

## **GOD-PLEASING STEWARDSHIP 4** **“LIVING SIMPLY”**

Today we'll conclude this little series on strategies for developing a God-Pleasing Stewardship Life. Based on the principles that Salvation is what we have received, Servants are what we are, and Stewardship is what we do; we've underlined this series with a truth: “It's All God's”. Everything we have, and all we are, come from God. The first week we explored “Maintaining Balance” between earning, saving, spending and giving. In week two we studied “Managing our Debt” as a stewardship strategy. Last week we discussed “Investing Wisely” all the resources God has given us, and today we'll conclude by considering “Living Simply” as a God-Pleasing Stewardship Strategy. A couple verses might help get us going:

*A **simple life** in the Fear-of-God is better than a rich life with a ton of headaches.*  
Proverbs 15:16

*A pretentious, showy life is an empty life; a plain and **simple life** is a full life.*  
Proverbs 13:7

Most of us, especially this time of year, pine (wish) for a “simpler life”; yet most of don't really have a clue what that is. Unlike the conventional “Simplifying” wisdom; like getting organized, spring cleaning (year round), ‘If you haven't used or worn it in a year...donate it, or throw it, setting goals, managing time, saying no; today's message will take a deeper look than the obvious life simplifying tips. Tips are good for thanking your waiter, but getting to a God-pleasing level of simple living may require something more. I hope to give you a glimpse of that today. But first we must look again at what has become the primary text of this series from I Timothy 6.

*A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough.*

*But if it's only money these leaders are after, they'll self-destruct in no time. Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after.*

*Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life.”* 1 Timothy 6: 6-10; 17-19

That's what I'm after today...with my life; to build a true, Godly life...that will last.

There are three steps I discover in this passage that will help us.

### **1. GO HARD AFTER GOD**

*Tell them to go after God...*

Part of the reason we are in this hectic, stressful mess we call 'living', is because we have sought to make God just one more activity in our life; rather than making God the very essence of our life. Part of the problem we face in simplifying our life is not just cleaning out the closets, or organizing the garage, or prioritizing our appointments, or throwing out our trash; it's dealing with who God is!

We all know that the materialistic machine marching unabated across our culture, around our country, and even invading our community is driven by basic personal insecurities that will never be appropriately addressed by buying some product! Only as we initially and repeatedly come to an awareness and acknowledgement that God alone defines who we are, that God alone determines the value we have, that God alone identifies our identity; will we ever get to a simpler life! On the surface that doesn't make much sense, but let me go deeper.

God has created human beings with some needs. We have some basic needs and some others too. We all have the need to be loved, and the need to love. Some of those needs are designed by God to be met by other human beings, or from other sources besides God. Let's use our human need for intimacy as an example. God has specifically created us with the need for intimacy, and desires that need be met by significant other human beings. Yes, God wants to be intimate with us, but most of us need our intimate relationships to "have skin on them."

In much the same way, God has created us with a deep need for self-identity or some would say self-significance, or even self-esteem. That need cannot be met by any other human being or from any other source. This need that resides at the very core of who we are; can only legitimately be met by God. Husbands can't find themselves in marrying the most beautiful woman in the world. Wives will never find themselves in the career or power of their husbands. Children will never find out who they are by only considering the family name they inherit. Our needs for identity can only be met by God.

This is partly at least, why our lives have spun into this stressful, chaotic, out of control, materialistic life. Far too many of us have believed the consumerist lie, that buying products or toys, or stuff in general will make us feel better, look cooler, seem more together; when in reality there is no product out there that can define who we are... but God. And God is no product to be purchased, but a Savior to be sought..."hard", after!

The prophet Isaiah gives us an insight into what I'm saying:

*God's Message: "Heaven's my throne, earth is my footstool. What sort of house could you build for me? What holiday spot reserve for me? I made all this! I own all this!" God's Decree. "But there is something I'm looking for: a person **simple and plain**, reverently responsive to what I say. Isaiah 66:1*

You want to simplify your life (even if you don't) go hard after God, or you'll be going and growing more frustrated every day. Be reverently responsive to God.

## **2. GO ON DOING GOOD**

*...to do good, to be rich in helping others...*

You'll remember that we discussed this last week; the primary way that we invest our resources in eternity, is by using them to help other people; meeting the needs of other people. Today I want to expand on that in light of simplifying our lives. Again, at face value it makes no logical sense to try and add", being nice to strangers", or "sharing with others, this Christmas season"; to our overfilled plate. That's just more stress... until we get to the deeper meaning.

Have you ever considered that the excess clothing crowding your closets might be a “God-blessing” for some stranger in need? Have you ever thought that all those books on your (my) shelves might actually lead another person to Christ, or help clarify the Christian message, or provide someone simple entertainment? Have you ever thought that helping someone else changes you? Could you even imagine that one of those needs we all have is the need to give stuff away? Might be! From out of our discovering God, we soon begin to take on God’s character, and God’s priorities; one of which, (maybe the biggest) is that God is a do gooder! God believes in doing good for other people; and most often asks us to be His agents. Listen:

*But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite **simple**: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously— take God seriously. Micah 6:8*

I really like that last line: We often take ourselves way too seriously, and hardly ever take God seriously enough! But I also like what comes before it: God wants us to seriously go after doing good; be fair, just, compassionate and loyal! Sounds like a recipe for a simple and happy (maybe even a holy) life. Make it a priority in your life, give up some of the meetings, and replace them with volunteering that makes a real difference. You have my permission to simplify your life by ceasing so much junk that is not fulfilling to you or helpful to others, in order to replace them with opportunities for doing good to others.

