyrics on the screen as well. And this morning we're going to sing three songs.

[2 : 18] One, Come Ye Sinners, which is an older hymn that you may not be familiar with. But I really enjoy, I find the words of this hymn to be so powerful. It's fairly new to me as well.

It's old but new. So I hope, give it a listen if you don't know it. And we'll see if we can get familiar with it together. We'll then be singing How Firm a Foundation, followed by one that most people will know, which is I Surrender All.

And again, follow the worship leader as he leads with his voice and the music. And the lyrics will appear on the screen. God bless you as you worship him with your voice this morning.

God bless you as you worship him with your voice and the music. God bless you as you worship him with your voice and the music. Come ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore.

Jesus ready, stands to save you, full of pity, love and power.

[3 : 35] I will rise and go to Jesus, He'll embrace me in His arms, in the arms of my dear Savior.

Oh, there are ten thousand charms. Come ye first, come at all, God's free bounce and glorify.

True belief and true repentance, every place that brought you high.

You am prostrate in the garden, on the ground.

Your maker lies on the bloody tree, behold Him. Sinner, will this not suffice?

[5 : 08] Sinner, will this not suffice?

How firm a foundation, He saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith. In His excellent work, what more can He say than to you He has said, to you for refuge to Jesus?

I am thy God, and will still forgive the aid. I'll strengthen the help, He can cause thee to stand.

I'll help, by my mind, just unnip ten.

I'll help, by my mind, just unnip ten. I'll help, by my mind, just unnip ten.

[6 : 26] When through the deep waters I call thee to go, through the river so soft, approach the night of a throne. For I am will be with thee, thy Charles to bless, and sanctify to thee, thy deepest, sister-house.

I'll help, by my mind, just unnip ten. The soul that on Jesus has leaned for regrows, I will not, I will not desert to thy foes.

That soul, though all hell, should endeavor to shake, I'll never, not never, never will sing.

Yea, that abilities we all will grow here from by a soul.

All to Jesus I surrender all To Him I freely give I will ever love And trust Him in His presence daily I surrender all I surrender all All to He my blessed Savior

[8 : 44] I surrender all All to Jesus I surrender Let me save Your holy life Let me feel the Holy Spirit Truly know that Thou art mine I surrender all I surrender all All to Thee my blessed Savior I surrender all All to Jesus I surrender Lord I give myself to Thee

Fill me with Thy love and power Let Thy blessing fall on me I surrender all I surrender all All to Thee my blessed Savior I surrender all I surrender all I surrender all All to Thee my blessed Savior I surrender all I surrender all Well welcome back from singing.

I hope you enjoyed those songs. I hope the Spirit of God filled your heart and your mind as you were singing those beautiful words to Him.

And we just want to remember that as we sing our praises to God it's about God. It's not about us. It's about not about what kinds of songs we like or the style of singing that we prefer.

It's not about us. It's about the gift of our worship. The gift of our voices. The gift of our praise back to God. And so I hope that was meaningful for you this morning.

[11 : 31] Well as I was preparing this sermon this week I recognize that many of you will be hearing it on February 14th. So happy Valentine's Day.

And I just want to reflect on this for a moment. This is one of those days that's become primarily about cards and flowers and candlelit dinners.

It's about love. It's about human love. Human love can be amazing and I think we'd all agree. Knowing that another person is there for you.

Cheering you on. Supporting you and encouraging you. Knowing that someone has got your back. And it can also be deeply painful when we love someone and then for whatever reason perhaps a relationship or a marriage breakup or a death Valentine's Day.

The person we have deeply loved is gone. Valentine's Day may tend to amplify the joy and affection of the relationships that you currently cherish.

[12 : 41] But it may also be a time of grieving for a loss. And if you're grieving now may God bring you comfort and peace.

And may the pleasant memories the happy memories and moments fill your heart and your mind. Well during our sermon series In His Image this past fall we explored the characteristics of God and we particularly looked at the communicable ones.

God's communicable characteristics are those that we can also reflect in our own lives. And you can find that series that particular sermon in the video section in our church Facebook page or in the sermon section of our website BramardBaptist.com And during that series we talked about God's characteristic His quality of being loving particularly towards us.

So as we recognize Valentine's Day let's be reminded of true love. God's eternal unending sacrificial unconditional love that He wants to lavish upon each and every one of us.

John 3.16 reminds us For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[14 : 17] My friends God's love is not a passive love but an active one an intentional love that reaches out reaches out to every one of us.

Often the only cost of human love may be a cost to our bank account when you buy flowers or chocolates at Valentine's Day or a sense of perhaps personal inconvenience when we let someone else have their own way.

