

## THE PRACTICE OF ABUNDANT LIVING

Final Week of the 3-Week Series, "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry"

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So how many people love to shop? Anybody like to shop? And how many people, when you shop, often buy things you don't need or things you didn't plan on? [Congregants laugh] Anybody ever do that?

How many people have any clutter in your house? Anybody have a garage or a cupboard just filled with stuff? And how many people would either call yourself a packrat or a hoarder or know a packrat or a hoarder? Anyway ... Last one: How many people own at least one storage unit? Anybody? Any storage unit owners?

You know, we have so much stuff. We buy so much stuff that it cannot even fit in our houses. We pack our houses to the point that we need an off-site location for the extra stuff. You know, the storage industry is a \$56.8 billion dollar industry. That's globally, but the US is 90 % of that. We have so much stuff!

And unfortunately, we still want more stuff. You know, we in our culture have been conditioned to think that we always need more and that we should always want more. And we have bought into this unhealthy belief that not only is more better, but more will make us happier. That more money, more possessions, more power, more achievement, more success will make us feel happier; make us feel more secure; make us feel more loved. Give us more attention; give us a better life.

The mindset of more really contributes to the mindset of hurry. And we are in the third of our final week inspired by the book -- this series -- "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry." You know, John Mark Comer says that hurry is dangerous. It is harmful. It is the root of all our problems. Hurry is not only a lifestyle, but it is a mindset of what we think we have to just keep rushing and hustling and keep going. That there's always a sense of urgency; this internal pressure to get things done; to go, go, go, go. That hurry disconnects us spiritually; it drains us emotionally; and it distracts us mentally.

You know, someone said that we suffer from "pathological busyness," and that it really robs us of the three core realities of the Kingdom of Heaven: and that is peace, love, and joy.

You know, Gary Easterbrook said in his book -- the book is called *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While We Feel Worse* -- that with all the luxuries, all the advances, all the incredible conveniences, with the fact that we're living longer than ever, that there are more people who are not happy. More people who feel alone, who feel sad, who feel depressed, and even suicidal. And the thing is: the price is too high. The costs are just too much, you know, to keep living a life of hurry.

Can you imagine living an unhurried life? Could you imagine how fabulous and amazing that would be? Could you imagine living a healthier, happier life that is, yes, productive and successful, but just not hurried? To live life without hurry means to do calmly and efficiently and with strength and joy what really matters.

Last week we looked at the first of the four practices of unhurrying our lives, and that was **SILENCE AND SOLITUDE**, which is *the* most powerful and important one, because when we find that peace and centeredness and calm within, it tends to radiate out into our lives. And as we have a deeper connection with God as our source, you know, we are less likely to be just chasing after happiness, chasing after acquiring and accomplishing more and more.

Today we're going to look at the final three practices -- Sabbath, simplicity, and slowing -- as practices for living more abundantly.

So let's look at **THE PRACTICE OF SABBATH**. You know, God was excited, and He said to one of His angels, *"Look what I created! Look what I created! I created a 24-hour period with alternating light and darkness."*

And one of the angels said, "What are you going to do now?"

And God said, *"I think I'm going to call it a day."* [Congregants laugh]

In the story of Creation, on the seventh day God rested. Now, do you think God rested because God was tired? Just wiped out, you know? He was just totally spent with all that creating? I would suggest not. That it is a story that is illustrating and demonstrating the importance of rest in the creative process. The importance of rest in having a good life and a complete life. The importance of rest as a vital principle of life.

You know, rest -- and the Sabbath -- in the Bible is not just a suggestion or a nice idea; it is actually a commandment. The Sabbath -- rest -- is a commandment: the fourth commandment. And it says -- I'll read you in Exodus 29: 8-10 -- *"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work."*

Work is a good and important thing. And then the Sabbath means ... actually it means "to stop." On the seventh day to stop: stop working; stop worrying; stop wanting. The Sabbath is a break -- like, almost like a deep breath for the soul, just to relax and open up. And to switch the energy of driving and creating into honoring and connecting and renewing ourselves in the awareness of the living Spirit of God.

