

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you today. Often what I do right before I teach I like to give you an update on a few things going on to bring you up to speed and to make sure we are communicating as effectively as we can. First of all, please pray for Pastor Ben today as he is actually teaching for a church on the other side of the Lake in Denver, North Carolina. One of the pastors over there at Denver Baptist Church gave Ben a call yesterday and said, *'Help, our family has Covid and I don't have anyone to preach for us.'* I love that our churches can collaborate with each other and have the same mind and fellowship that we can switch off like that. So Ben is preaching on that side of the Lake and I am preaching on this side this morning, and hopefully we will have a good time at both places this morning.

I just got back from Colorado yesterday. I was supposed to get back Friday but American Airlines messed me up so I didn't get back until yesterday. I have been out there teaching at a gap year camp. The reason I mention it to you is because a young man who was a teenager here in our church, Sam Hatfield, is supported through our missions every month. Sam's dad and mom were very influential in starting this church, and Sam has been in Colorado for six years at this camp that has programs to disciple kids between high school and college to kind of get them ready for all the pressures of college life. So Sam called me a few months ago and asked me to come out there and teach these young people. And I jump at those kind of things because I love working with young people that age.

Sam asked me to teach the book of Isaiah. And I asked him if I had done something to make him angry because Isaiah is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to teach, particularly to a bunch of 18, 19 and 20 year olds. But I did that last week and it was just a wonderful time. Now I mention that because I want you to remember that there are folks that grew up here that were part of our church that we now support, encourage and partner with through our missions program and they are doing work around the world that is phenomenal. There were forty young people in this group from places like Belgium, Germany, Canada plus the United States. And man, they were just some of the sharpest young people who are on fire for the Lord.

You know I get so tired of people my age always talking about millennials and generation Zs that we call Zoomers, like they don't know what is going on. Hey, we didn't know what was going on when we were that age and then we raised them, so what are we talking about. There are some really great young people out there who are passionate about Jesus and we just had a great time last week.

Speaking of missions I also want to kind of remind you that about nine months ago I talked to you about a young man from India, Stephen Dasari, who goes to church here. He was in my Life Group several years ago. God has called him to serve Him vocationally, so he has been shifting his immigration status to be able to become an intern here. I saw him earlier this morning, and I think he may be working in the tech room today. He and his wife are both very active in church, and I wanted to give you an update

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

on him. So I want you to know that it is still in process and it is now all up to the government, because apparently when you do things legally it takes like twenty times longer than if someone decides to do it illegally. But since he is working on getting his immigration status shifted over some people came here and did a surprise inspection a couple of weeks ago, we have been on the phone with them back and forth and we have been sending all kinds of paperwork to them.

And things are happening now after like six months of silence. I think it is still going to happen and we desperately need his ability to work with us on a more regularly scheduled time as he is doing it as a volunteer now. So I just wanted to bring you up to date because I know some of you have already starting giving and some of you are planning on giving to make this possible.

Speaking of giving I just want to tell you that in October we had a really good month of tithes and offerings so I want to tell you thank you for that. If we have a regular offering today we will hit the budget for this month. We did not hit it in the first two months of this fiscal year in August and September, we were down a little bit, but that is often the case in August and September. Now we are in the three month period of October, November and December where we usually do a little better. So I like to keep you up to date because it is your church, it is not just staff's church, or elder's church, it is our church. As we get ready to come to the end of the year hopefully we can catch up from the first two months of being down some. Covid has really thrown a lot of churches for a loop including ours, but we know God is on His throne and we are going to keep doing everything we possibly can. And I do appreciate your faithfulness in giving.

So this morning we are going to be talking about our next topic in this series that we have been doing on Spiritual Disciplines. And today we are talking about simplicity. And I have to tell you that I have been both very excited and very apprehensive about this topic. I am excited because I think this is an absolutely life changing, revolutionary even, spiritual discipline that we see far too little attention on in the life of a typical American Christian.

At the same time I am apprehensive because I am going to hit a topic that can be a little bit sensitive. I am delivering this challenge to a generation of Christians, who if we are going to be honest and objective, are the wealthiest, busiest generation in one of the wealthiest, busiest regions in the wealthiest, busiest country that has ever existed on this planet. I will tell you up front that what I want to do this morning is the same way I approach my classrooms, it is the same way I approach teaching and preaching for all of my ministry, and that is with the intention always to poke people in the brain with the Word of God.

And you know if you open up someone's cranium and you just randomly stick your finger in there you are going to have things flopping all over the place. It is supposed to cause a reaction. Well, I want to do that spiritually this morning. There is

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

supposed to be a response. It may make you feel a little uncomfortable, or a little challenged, it may even make you a little ticked off for a little bit, but that is okay, because in the end we want God to work in us and sometimes He does that by poking us a little bit.

Here is what I do know about all of us; we like our stuff. We really do. We like our cars, we like our big houses, we like our boats, we like our vacations and we like our investments and retirement accounts. We like our closets, we like our collections and our bucket list. We like our social circles, we like our lifestyles, we like our hobbies and our recreational pursuits; all of the indulgences that we accumulate and curate to make our lives more comfortable, more enjoyable, more enviable and more sustainable. We just like that.

And at the end of the day, if we are going to be honest, many of us are exhausted, over extended, stressed, anxious, addicted, overwhelmed, preoccupied and hurried bordering on burnout. That is why I think this is such an important topic for us to just kind of take a breath, sit up like big boys and girls, and listen carefully to the Word of God. Now I will say this to you this morning, we are going to be using Scripture to kind of test the foundation but this isn't a sermon like we normally deliver where we take a passage and we work through it line by line, verse by verse, or word by word. I would call this a sermonar, because I want to be practical, and I think this is one of those disciplines where God can use a good dose of practicality in our lives to help us make strong spiritual applications. So I wanted to kind of say that upfront.

In Scripture we see consistent themes around the ideal of simplicity. It is sometimes called moderation, but moderation is actually in my opinion a prerequisite for simplicity. Simplicity doesn't break out unless we are willing to live the moderate life. You know there is this cultural trend that some of the young people have kind of gotten into that is a little hip in a small circle of our culture today. It is called 'minimalism.' Basically the idea is how little do you need to be able to get along. Some of them have gotten into the 'little house' idea you may have seen on television. The little houses are about 250 square feet and they are on wheels.

Back in my day we called those campers, but today they are called 'little houses.' They cost a lot of money, but they are kind of portable. Here is my concern, some of that actually can be a modern form of an ancient practice called 'asceticism,' that teaches you can reach some kind of spiritual nirvana of contented peace separate from modern niceties and modern hectic-ness if you just minimalize. That is not what I am talking about this morning. I am not talking about that. I am talking about our values and also how we order our lives in terms of being able to focus on the things that God has said ought to be a priority for us.

So today I will not be saying everything that can be said about the spiritual discipline in the area of simplicity, but what I do say I hope it will provoke you. And I

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

used that word provoke advisedly, intentionally, to provoke you to think about your life and your choices, your possessions, your distractions and your schedules. This is not a one size fits all type of talk this morning. It is not just for wealthy people who live on the Lake. It is not just for retired people who have accumulated a lot of stuff. It is not just for the hoarders among us who cling to possessions like lifelines of significance. It is not just for the ambitious young entrepreneurs that are getting ready to start their business. It is not just for the young frazzled couple who are trying to have it all from parenthood to financial security. It is really for all of us. Okay? Those with much and those with little, those who are young and those who are older, those who are navigating life with ease and those who are hot messes of anxiety. It is even for those who are in ministry and those for whom church is the occasional visit when they don't have anything better to do.

So let's all consider the Word this morning. When we go to our Scripture it is going to be a little different today. I am going to be reading a litany of verses, and I am asking you to follow along, but I am not going to expect you to find each verse in your Bible because it would take the whole time that we have. I have them up on the screen, so please follow along as I read them. And I want you to listen very intentionally if you would please. Let the Word of God be almost sufficient for the whole message. That is ideally what it could be and should be is that if you did nothing else but listen to the Word it would cause you to respond. So listen to these passages of Scripture with a great deal of intentionality, and then I want to give you some practical advice.

So we are going to start off in Matthew Chapter 6, which is the great message that Jesus delivered and we could never get done learning things from it. Matthew Chapter 6 and verse 19 says: ***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven where never moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”***

I Timothy Chapter 6 and verses 6 and 7 says: ***“But godliness with contentment is great gain 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.”***

Luke Chapter 12 and verse 15 Jesus says: ***“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.”***

Proverbs Chapter 15 and verse 16 says: ***“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.”***

Matthew Chapter 6 and verse 33 says: ***“But seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”***

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

Mark Chapter 8 and verse 36 says: *“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul.”*

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5 and verse 10 says: *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”*

I Timothy Chapter 6 and verse 17 says: *“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”*

Proverbs Chapter 11 and verse 28 says: *“Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.”*

I could keep going on and on but these are just a few of similar verses. By the way did you know that the Bible deals more with money than it does with the Second Coming? It deals more with money than it does with the Virgin Birth. It deals more with money than it does major doctrines. I want you to understand this isn't a sermon just about money and material possessions and stuff; this is about resources, this is about what we trust in, what we value, what we think is important.

The fact of the matter is in our culture right now I think all of us will admit our lives are quite complicated by materialism, by trying to have it all. And whether that is about the amount of stuff we have in our houses, or the amount of appointments we have on our calendar, or even the number of relationships we are trying to maintain, a lot of us feel stress and anxiety because we feel a little overwhelmed with everything in our lives right now. And I think it is worthy when we talk about discipline, living in spiritual discipline, that is worthy of some consideration. And yes, prayer and fasting and reading the Scripture are all components, but we won't do those things if our lives are so complicated that there is no room for God, there is no room for these things.

I was talking last week with these young people from all over the world and these are sharp young adults. Some of them literally had grown up on the street and some of them were missionary kids from Afghanistan so there was a wide variety in their backgrounds. But it was interesting because one of the things that all of them wanted to talk about at some point during the week was how stressed they feel, how anxious they feel, and some of them were struggling deeply with things like depression. And for some of us when we look at them and realize that they feel anxious and stressed at 17, 18 and 19 years of age, we think, *‘just wait until you have a couple of rug rats in your house and you have a mortgage payment.’*

But the bottom line is this, all of us have the potential to live a life that is just disorderly enough, just complicated enough, just complex enough that we can't sleep well, that we feel this tension that starts in the back of our necks and crawls its way down to our fingertips. And we wake up with guilt, we wake up with frustration because we

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

feel like we have let people down, we didn't get everything done, we still want more and we don't feel satisfied. And when it comes right down to it, often God gets the leftovers if that. There are consequences to living an over complicated life. Let's go through a few real quickly.

The first one is this – it is just misplaced priorities. You have all heard the illustration a hundred times but no man on his death bed has ever said, *'Man, I wish I had worked a little more overtime.'* No one says that, do they? What are we more likely to say, *'Man, I wish I had been more generous.'* *'Man, I wish I had spent more time with the wife and the kids.'* *'Man, I really wish I had done more for others.'* But none of us say, *'Man, if I had only lived in a five bedroom house instead of a four bedroom house.'*

And yet how much of our current existence is spent trying to have that little bit more. The little bit more between contentment and stress, between being satisfied and feeling overwhelmed. That little twenty percent extra that goes on the credit card of our lives that while we think that will give us what we want and desire and need instead puts us into debt and bondage to others. That is what I am talking about because in that margin of over extension, often God and the things that are important to Him is who ends up paying the price by being pushed out.

The second thing is this - overwhelming distractions. Do you ever feel like you just can't take a breath? I don't know about you but I feel that way frequently, so what I do when I get to that moment is I go to an over compensation. Here is what I will do. I will either head for the Netflix or the refrigerator. Do you ever do that? I eat things when I am stressed that normal people should not be putting in their mouth like cold spaghetti. Every time I open the refrigerator door my standards drop. Have you ever noticed that? Before I open the door I think that I want fruit, but I am really not that hungry. I will just eat something low carb but when I open the door there is nothing low carb in there. So finally I am eating pizza that I had to scrape the green mold off of that was left in the back of the refrigerator.

The fact is that many of us will compensate our stress by wasting time. I will click on one stupid You Tube video, just one, and then the algorithm kicks in. Some of you younger people know what this is like but I am an old guy that does it too. And the next thing I know it is forty-five minutes later and I am watching stuff that is absolutely absurd. But just one more and the next thing you know you have wasted an hour. So my schedule that was really bad has now turned into worse. Why? It is because of these distractions that can overwhelm when I just needed a few minutes of escape to catch my breath. I just wanted something to eat to make me feel comfortable. I just wanted a few moments where I was not thinking about anything so I clicked on that link and the overwhelming distractions complicated my life.

Number three – constant anxiety and stress. We live in a culture where a lot of us are stressed. By the way you don't have to be old, you don't have to be in debt, all of

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

us are living in an unusual amount of stress. It is a characterization of our generation. And yet we have more conveniences than ever. We are just a few years away from being able to have our cars take us places by putting in the address, sitting back reading a book, and the next thing you know we have arrived. If God gives most of the people in this room a normal lifespan, we are going to get to do that. I think it is pretty cool because I have always wanted to be like the Jetson's. If I don't make that at least self-driving cars will be pretty cool.

We have vacuum cleaners that operate themselves. Boy if we could have had one of those when I was a boy. Now they run themselves. We have conveniences all over the place, and yet we are anxious and stressed and irritable and overwhelmed and over extended. What is up with that?

And then there is guilt. Some of us have guilt as our best friend. Why? It is because we never feel like we are good enough. When is the last time you spent time with your kids? When is the last time you took your spouse out on a date? When is the last time you had no credit card balances? When is the last time that you invited someone over for dinner just to hang out? When is the last time that you shared your faith? And then all of a sudden you sit back and you think, *'I don't have time for any of those things even though I know they are important and valuable.'* And what do you feel? Guilt accusations from Satan, and whether it is for good reasons or bad reasons we feel the stress of realizing that our misplaced priorities are robbing us.

Sometimes it is hoarding, and we are all guilty of that to some extent. Now I like to watch hoarders on television. Do any of you watch that show? Is that your guilty pleasure? I like to watch it because I am not that sick. They may have 48 cats and 12 of them are dead. (*Laughter.*) And they didn't even notice. I mean there are people like that out there. They show someone hardly being able to walk through their house because they have so much stuff. I like to watch it because it makes me feel good about myself.

But also if you were to go into my living room, and I am talking about the formal living room, you know that room that you have in your house that no one is allowed to go into except maybe special company, that room that you have in your house that your kids are not allowed in. Why? This is the living room and it is for company. And your kids say, *'But we never have company.'* And I say, *'I know, but if we ever do have company this is where they are going to sit. It is the good furniture.'* I have had the same couch in there for twenty years and it is just like the day we brought it home. I never plan to have another living room but we do have one in this house.

There is a glass cabinet in our living room, and if you are over forty you may understand what I am about to say. Do you know what is in our glass cabinet? There are two hundred Precious Moment figurines. (*Laughter.*) Do you all remember Precious Moment figurines from back in the 80s? We had a Precious Moment themed wedding.

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

Now don't give me that 'ah stuff.' (*Laughter.*) Do you know why guys like Precious Moments? It is because somehow they convinced us that if you didn't know what to get your wife for her birthday or Christmas, or if you had said something stupid, a Precious Moment would solve the problem. That is why I have two hundred. (*Laughter.*)

Let's just say the first two years of our marriage were a little rocky and there was nothing that Precious Moments couldn't at least try to resolve. So that is why we have this monument in our living room. By the way people always said if you will keep your Precious Moment figurines you will be able to sell them years down the road because they will go up in value. So as I was purchasing these I always felt like I was investing in collectibles and someday I would be rich. Yeah, mine went up in value to like being worth 'nothing.' And now you can't even give them away at garage sales.

First of all my wife is not going to lose that monument to Dan's stupidity for any price. But the other thing is they are not worth anything because it is no longer cool to collect them. At least I don't think so as I haven't bought one in several years. And when we stop and look at things like that, things that seem so important at one time, like remember Beanie Babies from years ago. People collect, collect, collect and we hoard them and we think they are going to give us value. We rationalize that we can sell them later on make a big profit. Yeah, and your kids are going sell them in your driveway for ten cents each after you are dead. So we hoard things, we hang on to stuff.

Then there is just self-centeredness that comes with living an over complicated life because it is all about us, isn't it? If I just had this people will think I am successful. If I just went there I would be cool. If I just wore this it would be perfect. So there is a self-centeredness that comes with it.

And then finally there is this inability to rest, a lack of contentment, an inability to be able to say, '*This is enough. This is sufficient.*' And that is because the more stuff we have often what happens is the more complicated our lives will become taking care of it. When I was about thirty I bought a boat with a friend. I took it out three times. The first time I got a speeding ticket, the second time I broke the propeller, and the third time it rained the entire time I was out on it. I owned it for three years, but I only used it three times. My kids still refer to it as 'the playhouse,' because that is what they did; they played in it while it was parked in my driveway.

But I thought I had to have it, and then I worried about it. Did it have sufficient insurance, were the kids going to mess it up when they were playing in it, was I maintaining it correctly, did I put the cover on before it rained? All the different things were a worry to me and I never used it but three times. And sometimes the busyness of our schedule, the complication of our lives, the number of possessions we own and have to take care of, even the quality of the things we have suck our ability to just have free time to enjoy relationships and friendships, to walk with God, to wait until we hear from Him.

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

And that is where I want us to go because at its root this is a spiritual matter. And I want you to understand why this is a spiritual matter. Yes, the whole world suffers from it, the whole world experiences this. I get that because we live in a materialist generation and a materialist culture and we are part of a materialist nation. But let's be honest we are that way as a church. We are Lake Norman people. We do live in this wonderful, beautiful, gorgeous place. I mean I lived in Palm Beach Florida and I will tell you that the upper middle class in this area live better than they do in Palm Beach Florida. And it is a privilege to live here. I don't like poverty, I like getting in my car and knowing it will start. I like having a nice house. I like living in a beautiful area. I am not saying that is the issue; the issue is what we deal with, and what we do with, and what our priorities are. That is where we need to step back and reflect and ask ourselves, *'Am I stewarding the privileges I have right now biblically?'*

I am glad God did not call me to be a gypsy where they live in cardboard ghettos. I am glad this morning that I don't live in India where I have visited several years ago and literally the floors of the huts were made from buffalo manure. They would take a buffalo patty, wet it, and rub it with their bare hands. They would do that for layer after layer of buffalo manure until when it was dry it would be like concrete. And that is what they sat on, slept on and lived on. I have to tell you that I am glad God didn't create me to be living like that. I am thankful for that. I didn't grow up rich, but I am glad for what we had. But it is fundamentally a spiritual matter how we handle any resource that God puts in our hands, whether it is our time, our talent or our treasure.