Well I love them so I'll let them have their way. But there we recognize that there may not really be a truly a cost to us for human love.

No sacrifice really. But God's love for us came at the greatest possible cost with the greatest possible sacrifice.

Jesus knew the price that God would pay. He knew the price would involve His own life and yet He willingly paid it for you and for me.

[15 : 27] As we read in John 15 verse 13 greater love has no one than this that He lay down His life for His friends.

My friends can you love others with that kind of sacrificial love that kind of reckless love willing to love as God first loved as He still loves you.

Happy Valentine's Day. Well we're continuing in our sermon series titled Spiritual Disciplines Exercise Your Faith and we've been recognizing through our series that as followers of Jesus Christ as His disciples we can benefit from some tools and skills that can help us on our journey.

And these tools and skills are known as spiritual disciplines. Christian spiritual disciplines as we've talked about before have existed since the very earliest days of the church.

And these tools and skills are intended to help us put ourselves before God and in a state of heart and mind where we can best interact with Him.

[16 : 40] And we've just explored in the first part of this series the inward disciplines. We looked at meditation, prayer, fasting, and study.

And I hope that you learned how practicing these disciplines and incorporating them into your life can make a difference in your relationship with God. This morning we're starting our exploration of the outward spiritual disciplines.

And these are the disciplines or practices that are most visible to other people. Our actions, our words, reflect our focus, reflect the orientation of our hearts.

Can you appreciate that? Can you recognize that? It's important to recognize that a focus on dedicating our time and energy towards the inward disciplines, reorienting our internal and personal focus on God, will ultimately result in an outward or external transformation that should be noticeable to other people.

people. So is that it? That if we work on the inward disciplines, will the outward changes, the outward disciplines, just come naturally without us actually working on or focusing on them?

[18 : 07] Well, not necessarily. Remember that regardless of the discipline itself, whether it's inward, outward, or corporate, they require time and commitment to see significant benefit.

to see significant change in our lives. And remember as well that we've talked about this before, the spiritual disciplines are not about trying, but training.

Not all of them will necessarily resonate with every Christian, but it's important that we experience them ourselves and I challenge you to do that, to try them in your own life.

And hopefully you have been. We've been training for a few weeks now, so I hope that that is something that you've been engaging with throughout your week. So does this idea that the presence of the outward disciplines will be visible to others, does that scare you?

Does that intimidate you? Does it perhaps make you feel self-conscious or paranoid or even, dare I say, prideful?

[19 : 20] Remember that the spiritual disciplines are primarily about you and God. Your relationship with God, your intentional desire to learn and train yourself, train your mind and your heart to focus them on God.

God. We're beginning our exploration of the outward spiritual disciplines by looking at the discipline of simplicity. And one of the main passages we're going to focus on in this sermon is Matthew 6, verse 33, where Jesus reminds us to seek first his, that's God's, kingdom and his righteousness.

And all these things will be given to you as well. seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Now I encourage you to read from Matthew 6, verse 25 to 32, and verse 34, which comes just after the passage that I read.

I encourage you to read them for yourself, because they set the stage for Jesus' main focus here, and that is seeking the kingdom. Well, what comes to mind when you consider the word simplicity?

[20 : 45] What does it mean to you? What kinds of thoughts or actions come to mind? What does simplicity mean for you or to you?

Well, maybe for you simplicity means, simply, decluttering. And that's kind of on the right track. For example, do you have a closet in your home that is packed full and no one dares to open it?

It's an unwritten rule in your house. Don't open that closet. You'll regret it. No one opens it for fear of being buried in an avalanche of stuff.

Do you have a list, perhaps, of one-day aisle projects in the back of your mind or even tacked up on your fridge or stored in your phone?

Is your life filled with many casual friendships that don't really challenge you or enrich either you or the other person? Do you have real needs in your life, needs for healing and restored relationships, financial provision, or a job?

[21 : 59] Do you recognize a personal sense of responsibility and anxiety or worry? Feeling a burden that somehow you need to meet those needs yourself?

Well, when you're able to pause for a moment in your life and reflect, hopefully you do have moments when you're able to do that, maybe you don't feel you have the time to do that, so you need to make it.

when you pause and reflect in your life, do you recognize peace? Do you recognize simplicity?

Or do you recognize a cluttered mind, a cluttered life, perhaps even a cluttered heart? Seek ye first kingdom simplicity.

clutter, complexity, anxiety, all of these things tend to come in our lives when we lose our kingdom focus, when we lose our focus on God and begin to try to meet our needs, try to solve our problems, try to find solutions, fill any sort of a sense of emptiness we may feel in our lives with anything or anyone other than God.

