

THE SIMPLE LIFE

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So how many people live a full, busy, active life ... and you love your full, busy active life? How many people? And how people have a full, busy, active life, but sometimes you wish your life were a little simpler and you had a little less to do? Anybody have? And how many people here would like to have a little more balance and maybe a little more time just for yourself? Anybody?

You know, we all say and understandably all desire to have simpler lives, but we always get sucked back in to the cultural, competitive, "go, go, go"; got to be number one; got to be bigger, better, faster, higher. Because our modern life has a lot of demands; has a lot of expectations. And I believe, culturally, having a full calendar -- being busy and going from meeting to meeting -- and having achievements and always have to keep pursuing more and more achievements is a sign in our culture of a successful and happy life. Of us being valuable and us being important.

And so, you know, it's such an important thing for us to sometimes simplify our lives, but we get so caught up in the whirlwind of the image of busyness -- and being active and doing so much -- that we literally think bigger is better; busier is better; more is better.

There's this story about this American business banker who was visiting a small little fishing village in Mexico. And he saw this one fisherman in a boat, and he saw he had a lot of yellow fin tuna. And he said, *"Wow, those are beautiful, quality tuna!"* He said, *"How long you take you to catch them?"*

[The fisherman] said, *"Oh, not very long."*

He said, *"Well, why didn't you just stay out and get more?"*

[The fisherman] said, *"Well, because I just have what I need for my family."*

And he said, *"So what do you do with the rest of your time?"*

[The fisherman] said, *"Well, you know, I sleep late. And I fish a little bit, and then I play with my kids. And then I have a siesta with my wife. And then I walk around in the village at the evening, sipping wine. And then I play guitar and hang out with my friends."*

And the American investment banker said, *"Wow! But, you know, I can really help you! Because, you know, I have a Harvard MBA. And if you were to spend twice as much time fishing, you could have for yourself and -- with that extra over time -- you could buy a bigger boat. And then if you just keep doing that more and more, then you can have several boats. The next thing you know, you'll have a fleet." And he said, "And then you won't even have to sell to the middleman. You could sell directly to the processor. And then you can open your own cannery and control their product and the process and the distribution. And then you'll be so big, you'll have to move from this village to Mexico City ... and then to Los Angeles and then to New York. You're going to have an empire!"*

And then the fisherman said, *"So how long will that take to get?"*

He said, *"Not long; about 15, 20 years."*

And then [the fisherman] said, *"But then ... well, what then?"*

He said, *"That's when the best part comes! Because then you could put out an IPO and sell stocks, and you could make millions upon millions of dollars."*

[The fisherman] says, *"Okay, millions. And then what's next?"*

He said, *"Then you can retire."*

[The fisherman] said, *"Well, what will I do?"*

He said, *"Well, then you can move to a small coastal village and fish; sleep in late and play with your kids; have a siesta with your wife; and, you know, walk around the village; sip wine; and play with your amigos!"* [Congregants laugh]

You know, so somebody said that life is really simple, but we human beings insist on making it complicated. You know, in our culture, again, we are taught to be aggressive; to be ambitious; to be driven; to be motivated. And so, a simple life doesn't sound so sexy and exciting. It doesn't sound so desirable. It doesn't sound like something for us, in our culture, to really aspire to and we would think is a great thing ... until we get burned out. Until we're overwhelmed. Until we feel overloaded. It's only then that we sometimes begin to seek and wish and desire for a simpler life.

A simpler life, almost to some of us, sounds less than; or you're not trying or working hard -- hard enough. And the truth is: it is a simple life that is the key to feeling happier; to having a life that feels more meaningful and fulfilling. Because as we live a simpler life, we actually are more present. We're more engaged; we're less rushed; we're less stressed. And we actually have more time and energy to invest in our relationships; to get to know who we truly and really are; and to get to enjoy investing our time in the passions that we really have and the things that we really enjoy and are interested in.

So, I ask you: In your life, where and how do you find simplicity in your life? And how many people would agree that finding more simplicity in your life would be beneficial and help you enjoy your life a little bit more?

And so, tonight, I want to look at seven ways to help simplify our lives. I actually had 10 ways ... but then I thought that doesn't sound so simple! [Congregants laugh] *"Here are the 25 ways to simplify your life."* [Laughs with congregants] So it's down to seven! So you should feel really good!

So the first one – the first step – to simplifying our lives is to **GET CLARITY ABOUT OUR PRIORITIES.** Anybody ever had a time in your life where you didn't know what you wanted to do? You didn't know where you wanted to go? You didn't know what end was up? Anybody have a time like that? Or anybody ever been unclear about an important decision or unclear about what to do about a certain relationship?

When I was a kid, I used to be kind of wishy-washy and indecisive. Somebody'd say, *"Hey, Rich, what do you want to do?"* I said, *"I don't know."* [Congregants laugh] *"What do you want to eat?"* *"I don't care."* [Congregants laugh]

And so, sometimes we put out this kind of energy in the universe, you know. And so, if you really think about it, the Law of Attraction ... that being true -- and it is! -- what happens when we put out energy of, *"I don't know; I'm not sure."* When we put out energy that's really ambiguous and vague and unclear, should we be surprised that we get back that same kind of energy and experiences in our lives from the universe?

And it really shouldn't be! Somebody once said, the reason most people don't get what they want is because they don't know what they want. That they are not clear about what it is that they want.

When Jesus said, *"Ask and you shall receive"* ... When he was saying "ask," he was saying: Be clear about what you want to attract. Be clear about what you're calling on the universe to bring into your life. Being clear is a huge and powerful way to not only simplify our life, but to attract things in our lives in a greater way.

You know, Don Quixote was a character in a play called *The Man of La Mancha*. And he said this. He said, *"Take a deep breath of life and consider how it should be lived."* Simplicity is an invitation to pause and take a deep breath and think of how we want to live our lives. And think to ourselves: What is my top priority? What is the most important for me? What is it that gives my life meaning? How is it that I want to spend and invest the amount of time that I have?

You know, clarity is a powerful thing, because it frees energy to allow us to enjoy and focus it on the things that we want. But we need to know what we want to focus that energy on. You know, we can't have or do everything in life. So, we have to get clear on what it is we actually want to do with the time that we have; the people that we want to hang out with; the activities want to engage in; the things we want to learn; the difference that we want to make. It's an unlimited universe, but we still have to pick and get clear about how we want to invest this human time and energy into the world.

So, the first thing to simplify our life is to get clear about our priorities; to really think of: What are the things that have the most meaning? What brings me the most joy? What is the thing that I'm really here to do with my life?

And the second one is kind of related. And that is -- a thing to simplify our life -- is to **LEARN HOW TO SAY 'NO.'** How many people have ever had a hard time saying "No"? And how many people ever said "Yes" to things you really want to say "No" to?

You know, I had a really hard time saying "No." And I remember when I was in seminary, I lived in a house with five other guys. And I had the front -- what would have been in a living room with a house. And I would come home sometimes and sit on my futon, and I'd see popcorn on my futon. [Congregants laugh] And then a couple times I'd see like, *"Your mom called."* And I'm thinking, *"My mom called? Who was here to answer the phone from my mom?"*

And then once I came home, and there's my friend, John -- one of the classmates -- and he's there talking on my phone and eating popcorn. And I really wanted to say, *"Hey, no! No! This is not okay! You can't come into my place."* And, for some reason, I was scared to say it. And it took me like a couple of months to develop the courage.

And I'm thinking ... you ever like rehearse things in your head? I'm practicing in hand. And then I'm practicing: *"In case he gets testy, I'll get testy"* and running through all these things. And then, finally, I got the courage. My heart's pounding! And I said, *"Hey, John, I'd really prefer if you're not come into my room when I'm not there."*

And he said, [lightly and agreeably] *"Okay."* [Congregants laugh]

I'm thinking, *"Okay? I've been sweating and working for months!"* [Congregants laugh]

But the point is: When we don't know our "No's," that it does take up a lot of life energy unnecessarily. When we say "Yes" to things we really mean "No" to, it really burns up a lot of our energy and our time. And when we don't say "No" to the things we really want to.

And a good question is: Why is it that we have a hard time saying "No"? And I think it's because we want people to like us. We don't want to disappoint people. We don't want to hurt people. Some of us are people-pleasers. And another thing is: we want to be seen in a good light, like in our work. For getting promotions, it's a good thing to say "Yes." You're a team player! And so, we have all these pressures.

But really, this category, you know what it's really talking about? To learn to say "No," an important thing for simplifying your life? It's about setting boundaries. That it's so important for us to learn to set boundaries: to know what we'll do and not do; what's appropriate for us and what is not appropriate for us. Because without boundaries, it's hard to have a healthy relationship with ourselves or others. You

know, setting boundaries helps us have a greater level of self-respect and self-care; self-awareness; and self-worth. It is important that we all know and set our boundaries. Then we are healthier, and then we are more likely to be in a healthier relationship or attract and create a healthier relationship.

In the book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 37, it says, *“Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes!’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No!’ Anything else is from the evil one.”* And what he is saying is: when your “Yes” is “Yes!” and your “No” is “No!” your energy is clear. But when you mix it up, the evil one creates mixed messages and energy within us that isn't healthy and clear and doesn't really help us live a happy life, let alone a simple life.