So let's look at this. Number one – materialism can cause us to forget our need for God. And we as Americans need to remember that of all people on this planet this is a privilege that we may never have truly experienced like some and that is an utter dependence upon God for everything. How many of those verses did we read this morning that said, *'Look, are you worried about what you are going to wear? Trust God. Are you worried about what you are going to eat? Trust God. Are you worried about where you are going to sleep? Trust God.'*

But most of us have never, not one single time in our lives, been in a situation where we have had to trust God for those things, because they just came naturally in our culture. So my question is this – what are you trusting God for today? The mentality can come to us subtly as a lie from Satan saying, *'Hey, you know what, I have everything covered anyway. I am quite comfortable. I don't need to pray, I don't need to beg, I don't need to grab hold of God and ask Him to hear me, because man, I have it. I'm comfortable. I don't have to stress.'* And if we are not careful what that does is it robs us from the opportunity to know what it means to have God reach down in our distress and in our want and say, *'Here I am.'* And the more we accumulate the less likely we are to ever be in a situation where we say, *'God, will you walk with me through this valley?'*

Here is another thing, when we value things over God, let's be honest we are guilty of idolatry. Here is what happens sometimes because we are not like the places I

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

have been and some of you have been as well, where literally if you go in parts of Asia they have big monuments, big buildings dedicated to worship of idols. I mean statues covered with gold leaf, made out of stone, and people come and cry, they leave gifts and they light incense. Arguably, sometimes we do that in some of our churches even in a Christian culture where we look or pray to images which is unbiblical, but some still do it.

I was in a home in Cuba one day and they had an altar right in their living room, and it had the Virgin Mary and another statue that I didn't know who it was supposed to be. And they had a little bowl of rice, a little glass of whisky and some flowers around them. And I asked them what it was and they said it was their altar. They were practicing Santeria. And some religions, particularly in the Hindu religion they kind of have a god of the week, or a god of the day, and they just hit all the gods to make sure they get the right one. It is kind of convenient to do it that way. We look at it and think it is so silly. They take all their money and spend it on stuff that isn't really important and can't really impact anyone in useful ways. *'Dan, how many Precious Moments do you have in your cabinet?'*

If I am going to poke you in the brain then I have to poke me in the brain as well. So let's say two hundred Precious Moments figurines at thirty dollars apiece, and some of them were more than that, but let's say two hundred at thirty dollars apiece. I am not a rocket mathematician but I think that is about six thousand dollars. And six thousand dollars would pay for all the food and needs of a Cuban pastor in Cuba today for a decade, a decade.

Again, I am not saying you should never buy a Precious Moments; I am not saying you should walk everywhere and sell your cars. I am not saying you should never go to Disney again. What I am saying is this – we ought to be thoughtful on how we prioritize, because quite frankly if we have time to go on the Lake every week but we never worship corporately, that is idolatry. If we have money to put in retirement, if we have money to buy yet another outfit that we will wear only a couple of times and then give to Good Will, if we have money to go to 131 Main, which is one of the best restaurants around. And again, I am not saying never go, but I am saying if we have money to do those things, but we have never given a red cent to missions, we have never tithed, we never consider giving to someone who has a great need; if that is not idolatry can you explain to me what is. That is what I am saying.

Maybe you are thinking there is some interior motive to this message. No, there is no interior motive other than shouldn't we desire to do things the way God planned. Is His Word going to mean anything at all to us? Shouldn't it reorder our priorities? Shouldn't it change how we look at our resources? Or are we okay just living like the world? Are we okay just living like everyone else?

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

And that is the same with our time, our talent, and our treasure. If you have a talent, maybe it is playing ball or it is playing music or whatever it is, if you have time to go do this or that, but you don't have time to volunteer doesn't that say something to us. And that is what the purpose of spiritual discipline is; it is to help us to live our life with God in mind as a priority.

The third thing is simplicity and generosity do often go hand in hand because if I have more than I need I have opportunity to share with others, but if I am spending more than I have than I am in bondage. And so we have to be really aware. Mother Teresa said this: *"The more you have, the more you are occupied. The less you have, the freer you are."* And that is really, really true. And if we live a simplicity life we can also have generosity. And here is the cool thing, it is fun to live a generous life; it really is.

And I want to say this, I want to say thank you to this church. I have worked here for almost eleven years now, and before I came here the elders said, *'Dan, we know you have a huge passion for missions, and we want you to continue that.'* And the elders have said that to me consistently over the years because they know that is something God has laid on my heart and they want to be partners with me on it. And this church gives me the freedom to go do what I did last week. It is a little stressful because I had to prepare for my sermon today, and I am doing lots of other things as well. But to be able to go invest in others like I did last week when it doesn't have a direct impact or a direct blessing to Life Fellowship, to be able to go do that is just a huge blessing. That is why supporting missionaries is so important, and I want to say thank you because that is corporate generosity.

But here is my question – where is our personal generosity? Are you willing to take a week of your vacation and go on a mission trip? Are you willing to take a couple of hours a week and pair with one of our ministries? I just had a really great meeting two weeks ago with a young Life representative and hopefully we are going to do this in the future. This guy who kind of grew up in the hood himself has a passion for reaching kids in the high school that none of us would send our kids to in West Charlotte and different places. Some of those kids don't have a parent or anyone in their life to speak truth to them. And you know we could do that, we could give two hours a week, we could give someone our cell phone number and tell them we will facetime them tonight while they are doing their algebra. We could invite them up for the weekend to the Lake.

These are the kind of things we could do, but we can't do that if we are running a hundred different directions. We can't do that if we are in debt and having to work extra to pay off our bills. We can't do that if we have so complicated our lives that there is no reserve to be able to share with others.

Number four, we lose sight or we are unable to set our priorities in order. And the reason is because we have more than we can say grace over. We have twenty-eight hours

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

of things to do but only twenty-four hours to do them in. So we are not even going to be able to talk about priorities because we are just trying to keep from drowning.

Number five, our external is a reflection of our internal and our eternal. And this is damning to those of us who live in this generation. We need to understand that our busyness, our lack of generosity, our anxiety ridden, stress filled reputation sends a message about what is really important internally to us and eternally for us. That is why the Scripture said, *'What are you laying up for your treasure in heaven?'*

What is your long term picture? Are you getting stuff here so that someone can break into your house while you are at church and rip you off? Are you laying up stuff here and sometime you are going to go out in the garage and find that you have rat's nests or rust or things falling apart because of neglect because you really didn't have time to take care of it? Or are you laying up treasure in heaven? There will come a day when we will look at all we have here and the Bible tells us that it will be wood, hay and stubble and it will burn and be gone.

So what can we do? Very practically let me share these thoughts with you. Number one – thoughtfully set reasonable goals and standards in a variety of areas and set priorities of God, family, others and then ourselves. Really order your life, sit down and have a conversation with your kids, with your spouse and say, *'Alright, as a family what can we do, what can we get rid of, what can we reorder, what do we need to wait on in order to allow ourselves to have time and space and resources.'* It literally may be this; God wants you to take your family on a missions trip sometime in the next twenty four months. Now that Covid is starting to get better we are going to be planning some mission trips. And then make a decision as a family to go on one as a family. It doesn't have to be with Life Fellowship because there are other places to do this, but make a decision to go on a mission trip instead of going to Disney.

Maybe you think I am preaching against Disney but no, I am not saying that. You can go to Disney but go to Disney after you have gone on your mission trip because I guarantee you what you learn on a mission trip will be far more substantive, far more life changing potentially than if you go to Disney every single year. Do you know what going to a mission trip does for us? It is a distraction, it is cold macaroni and cheese for a week, but also when you go you serve, you help, you invest and you see the way the rest of the world lives. You and your kids will never be the same because it will transform you.

It may be that you wait in terms of buying that new car; it may be that you don't join that club; it might even be that you downsize your house. I used to have a place in the mountains where we were going to retire. I owned that place for fifteen years because I didn't have a house when I bought it and I thought buying that would be an investment and I thought it would be great to retire over in Lake Lure. The place wasn't on the lake because I didn't have that kind of money, but it was in the area and it was

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

nice. We were going to go there all the time and relax and chill out, de-stress from the ministry, right? Yeah, we only did that very, very rarely.

And you know when I did go there what I had to do? I had to mow the grass, do lots of repair because we had renters in it like an Airbnb kind of thing. I kept that place for fifteen years and finally decided that was it. I was tired of worrying about it and I decided to sell that thing. Had it on the market for three years trying to sell it and finally sold it for the exact same price I had paid for it with absolutely no profit. Of course today it is worth two hundred thousand dollars more, but that is the way the market goes, right? *(Laughter.)*

God taught me an important lesson. For all the energy, all the money I poured into it, losing money on it every year even when it was rented, all the distraction it was, I could have re-invested that in so many different ways, better ways. So I just wanted you to know that I am an idiot. I mess it up sometimes too. I have to sit down with my family and thoughtfully re-order things too. We all have to do that because that is part of the culture and that is okay. What isn't okay is to continue to do the same thing that is stupid and wasting resources over and over again until we eventually are just crushed by it.

The second thing is utilize tools to keep things reasonable. Again this isn't rocket science; maybe it just takes having a budget. Maybe you don't know how to do that. We offer a class called Financial Peace University. We offer it about four times a year and if you take that class you will learn how to make a budget. Maybe you wonder why that is important, but you will find that you live better and smarter when you plan how you spend your money. I don't care how poor you are, or how rich you are, if you have a plan for it you will live better. I am so thankful my parents taught me that at an early age. One of the first things they taught me when I got my first allowance was to tithe. My mom paid me in nickels and dimes so it would be easy to figure out what the tithe was. So it has never been an issue for me to tithe because I learned it when I was young. Tithe ten percent and save ten percent and you will live a better life. And those two rules went in my budget at the very beginning, I have kept them all my life and it has been a huge blessing.

Again, it is not complicated. But you know what we will do if we don't budget? We will spend one hundred percent of what we make, we won't give a thing, we won't save a thing and we will put ten percent at least on credit cards. So every year we get in bondage. But if we have a plan we also know to work the plan. And God has a plan for our lives and we should too. And it begins with giving. People ask me this all the time. I give my ten percent before I pay my taxes. Why? It is because God is more important to me than the government, so I start with that. I am not telling you this because I want you to think I'm pious; I am trying to give you an illustration.

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

I know that I will live better on the ninety percent that remains than if I kept the one hundred percent. Why? It is because I am disciplined and I know where I am going to spend my money. Some people say to me all the time, *'Tithing is Old Testament.'* Yes, and do you know what the New Testament standard is? It is tithe – plus. Remember how Jesus actually endorsed the tithing when He was talking about the woman who gave her mites. He said in the Old Testament if you committed adultery you broke the Law, and in the New Testament He said if you look after a woman with lust in your heart you are as guilty as committing adultery. In the Old Testament it said we should not murder and in the New Testament it said if you hate someone and have evil thoughts toward them you are as guilty as murder.

Standards under grace are higher rather than lower than it was under the Law. Why? It is because we are to do it out of love not legalism. I dare you to try this. Try God, live by His standard of generosity starting with ten percent. If at the end of six months you are not living better financially because you have tithed and lived with a plan and a budget, come up to me and say, *'Dan, this is a big mistake. I should never have tithed. I am a ruined mess right now.'* If you do that I will go up to the bookkeeper and have her give you a check for the entire six months. Have I ever had to do that? Not one time because you will find that you will live better with a plan than you will without a plan, and God's plan says: ***"Seek ye first the kingdom of God."***

It is not because God needs your money; it is because we need to be dependent in thinking about God and His plan. I wish you could see Sam and Laura Hatfield. They live in a tiny little place with two bedrooms and two kids. They don't have the formal living room, they don't even have an eat-in kitchen, and their house was filled with young people all the time. They would come and eat, have Bible studies and it was a mess, but they could not be happier because they don't need more stuff. I am so proud of them for that and so excited for them; it makes me want to do something for them. I would love for our church to get behind them and help and encourage them more than we are. Why? Because it is a blessing to be generous.

So use the tools that allow you to be generous. Use the tools to free up your time by having a schedule. Remember a few weeks ago I told you about what Friday night is for Julie and me? Someone sent me a pastor's appreciation card after I had said that Friday night was date night where we go to Showmars and we go to Walmart probably eighty percent of the time. That is our date night. It is not fancy but it is our date night. So in that pastor's appreciation card someone sent me was a Showmars gift certificate and a Walmart gift card which was really sweet. I told the first service it was like someone gave me a thousand dollars, now it wasn't a thousand dollars, but it was so cool that someone did that for us.

Now if you tell me that on Friday night we are going to have an activity I feel bad but I have to say that I am sorry but I am busy that night. Now every once in a while there may be a wedding or someone is in the hospital on a Friday night, but for the most

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

part I am not going to come to your birthday party or some other activity on Friday night because that is my date night. And it ought to be important for you to have a date with your kids or have a date with your spouse. Have a date with God every day, a date with your wife every week, and a date with your kids every month if at all possible. Set those up on your calendar and don't give up, don't quit. Use those tools and use your calendar.

This brings me to number three, learn to politely but decisively say no to yourself and others. Sometimes it is a good thing to tell yourself no. *'Dan, you do not need to eat cold pizza, because you had a heart attack in January. Don't touch the pizza.'* That is a good thing when you tell yourself no. It is a good thing when you say, *'I would love to put my kids on the Travel Team, but Travel Team means that my kids will not be able to participate in any of the church youth activities because they would be gone Sundays. So as a result they can play on the school teams but they can't play on the Travel Teams.'* Now some parents will think, *'Well, my kid will never be Michael Jordan then.'* Guess what; I have a little secret for you, your five foot six white boy son is not going to be the next Michael Jordan. *(Laughter.)* You have more chance of being the lottery winner of the mega power ball, so quit living your dreams through your kids and invest in them spiritually.