[23 : 33] Can you recognize that our society doesn't generally really recognize the idea of either inward or outward simplicity as having value?

can you recognize that? Outwardly we are expected to be consumers and comparers. We're taught, we're trained to ultimately always strive to try and keep up, to be in step with the latest products or gadgets, to try and compare ourselves to others and usually we find ourselves lacking, don't we?

Based on our own evaluation, our own measurement. By the nature of that we spend money we may not have. We accumulate stuff we don't need and we're looking to cram it into space we probably also don't have.

And all of that leads to a state of mind that is anything but focused on simplicity. We're worried about comparing ourselves, falling short, we get caught up in managing our possessions and our money.

And likely that always leads to stress and anxiety. So returning to our passage from Matthew 6, Jesus spent a great deal of time, a great deal of detail addressing and recognizing our worries.

[25 : 06] That's why I'm asking you to go back and read that passage beforehand in Matthew because Jesus recognizes all of those worries in detail. He recognizes our practical need for provision and the tendency we have to worry about that.

He recognizes our desire for clarity in the middle of what may be an uncertain present or perhaps an unknown future in our lives and in our circumstances.

Our concern over what the future may hold for us, for our health even. Are any of these worries familiar to you?

They certainly are to me. I'm not, now hear me on this, I'm not seeking to simply tell you in the words of the 1988 song by Bobby McFerrin, if you know it, great, don't worry, be happy.

It's not always that easy. So I'm not looking for you to discount your worries and I'm not suggesting to you that if you're worrying about things in your life you're not being a good Christian.

[26 : 16] But I am seeking to remind all of us that if we want to have simplicity in our lives, if we want to have a life where our worries, our wants, our needs, are not the primary focus of our lives, we need to remember, seek ye first.

A kingdom focus will lead to kingdom simplicity. But what does it mean for us to seek God's kingdom first?

Well, I'm going to look at, we're going to look at three main areas of focus as we seek God's kingdom, God's priorities first over our own.

First, consider areas in your life where God may be calling you to minimize. Many people recognize they've literally cluttered up their lives with stuff.

Can you relate to that? One of my cousins has her own business and it's called She Sells Your Stuff. Perhaps you can tell what she does.

[27 : 29] People contact her when they recognize that they have stuff in their lives and stuff in their homes that they have outgrown, no longer need, don't have any use for, things that really serve no purpose in their lives, practical items that still have value potentially.

So she collects these things from people, she sells them online and gives them the majority of the cash that she frees up for them. Win, win.

And she makes a little bit of a commission on doing that. She's helping people declutter to simplify their lives in a very real and tangible way. One reality that may help you consider how to minimize the literal clutter in your life, I almost said wife, Freudian slip, is your wife cluttered?

That's another sermon. So what happens when you die? Okay, for the cheeky people who are out there listening, well, the correct answer is not, well, you stop living, obviously.

That is part of it, but that's not what I'm after here. Perhaps you have a very detailed will established that outlines what is to be done with every single thing that you own once you die.

[28 : 46] But I'm willing to bet that not all of us have that. Is that fair? That cherished collection of teaspoons, the stamps in the books and books on your shelf, comics, extra sets of good dishes, towels and sheets, an entire cupboard of small appliances.

We have a gadget that I still am reluctant to get rid of. If you freeze older bananas, you can put them into this and it creates a healthy alternative to frozen ice cream, which is great.

But how often do we use it? Good question. But there's whatever it might be in your life, whatever it is, you can probably just stop for a moment or not even need to take much time at all and recognize the things in your life that are causing clutter, that are making it hard for you to be of a simplified mindset.

And the bottom line is when you die, if you haven't dealt with any of these things, someone other than you will need to deal with all of that once you're gone.

So maybe consider minimizing now. Imagine the time that you would reclaim by not having to sort and dust, worry about, cherish, things in your life that ultimately have little to no meaning.

[30 : 23] We could reclaim a kingdom focus on our finances and our possessions. We could be able to direct them from being used for our own desires, to meet our own sense of need or want, towards what God, who has given them to us in the first place, desires that we use them for.

So I'm not saying, hear me on this, I'm not saying that it's somehow sinful to enjoy things or enjoy possessions. As long as our attachment to them or our enjoyment of them is healthy.

It's in balance with our commitment to, with our focus on God. Jesus gives us a healthy perspective on stuff in Matthew 6, 19 to 21.