The third one to simplify our life, is to **CUT OUT AND ELIMINATE THINGS THAT REALLY AREN'T NECESSARY FOR US OR DON'T REALLY SERVE US.**

And one of the things is: if we all want a happy life, the thing we automatically think about is, *“I want more of that. More money, more friends, more going out, more cars”* ... more whatever it is. We think more is always what we associate a happier life with. We think addition is the key to happiness, when it really is often subtraction. What are the things that we need to release and let go that actually can give us a greater sense of peace, a greater level of freedom, and a greater enjoyment of our lives?

So my question for you is: What activities that you are currently engaging in would be good for you to cut out or eliminate? What are the things you're doing right now that are really not serving you or not helping you? Or something that you're not enjoying? What meetings, what groups, what activities would make your life better if you lightened your load and lightened your schedule? Because I bet every one of us probably has at least one or two things that, if we would just eliminate, that we absolutely would have more time and more freedom.

You know, one of the things I think that is important is to realize we don't have to fill every moment of our lives with activity. I had a friend; she's a doctor. And on her day off, if she wasn't doing anything, she felt like she was wasting the day and wasting her life. Sometimes doing nothing is one of the most beautiful things! And I am masterful at it, let me just say ... [Congregants laugh] Sometimes just space and quiet is one of the most healing, renewing, refreshing things we can do.

But again, our culture will say, *“You've got to go, go, go; do, do, do; be productive!”* And yet, it really replenishes us. It renews us. It's just waiting for us to give ourselves permission to take it easy, to relax, and to eliminate some of those things that are really not necessary for us.

I had a friend, Angela. And she had a young daughter, Abby. And she was in soccer; she was in dance; she was in piano; she was in all kinds of things. And finally, Angela said, *“This semester, honey, we're not doing any of those.”* And first, Abby was upset; not pleased. But over that time together, they played games; they got to go do different things; and it was a wonderful period.

Somebody once said, *“My goal is no longer to get more done but, rather, to have to do less.”* And so what would help ... what “doing less” would help your life for you right now? That would lighten your load and make you a little happier?

Another thing to cut and eliminate is toxic people. Anybody have anybody in your life that drained your energy? And they were so negative? Only three people. That's fantastic! The rest of you have a really good circle of friends! And so, sometimes when we are hanging out with somebody that it really feels like it's draining us, or pulling us down, or our minds become a little bit negative ... like, that's just not really a healthy and effective thing for us.

And so, sometimes eliminating some of those relationships is the best thing we could do for ourselves and really even for them. Sometimes we need to make some bold choices about the kind of life that we want to live. And sometimes it's to eliminate those relationships that are really toxic; that are really not

healthy. The ones that you dread ... like you're tired just thinking about, *"I've got to go see them."* And sometimes you have difficult in-laws or family members that you have to see. But I'm talking about people that we actually choose to see, even when it's not healthy.

The fourth one is to **DECLUTTER**. How many people have in your house -- in your kitchen -- a bag full of bags? [Congregants laugh] Anybody have a bag or Tupperware containers that do not have tops anymore, and they're overflowing because you don't even have enough room for the Tupperware? Or you have a drawer full of rubber bands and paper clips, you know, and twist ties? Anybody have a closet so full, like, just the thought of opening it could cause an avalanche because it's just crowded? [Congregants laugh]

It is absolutely stunning. We keep so many things we do not use or have not touched in years. We've got gym equipment. We've got all kinds of art and all kinds of knick-knacks and doo-dads that are just filling up our house and doing nothing. And we're really not enjoying them or using them.

And the interesting thing is about us: it's like, we love to hold on to stuff. We just do! We love to hold on. Even stuff that's useless; stuff that we've not touched in years. We do! Do you know that the storage industry is one of the largest industries in this country? More and more people are getting storage units. I know people paying more a month for those storage units in six months than the items that they're actually storing are worth!

And so, even things like given clothes away, you know ... Like, sometimes it's got holes in it. But ... *"Yeah, but it's my favorite shirt! It's so comfortable! I love that shirt!"* Or something that's two sizes too small. *"Yeah, I'm keeping that to motivate me, because one day I know I'll fit it in again."* Or some gadget. You don't even know what it does! It's like, *"Hey, I might need that one day!"* We've got all kinds of excuses because we love to hold on.

Anybody read the book, *The Joy of Tidying Up*? Remember that? Marie Kondo? And her thing, she says, is that these things are all energy. And they're taking up space in our lives, clogging up our lives so can't bring in new. We can't even feel peace, you know, being in the presence of these things. She said, take everything; hold it in your hand. And if it gives you a sense of joy, keep it. If it doesn't, give it away or throw it away or sell it. And it sounds radical, but I think it's an important thing.