The Sabbath is a spiritual restfulness that reconnects us with God and that rhythm of life of work and rest; of work and rest; of work and rest. It says, *"Remember the Sabbath. Make this day holy."*

And in the book, Mark Comer says, *"We should gear up for it and plan for it and prepare for it and even anticipate it with a level of excitement, but it requires some discipline. And the discipline is to remember not to work; not to worry; and not to want. But again, to invest that energy in doing things where we rest and worship and celebrate the Spirit of God and our relationship and connection with God."*

And this could be any day we choose; many choose Sunday, but it could be spent in the awareness of the presence of God. You could take a hike; you can have lunch with your friends; spend time with your family; walk in nature. You can do anything you want! But it's the intention and the awareness of not working, not wanting, not worrying, but focusing your time in the awareness of the presence of God. It could be feasting; it could be dancing; you know, it could be laughing ... anything that helps refill our souls, that helps us reconnect spiritually.

And then we take that wonderful energy from our Sabbath into our work and the next six days. Sabbath is a restorative process and experience. Like, we all know our cell phones need to be recharged. And in the same way, spiritually we need to be recharged. We need to be plugged in to God.

And so my question for you is: Are you willing to pick a day that is a Sabbath? That is a holy day? That is designed by you to consciously not work, but to consciously give your time and devotion, you know, to celebrate the ease and the joy and the wonderful gift and blessings of God and your relationship with God? I mean, are you willing to remember and practice the Sabbath? It is a powerful and important thing.

And remember, it's a commandment! That it is a principle of life and a principle of living, and living more abundantly.

So, the second principle is **SIMPLICITY**. John Rockefeller, the oil tycoon, died in 1937, and his net worth was \$1.4 billion. That would be equivalent to over \$25 billion today. That would be equivalent to five times the collective earnings of Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, and LeBron James. Five times! That's a lot of money!

Rockefeller was asked how much money is enough? And he said, *"Just a little bit more."* We always want and think we need a little bit more. A bigger house, a bigger TV; we've got to get that new gadget; get the most updated iPhone.

And, you know, part of this thing that we bought into -- that more makes us happier -- we think money makes us happier. You know, if you're poor, money makes you a bit happier. But, you know, they've actually done studies. And they say the amount of wealth that is just the exactly -- the very peak -- is \$75,000. They say that that will increase, but after that it actually plateaus. And sometimes even more money will actually decline that level of joy and happiness, because it often means less time, less peace, less of what matters, less of the awareness of God, less in our connecting and our time in our relationships.

In the book of Luke, Chapter 12, Verse 15, it says, *"Be on guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."* In Luke 19, remember the rich young man who wanted eternal life? And he asked Jesus how and Jesus said, *"Go sell your possessions and give it to the poor,"* and he walked away, sadly. And it also says in Matthew 19, *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."*

All of these are saying the same thing: do not be possessed by your possessions. Nothing wrong with possessions at all! But when we put it ahead of God in terms of what's going to make us happy -- what's going to make our lives meaningful and more valuable -- that's when we get lost. That's when we just keep chasing and chasing and chasing, thinking that more and more is going to make us happy.

In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 19, it says, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."*

And it's saying: don't invest all your time in material stuff. Yes, enjoy it; but don't keep focusing your mind on it as your source. But to realize God is your source: that interconnection, the connection of our heart and the awareness of that Spirit of God within us; that's the thing that brings us joy. That's the thing that brings our lives meaning and fulfillment.

And so, living a simpler life is an important thing. And sometimes we hear "a simple life" or a more "minimalist type of life" and we think that it means living with nothing. And it doesn't! It doesn't mean like an empty house with just a chair and a lamp. It doesn't mean poverty. It just means less: less clutter, less so we could experience more peace and more freedom and invest more of our time in the awareness of our relationship and the presence of God. It's about eliminating the things that distract us from what really matters. It is about leveraging our time, our talent, our energy, our money and possessions towards what matters.

And we have to figure out: What would it take for me to have a simpler life? In what ways will a simpler life bless me and help me address and experience and deal with the things that truly matter and make a difference?

So my question for you is: What area of your life do you need to simplify? What area of your life is feeling crowded or cramped that it is time to release a few things? Where's your calendar so packed

that it's time to reduce your number of activities? You know, what can you eliminate that will bring you a greater sense of peace, greater freedom and greater levels of joy?

Sometimes we have a hard time with the idea of simplifying, because it feels like we're being defeated. We're thinking like less is failure ... but, no; it's actually freedom! And it is a way to enrich our lives and focus on the deeper and more meaningful things; deeper and more meaningful relationships.

Here are five suggestions to help us simplify.

