

First Things First

Simple Life #2 – Pastor Gary Combs – 1/14/24 – Mark 12:28-31

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing our series today entitled: "SIMPLE LIFE: How Simple Commitments Create Great Life Change." Last week, we talked about how LESS IS MORE, how saying no to lesser things and saying yes to greater things leads to a better life. We challenged one another last week to say, "Less of me and More of Jesus!"

But what does it look like to walk that out? What comes first? That's today's topic. Today's message is "**First Things First.**" Because the joy of simple living comes from deciding what the most important and best things in life are, and then making sure that you put those best things first in your life.

Need: Of course, you'll have to slow down and step off the "hamster wheel" of your hurried life to really take time to consider how to put first things first in your life. And that's the problem isn't it? Because we live such hurried lives. This hurriedness is more than a bad habit, it reveals a condition of the heart...



ILL: "Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart." — John Ortberg

Which of these may cause you to hurry? (From *31 Days of Unhurried Living*)

- HABIT - Rushing is your MO
- WORTH - When you are in a constant state of urgency, you feel valuable.
- GUILT - You feel bad when you slow down or if you are not doing something.
- FEAR - You are afraid of being still and facing your disappointments.
- PRESSURE - You feel the need to perform to be loved and prove yourself.
- COMPETITION - You sense if you slow down, others will move ahead of you.
- CONTROL - You think that you have to do everything or life will fall apart.
- FOMO - You fear you will miss opportunities by slowing down.

If more than one or two of these describe you, then you are truly too BUSY and need some help to slow down and simplify your life! As John Ortberg observed, "Hurry is a disordered heart." It's a heart condition. Do you have a hurried and disordered heart today?

Trans: Did you know that God cares about your heart? That He cares about your love? What you put first? In the book of Revelation, Jesus told the church at Ephesus that although they demonstrated perseverance and hard work for God, he said,

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." (Revelation 2:4)

It's like Jesus was accusing the church of Ephesus of letting all the romance go out of their relationship. So, how do we get the romance back? How can we slow down and put God first in our hearts as our "first love?" How do we put "First Things First?"

BODY: In the gospel according to Mark, Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment. In a sense he was asked to simplify all of the writings of Scripture down to one simple statement. Jesus didn't pause. He gave them a simple command to put loving God first in their lives. We can put our love of God first in our life. How can we put our love of God first in our life? The text gives **four ways** we can put our love of God first in our life.

Today's text: Mark 12:28-31 (ESV) ²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

How to put your love of God first in your life:

1. Give God the first part of your week through passionate worship.

EXP: (30) Let's focus on first on: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart..."

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“**Love**” (ἀγαπάω, *agapaō*) - love, unconditional love

“**All**” (ὅλος, *olos*) - How can Jesus mean all our heart, leaving no room for loving anyone else? Certainly not! Otherwise, He wouldn’t have commanded us to “love your neighbor” (31). No, this is about first love, as He said to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4, “You have forsaken your first love.”

“**Heart**” (καρδία, *kardia*) - denotes the center or seat of the will, soul, and mind. In a way, the next 3 are aspects that emerge from the heart (Heart > soul, mind, strength).

ARG: **First fruits represent this idea of first love:**

Proverbs 3:9-10 (ESV) Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce

We have a heart problem: We can’t keep the Great Commandment without a new heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 (NKJV) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Surrender your heart, your will to Christ’s Lordship. Give your heart to Jesus!

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV84) But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord...

ILL: Worship is like romance. Where does romance come from? Do you bring flowers and gifts to your love? Do you remember anniversaries, birthdays, and Valentine’s Day? Two ways we can get it wrong with romance:

- It becomes a ritual... too dry:

What if I give my wife flowers and I say, “Honey, here are some flowers for you. I am giving you these flowers for 3 strategic reasons: No. 1, I am your husband. No. 2, it is our anniversary. No. 3, husbands are supposed to give their wives flowers on their anniversary. So here.” Wouldn’t she be thrilled?

- We don’t make it a priority... it becomes lost. The passion is gone.