He says, do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourself treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Hear this, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jesus is not just talking about money here, but our focus on everything in our lives.

[31 : 53] Where we put our focus, where we put our priorities, friends, that's where our heart will be. Seek ye first for a kingdom perspective on how we value our stuff.

Second, consider areas in life where God may be calling you to downsize. Now, we've talked about doing that with our stuff already, but are there other areas in your life where you recognize you could downsize and simplify?

Particularly in the context of social media, how many friends or friendships are we maintaining that may not actually be enriching our lives or the life of the other person?

Are they transitory? Are they thin? Are they perhaps not the best investment of our time? I've had conversations with people where they admit they've been holding on to a relationship in their lives which is more of a drain than a source of encouragement.

Perhaps they feel a sense of obligation to the other person. They're trying to heal a relationship that may never be healed. They're trying to restore a relationship to what it was in the past when one or both of the people involved have moved on.

[33 : 24] Perhaps you're familiar with the Disney animated movie Frozen. Can you recognize relationships or things in your life that you may be clinging on to and realize that it may be time to let it go?

You may even be able to recognize relationships that you've previously neglected that actually do enrich your life. maybe it's time to focus back intentionally on those.

Perhaps you can recognize a desire in your life for a relationship with another person to fulfill a need that if we stop and think about it could be better spent in time of study or prayer or connection with God.

Seek ye first. Be willing to let go of the things and relationships in your life that don't add true value in either loving God or loving others.

Third, I want you to consider areas in your life where God may be calling you to prioritize. When we change the focus of our lives from accomplishing, accumulating, achieving solely for their own sake, we'll begin to allow space in our hearts, space in our minds, space in our lives to connect with God and hear his voice.

[35 : 07] make time with God and time training in the spiritual disciplines your priority and trust God to provide the rest because he will.

Seek ye first and all these things will be added unto you. The things that we worry about, the things that we seek to provide for ourselves, God will provide.

when you seek to focus intentionally on the kingdom of God, on his will for your life and for all of creation, his plan for your life, his desire for all people to know him and declare him as their savior and lord.

Once you do that, one of the first things you may begin to notice is a sense of peace. Do you think God intended for us to spend our lives striving, feeling dissatisfied, feeling anxious and stressed?

Of course he didn't. At its core, the human life was always intended to be one of simplicity, one of beauty, one of peace.

[36 : 35] And despite that chasm of sin that was created by our human desire to choose our own way over God's way, God's simple and perfect plan for us can be restored.

Thanks be to God and thanks be to Jesus. written by the very wise King Solomon, the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament makes a powerful and insightful statement about human nature as it relates to simplicity in Ecclesiastes 7 verse 29.

And I found the Jerusalem Bible translation captures it most powerfully. Ecclesiastes 7 verse 29. This, however, you must know.

I find that God made man simple. Man's complex problems are of his own devising.

I find that God made man simple. Man's complex problems are of his own devising. God is not saying that God made us simple in the sense of intelligence.

[37 : 58] But he intended for our lives to be relatively uncomplicated. Yes, as Jesus recognized in John 16 verse 33, in this world, you, we, will have trouble.

God never promised that our lives in this broken world would not always be without pain or struggle. And I know we can all relate to that. We have had struggles and pain in our lives.

But that's not how God intended for our lives to benefit from simplicity. Continuing in John, Jesus ends his statement with the words, but take heart.

I have overcome the world. Friends, I think we can all recognize that our world is out of sync with the simplicity and the harmony that God intended for us.

It's out of sync with God's truth and in so many ways with God's people. We can all recognize and relate to that. But we can find simplicity in our lives by seeking God and his kingdom first.

[39 : 16] first, when we seek to minimize that inward clutter in our minds and hearts and the outward clutter of the stuff and the perhaps unnecessary relationships in our lives, when we respond to God's call to downsize and refocus on the things that have true value and importance in our lives, when we prioritize relationships, activities, and things in our lives that bring us closer to God and his will for us, then I believe we will begin to experience a true sense of simplicity.

If our hearts are oriented on God and on kingdom priorities, on loving God and loving others, everything else will fall into its proper place in our priorities.

Seek ye first. Amen. Friends, let's close with our benediction this morning.

A powerful reminder from scripture of what our God is capable of. So as you seek God's kingdom first, trust him. God will protect us.

And if we remain faithful, he will bring us into his presence and an everlasting life beyond anything this world can provide.

[40 : 58] Our benediction comes from Jude 24 and 25, and it says, now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

And to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time, now, and forever.

Amen. My friends, go in peace. Have a great week. Be blessed. And stay warm.