Number one is: before you buy something, ask yourself: Do I really need this? Is this really going to add to my peace and my well-being? You know, Will Rogers once said, "We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like." [Congregants laugh] And so, the first one is to ask yourself before you buy: Is this is this what I really need? Is this really going to bring me joy?

The second one is to give away on a regular basis. You know, it's so easy to accumulate, as evidenced by all the storage. And what we need to do on a regular basis – because that blocks good and energy in our lives. And so, on a regular basis -- maybe every six months, maybe once a year -- go through all our stuff and give away. Give to people who could use it, stuff we have not been using. You know, give it to Goodwill. Give it to a friend or neighbor. Or if it's time, to just dispose of it. It's an important thing for us to do. It lightens our load; it makes us aware of what we have; and energy that flows clothes easier in our lives.

The third one is: take time to appreciate nature more. Get barefoot on the ground. You know, walk around in nature; look at the beauty of the flowers and the trees. I mean, there's so much beauty in nature that it's a great way to have us feel grounded; have us really feel connected; have us feel a joy of just being out in this beautiful world that God created and blessed us with.

Number four: appreciate and enjoy what's in your home. You know, we worked a lot for what's in our home. And sometimes we don't stop and look and remember, "*Oh yeah, I bought this piece of art back then.*" Or, "*Hey, my mom painted that for me.*" All these things are treasures that we have, but we're so focused on what's next -- What's the next thing I'm going to get? What's the next thing I'm going to achieve? -- That we miss out on some of the beauty and the goodness that's in our own lives.

And then the fifth one is: to give ourselves permission to feel content. You know, sometimes we think content, again, is just kind of like giving up and settling. No! There's nothing wrong with content. Here's what it says in Philippians 4:11-13: "*I have learned to be content in all situations. I know what it is to be in need. I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

Let me ask you a question: What is stopping you from being very happy and content right now? And I would suggest nothing other than us giving ourselves permission to be happy and content right now, in this very moment. We can choose to be happy and content whether we're young or old; or rich or poor; or married or single; or rocking it in our dream job that's paying well or working for minimum wage. Right here and now, we can all choose to be content. We can all choose to be happy.

You know, many years ago my brother took me to Trinidad. I was visiting him there and we went to visit a friend of his. And they lived in a shack with a dirt floor that wasn't near anything. It was in a wooded area; there was no backyard or front yard, it was just ... I mean, it was really just wild growth. And I'll tell you, they were the most hospitable, gracious people ever. I don't know how they got electricity, but they were able to cook. They didn't have a washing machine; they had to wash their clothes in a little body of water not that far away. But they were so gracious; they were so at peace; they were so happy.

Me, in my head is thinking, *“My God, they've hardly got anything; how could they be happy?”* And it was such a beautiful and powerful lesson for me to realize all this stuff we think we need to be happy is really just a story we've told ourselves and bought into. Because apparently, these people didn't know that story, because they were pretty happy. And they were so generous, you know, they packed me up with some food to take on the airplane! It was curry, and it smelled on the plane, but it was delicious. [Congregants laugh] Oh, man.

So are you willing tomorrow morning to wake up and think to yourself: How blessed I am to be alive! What a happy and wonderful life I have! And today I choose to be happy. Today I choose to be content. So, are you willing to simplify your life a bit? To lighten it so you could be aware of how blessed and how wonderful your life it is? Because it really is. All of our lives are.

And the third thing for unhurrying our lives is **SLOWING**. You know, sometimes, I've got to tell you, we like fast and furious. We just do! Remember the story of The Tortoise and the Hare? Even with that story, I still wanted to be the hare! [Congregants laugh] You want to be the one that's fast!

You know, Jesus was the tortoise. He was never in a rush. He was never hurrying. You even remember when they were told that Lazarus was dying or dead? It took him two days. He just went on. He had such faith, he knew that things would work out the next day. He didn't have to rush. He didn't have to force. He did not have to stress. His life was at a slow pace. And yet, he continued to pray consistently throughout the day.

Our lives are in such a rush. We're moving from here to there; going, doing this, that, and the next thing, and then the next thing, and the next thing. How much more do we need to slow down? His pedestrian pace: he lived and prayed in a slower way. We're in a mad rush! How much more to our souls need to slow down; to relax; to be still; to quiet ourselves; and not just to be a hamster on a wheel!

You know, slowing is a spiritual discipline that is not easy, but it's a vital and important one. To slow down our thoughts, slow down our minds, slow down our bodies so that we can open ourselves to greater possibilities. Here's some suggestions for slowing down.