APP: First things first: Give God first place in your heart. Begin your week with passionate worship. Worship is more than singing. It’s also serving and giving. That’s why we offer an opportunity to “attend 1/serve 1.”

2. Give God the first conversation of your day through focused prayer.

EXP: (30) Next Jesus said: “*Love the Lord your God with all your ... soul...*”

“**Soul**” (ψυχή, *psuchē*) - the soul, the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, aversions, the soul as an essence which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death. The unseen self.

“**Hear O Israel**” (29) The Shema (Heb. “Hear”). Jesus began his answer quoting the Shema from Deut. 6. The Jews repeated the Shema in their daily prayers. *Sing the Shema.*

ARG: **Last week, we studied Jesus’ invite: “Follow Me.” Ok. What’s that look like? Jesus prayed.**

Luke 5:16 (CEV) But Jesus would often go to some place where he could be alone and pray.

Mark 1:35 (CEV) Very early the next morning, Jesus got up and went to a place where he could be alone and pray.

ILL: **Jesus knew what to say “no” to and what to say “yes” to by beginning His days in prayer:**

Mark 1:36-38 (ESV) ³⁶ And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” ³⁸ And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”

APP: First things first: Give God first place in your soul. Give Him the first conversation before all the other voices in your life begin shouting in your ears. And once you’ve dialed Him up, don’t hang up the phone. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17) all day long.

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3. Give God the first thought of your day through biblical meditation.

EXP: (30) Next Jesus said: “Love the Lord your God with all your ... mind...”

“Mind” (διάνοια, *dianoia*) - the mind as the seat of understanding, feeling, desiring, imagination. Intellect.

ARG: Loving God with all our mind, we fill our minds with His Word. (“Meditate” - lit., to chew)

Psalm 1:2 (NLT) But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.

ILL: Be creative: Modern day pilgrims reading the 15 Psalms of Ascent (Ps. 120-134) on the 15 Southern steps leading up to the Triple Gate at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.



APP: First things first: Give God first place in your mind. Give Him the first thoughts of your day by reading and studying His Word. Read aloud. Read until God speaks. Journal. Memorize... We are asking you to commit to reading through the Bible this year. We suggest the One Year Bible. I'm currently using YouVersion...

4. Give God the first part of your substance through joyful offering.

EXP: (30) Finally Jesus said: “Love the Lord your God with all your ... strength.”

“Strength” (ἰσχύς, *ischus*) - ability, force, strength, might. Your strength is what you spend to earn a living. You work. This work produces income. We are to love, honor and worship God with our income (the product of our strength). The first part is called a tithe. The tithe represents your worship that God has given you the whole. You are also asking Him to bless the whole because you have trusted Him for the first part.

ARG: Give God the first part of what your strength produces. The product of your effort.

Proverbs 3:9 (Msg) Honor God with everything you own; give him the first and the best.

Give thoughtfully, cheerfully, generously, and regularly.

2 Corinthians 9:7-8 (NLT) You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully. And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

1 Corinthians 16:2 (Msg) Every Sunday each of you make an offering and put it in safekeeping. Be as generous as you can. When I get there you'll have it ready, and I won't have to make a special appeal.

ILL: In Uganda, they put a basket down front and they dance down the aisle when giving their offering. Last week, a member of my CG said, “I want to make more room in my life for serving God.”

APP: First things first: Give God the first part of your strength. Give Him the first part of your substance through joyful offering. You love God with all your strength not only by giving financially, but by giving of your time, talent and your treasure. Start bringing an offering to worship. Serve God with your time by volunteering at a local non profit. Serve Him with your talent by serving in our children's ministry or guest services or other ministry. Love God with all your strength.

CONCLUSION: Living simply begins with accepting Christ's invitation to follow Him and then by putting First Things First, loving God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. Will express your desire to put God first by committing to give Him ...

- 1) The first day of your week in passionate worship?
- 2) the first conversation of every day in focused prayer?
- 3) the first thought of every day in biblical mediation?
- 4) the first part of your substance in joyful offering? Let's pray.