I grew up with a mom that made us, once a year, we had to go through all our stuff and give away or throw away stuff. The only thing I find amazing is like, in three months or six months later, my stuff has multiplied magically, and sometimes I just have more stuff! And I have to keep doing this! Because that's how, as human beings, we keep naturally acquiring. And so, we need to make a conscious choice about decluttering our lives. I mean, sometimes just cleaning out a drawer or a closet makes you feel lighter and brighter. I mean, there's something, because it's energy; it's life energy! And we need to release it and let it go.

The fifth one is to **SIMPLIFY YOUR FINANCES**. Money is energy. And managing our money is managing our energy. And most of us -- or a lot of us -- do not know how much we spend and sometimes aren't even aware of what we're spending it on.

And so, an important thing for us to do is to make a budget. Because it helps us prioritize and it helps us avoid unnecessary expenses. And it helps us live within our means. You know, I think the more that we kind of know how much money we have and create some structure with a budget, it helps us to actually be able to save better. And we actually feel better in all areas about our lives. And it reduces the amount of stress that we have with regard to our money, and so we begin to use it wisely. We use it more intentionally. And so, that's an important thing: to simplify your finances. Get some control over your finances.

Number six is to **REDUCE YOUR AMOUNT OF SCREEN TIME**. How many people here wake up and the first thing you do is look at your iPhone to check your email or anything? Anybody else do that? How many people ever been in a conversation with someone, and they look at their iPhone three, four times during the conversation? And how many people have been the person looking at your iPhone during the conversation?

I mean, I've got to tell you: those little gadgets are so powerful. They are so miraculous and amazing; I absolutely love them. And they've also got some negative things to them, as well, in the way that we use them. And one of them is: they tend to distract and they can keep us isolated. I once saw a picture of a family around a table, and they're all on their iPhones. The caption was, "*Being alone together.*" [Congregants laugh] I mean, they are fabulous, but they are also isolating. And they are not beneficial to us.

I ... In some ways, I feel like I'm addicted to my iPhone. I feel like I cannot think; I would feel lost if I couldn't find it. I mean, the world would come to ... I mean, it's ridiculous, you know! But the interesting thing is twice -- once recently, and once a few months back -- I forgot my iPhone. And one was on a trip, and I was days without it! At first I was panicked about that. But after a while, I had a fabulous time! It was so good to not even think on my phone once.

And the other day, I forgot it in a friend's car. And she even wondered, "*Oh, my God, I wonder how he'll survive!*" And it was just fabulous! In fact, my sister was visiting. We had dinner. It was a fabulous experience.

But I think many of us need to help ourselves reduce the amount of time that we spend on these. And sometimes maybe it might be putting it away for dinner, or turning it off at night, or something. Because we can't allow it to keep distracting us; That's going to affect ourselves, our relationships.

Do you know how many times we look at our phones a day? Anybody? Eighty! Eighty times a day we look at those bad boys! I mean, and I don't question that number with myself whatsoever! And so, an important thing for us, if you want to simplify our life, is to not let technology and electronics dominate our mindset and our attention.

And then the final one to simplify is to **TAKE TIME TO NURTURE OUR SOUL**. To me, the greatest thing about simplifying our life in the greatest way is to be more God-centered. It's to take consistent time daily to nurture our soul by being still; by quieting our mind; by resting in God's peaceful presence.

You know, I have a meditation app called Brahma Kumaris. It's got like 20 two-minute meditations. It's fantastic! With any ... I mean, journaling. Doing mindfulness breathing. Any of the things that will quiet our minds and get us more grounded and centered -- it will be a fabulous way to simplify our life. Because to simplify means to quiet, and to open and align with Spirit. And that is the thing that will give us the greatest level of peace; the greatest level of meaning; the greatest level of fulfillment.

You know, one of the things I think this really comes down to -- simplifying: it really helps us cultivate the great art of letting go. Michael Beckwith said "*100% of spiritual growth is about letting go.*"

My favorite quote is by Havelock Ellis. He said, "*All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on.*" Because sometimes, we hold on to things we should let go of and let go of things we should hold on to! And I think simplifying is about letting go of the things that don't serve us any longer.

And those would be:

- To get clear and know our priorities;
- To learn to say "No";
- To cut out and eliminate unnecessary activities, and especially toxic relationships;

- To declutter and to clear out a closet, clear out some stuff;
- To simplify our finances;
- To reduce our screen time and electronics ... you know, not let electronics dominate our lives;
- And, finally, to nurture our soul: take time to center ourselves in the living, loving Spirit of God.

The more we are able to let go of things that not for our highest good, the richer and deeper our lives will be. And that is the key to living a simple life.

God bless you all!

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