Number one: drive the speed limit. [Congregants laugh] And I've got a little stretch for you: go in the slow lane sometimes. [Congregants laugh] Just take a deep breath and practice slowing down.

Number two: come to a complete and full stop at all stop signs, regardless if there's anyone around.

Number three: don't text and drive.

Number four: arrive 10 minutes early to an appointment, and don't take your phone in with you. Just wait. Just learn how to wait.

Number five: go to the longest checkout line in the grocery store, and just observe. Smile at someone, or if a conversation strikes up, have a chat.

Number six: develop some time and a pattern of knowing when to turn your phone off.

Number seven: limit your social media time.

Number eight: limit your TV time.

Number nine is: be a single tasker. Don't multi-task anymore. Just do one thing at a time. Be fully present; be fully engaged. And it will become a sacred experience in practice when you just do one thing at a time. You will get as much done as you normally do -- maybe even more! -- but the most important is: you'll be present; you'll be engaged.

Number ten: walk slower. Life ain't a race ... unless you're in a race, and then run! [Congregants laugh] But for most of us, we don't have to walk as fast. Just be a little more leisurely.

Number 11: take up journaling. One of the things to slow us down is a time of reflection. You know, we don't write a lot with our hands anymore. To be able to write in your journal and reflect I think is a powerful way to slow us down; make us more present and engaged. Practice mindful meditation, just following your breath, being aware of the here and now. And the third one: is cook your own food. I'm sure you do a lot, but do a little more. If you don't do some more, there's something great about that process of cooking that is really helpful.

Slowing down as a spiritual practice. It brings us to the present moment; it helps us be more engaged in where we are; and it makes space for us to connect with God. I mean, I don't think anyone has ever heard the voice of God when they're running around like a chicken with their head cut off. That just doesn't work! Slowing down is vital. I think we absolutely all know that.

*One Sunday morning, an old cowboy entered a church just before the beginning of services. Although this old man and his clothes were spotlessly clean, he wore jeans, a denim shirt, boots, and a very worn and ragged old hat, and an equally ragged old Bible.*

*The church he entered was very upscale in a very exclusive part of the city. It was the largest and most beautiful church the old man had never seen. The people of the congregation were absolutely dressed to the T's with expensive clothes and accessories. As the cowboy took his seat, others moved away from him. No one greeted him. No one spoke to him. Not even one welcomed him. They were all appalled at his appearance, and they did not attempt to hide it.*

*As the cowboy was leaving the church, the preacher approached him and asked the cowboy to do him a favor. And he said, "Before you come back here again, have a talk with God and ask him what he thinks would be the appropriate attire for worship." The cowboy assured the preacher he would do it.*

*The next Sunday, the cowboy was back for services, wearing the same ragged jeans and shirt and boots and hat. But, once again, he was completely shunned and ignored. The preacher came up to him at the end and said, "I thought I asked you to speak to God before you could come back to the church."*

*"I did!"*

*"If you spoke to God, what did God tell you about the proper attire for worshipping here?"*

*"Well, preacher, he told me that he had no clue as to what I should wear. He said he'd never been in this church." [Congregants laugh and applaud]*

Thanks! Ooh; thank God you clapped! They moaned at the first service, so ....

Bud Winter is an Olympic coach for track and field, and he has coached three gold medal winners. He had an interesting technique in having them train, and he would tell them: "*Don't run at 100%; sprint at 90%.*" And one of the things he found was: when we do 100%, that we create strain and extra tension in our body. And we use muscles that aren't necessary for running. And some of them include our face.

And so he said running 90% actually relaxes them; they pull back from the hundred, and they actually run faster than when they're running 100%. Isn't that interesting?

Well, I would say living in a life of hurry is running 100%. And it's important for us to pull that busy back just a little bit. We'll still be efficient, still be faster and, in fact, probably even faster if we are willing to just pull back a little bit and not always be in a hurry. So we could actually live more effective lives if we just reduce the amount of hurry and busy in our everyday lives.

You know, I think life is so precious; so wonderful a gift. I mean, is it really the best thing to be hurrying through it all? Is it the best thing to always be busy and in a rush and trying to do this and get more of that?

And I think it's important for us to practice silence and solitude; practice the Sabbath; practice simplicity; practice slowing. It's time for us to rebel against our cultural busyness -- our "pathological busyness." It is time for each of us to participate in the ruthless elimination of hurry.

God bless you all.

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