Does that mean your kids can never play sports? No, but seriously how many sports do they need to play. Pick one or two and let them play them well. Be at their games, cheer for them, but if you are not taking your son or your daughter out, if you are not going for hikes in the mountains or mountain biking, if you are not going riding roller coasters every so often with them, if you are not teaching them how to build something in your garage, if you are not teaching them how to sit with the family and converse, but they are in every sport, every dance club, every band, if they are doing all those things but they are not being disciplined by you then something is broken. So have a plan and learn to politely be the grownup and say, *'I'm sorry I have something very important scheduled so I am not able to participate.'* And that is okay, the world will not come to an end and you are a better parent for saying no than if you give in to every opportunity that comes. Our culture wants to make you too busy to parent, too busy to be a good husband or wife, too busy to give ministry to Kid Life, too overextended to tithe, and too busy to worship. They want all of that and in the end it is idolatry.

Number four, do a current inventory and start off fresh. What does that mean? Have a family meeting; take your spouse out for a date. Then talk to them about your clutter, talk about your schedules and talk about your finances. Get to a point where you can save a little bit every week, and at the end of the year at Christmas have a family project where you take the one hundred dollars that you have saved, or the one thousand dollars you have saved, or the ten thousand dollars that you have saved, and as a family figure out how you can invest it in the Lord's work. Wouldn't that be the coolest thing, and all that is required is a little discipline, a little planning and a little simplifying. You will find that you can have a family tradition that will touch people's lives and that will re-order your priorities and set an example for your kids that will help you live better than you have ever

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

lived before. You won't live the hectic-ness, you won't live the disorder, you won't feel stressed, and you won't feel in bondage.

Number five, invest your resources wisely, your time and your treasure. And the best way to invest is in people. Whether it is the poor kid that attends West Charlotte High School, or whether it is planting a church in India, or whether it is partnering with your teenager and teaching a Kid Life class; whatever it is that God gives you this little thing that you can do together.

I was talking to Thomas Peters a while ago. He was working in Kid Life this morning and he said he was heading out this afternoon to go with his motorcycle riding friends. And I thought it was a beautiful time to go in the mountains. And he said, no, we are going over to Concord because we are going to do a homeless feed there. That is what I am talking about, doing something for somebody else. And when you invest that and you have the time and the resources to do it you are starting to live out this discipline. There is a blessing doing this discipline and it is important.

So be financially generous, invest your time in ministry, enjoy your personal time with God, take that walk with your earbuds in and listen to the Scriptures, and pray. In my neighborhood we have a Life Fellowship family and during Covid a lot of us exercised around the neighborhood. And one day I went out to my mailbox and there was a note from my neighbor saying, *'I have just been out walking past your house and I wanted you to know that I prayed for you when I did.'* I can't tell you what a blessing that was. There are opportunities all around us if we will just like take a breath, not be so busy and let God speak to us. He will show us ways that we can touch people's lives.

I was a school teacher for many years, in fact I still am. I love doing it. One of the stupid things I did in my first year of teaching was I assigned every kid a written book report for every month. They would have to read the entire book and write a two page book report on it. This was before word processing so it was written in longhand. My kids wrote like drunken monkeys so they would be very difficult to read. And I had a handful of students who didn't understand the concept of those little red lines on either side of the paper which were margins. We all know those to be margins and we write in between the margins. I had a student who would write like one word real long over it because they didn't have much to say, but I also had these students who would write from the edge of the paper to the other edge of the paper and it would drive me nuts.

Do you know why? It was because I couldn't teach them by using comments. I might want to say, *'Periods are your friend. Use capital letters please. Here is a good place to start a new paragraph.'* But when they wrote everywhere on the paper I didn't have any margins to put comments on. I couldn't write anything to them or communicate with them, because I would have to wait until the very end of the paper and hopefully there would be a little bit of space on the paper for me to comment. But they are not going to read it at the end of the paper; they would read it as they were reviewing it.

MEET WITH ME: Simplicity
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 4
Dan Burrell

And I realized that is what I do in my life. I go from side to side and I don't leave any margins and then God doesn't speak to me and I wonder why. Do you know why I don't hear from God sometimes when I am reading my Bible, or I don't hear from God when I am praying? It is because there is no time; I have filled my margins. I have to be here, I have to do that, I have to take care of this, grass needs mowed, bushes need trimmed, I have to join that and I want to watch this on television, and oh, I haven't checked my Facebook. I have all these busy things going on and sometimes God has to tell me, '*Be still. Quit filling up your pages. Leave me some margins because I have some things I want you to hear, some things I want to teach you. I would like to make some notes for you.*'

Simplicity is a good thing, and it is a discipline, so let's think about that this week.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.