### **3. GO NUTS BEING GENEROUS**

*...be extravagantly generous...*

Ever heard the definition of a mighty oak tree? A nut that stood its ground! Call me nuts, but I’m standing my ground, in fact I’m staking my life on the belief that one of the BEST ways to simplify my life is to generously give as much of it away as I can. I earnestly believe that as a follower of Jesus, we must do everything we can to be generous, (hilarious) with our resources.

Debate with me 'Tithing' all you want; doubt that God was serious when He challenged us to put Him to the test, if you choose; disagree if you want that there are any standards for giving in the Bible; and I'll simply say this: "God so loved the world... that He gave..." I'll simply remind you of the Widow and her two mites she offered at the temple collection. It was all she had! She literally gave her very life to God...so how can we justify anything less? It's not a matter of writing a check of your entire fiscal worth and placing it in the offering plate, but rather seeing that all your worth has nothing to do with your money! We place our tithes, gifts and offering in the plate to remind ourselves that we belong to God and what we own has come from God.

My friends, I've been preaching and teaching about stewardship for 11 years, and many of you have accepted the challenge and adventure to give more generously. Many of you are enjoying God's greater blessing because you took a significant step of faith; you chose to stand your ground. It didn't make any fiscal sense, but you did it and are now enjoying God's greater favor; if I'm wrong tell me; if I'm misspeaking for you, tell me.

I don't know what to do with some of the rest of you. I know it's not my job to change your heart or mind, but I wonder why you still hesitate, why you withhold, why you disobey in this spiritually significant place in your life. Maybe a reason your life seems filled with chaotic stress, is because God is trying to get your attention. Maybe a reason you can't seem to manage your life, is you are unwilling to yield this simple part of your life. Maybe a reason that you have no sense of peace, contentment or tranquility in your life...is because you aren't supposed to! Maybe a reason you don't see God at work in your life, or even in our world, is you are not being generous with your giving. Giving what you don't need...is not by definition, really giving. Listen:

*We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion – how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand (our ground) before God. 1 John 3: 16-19*

I will close this morning with a prayer the late Peter Marshall wrote that would be good for us to pray with regularity: Let us pray it together. “Forbid it, Lord, that our roots become too firmly attached to this earth, that we should fall in love with things. Help us to understand that the pilgrimage of this life is but an introduction, a preface, a training school for what is to come. Then shall we see all of life in its true perspective. Then shall we not fall in love with things of time, but come to love the things that endure. Then shall we be saved from the tyranny of possessions which we have no leisure to enjoy, of property whose care becomes a burden. Give us, we pray, the courage to simplify our lives. Amen.”

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**STUDY / DEVOTIONAL GUIDE FOR GOD-PLEASING STEWARDSHIP 4**  
**“LIVING SIMPLY”**

**MONDAY:** Read Isaiah 33, and especially meditate on verse 15. What do you see/hear about how you are to live your life?

**TUESDAY:** Read Matthew 5, and especially meditate on verse 6. How would you define contentment? How would you explain it to someone who doesn't know God?

**WEDNESDAY:** Read Acts chapter 20, and especially consider Paul's example of helping the poor. He ends with a principle, (35) what is it? And how are you living out that principle in your life? What does that principle mean to you?

**THURSDAY:** Read Hebrews 13: and especially meditate on verse 5. What does it mean to you that God 'satisfies' you? Are you satisfied with God? Are there areas of dissatisfaction in your life?

**FRIDAY:** Consider the following suggestions for simplifying your life. How would you prioritize them and which would you like to start now, and what plan will you implement to begin?

**THE OUTWARD EXPRESSIONS OF SIMPLICITY**

1. BUY THINGS FOR THEIR USEFULNESS RATHER THAN THEIR STATUS
2. REJECT ANYTHING THAT IS PRODUCING AN ADDICTION IN YOU
3. DEVELOP A HABIT OF GIVING THINGS AWAY
4. REFUSE TO BE PROPAGANDIZED BY THE CUSTODIANS OF MODERN GADGETRY
5. LEARN TO ENJOY THINGS WITHOUT OWNING THEM
6. DEVELOP A DEEPER APPRECIATION FOR THE CREATION
7. LOOK WITH HEALTHY SKEPTICISM AT ALL 'BUY NOW, PAY LATER' SCHEMES
8. OBEY JESUS' INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT PLAIN, HONEST SPEECH
9. REJECT ANYTHING THAT BREEDS OPPRESSION IN OTHERS
10. SHUN ANYTHING THAT DISTRACTS YOU FROM SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD.