

## **“Priorities”, Week 2 of “Finding Simple” Series**

**Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 01-08-2017 at  
Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.**

Our first reading comes from Matthew 6, verses 26 and 33. Jesus is telling those around him about living a full life through the practice of simplicity. He asks us to focus on God's true gifts and not to scramble for the things we think we need. He reminds us that God's kingdom must be our first priority:

### **Matthew 6: 26, 33**

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Exploring Proverbs chapter 3, King Solomon, the wisest man to have ever lived gives us excellent advice about living a full life:

### **Proverbs 3: 1-6**

My child, never forget the things I've taught you. If you want a long and satisfying life, closely follow my instructions. Never tire of loyalty and kindness. Hold these virtues tightly. Write them deep within your heart. If you want favor with both God and the world, and a reputation for good judgment and common sense, then trust the Lord completely; don't ever trust yourself. In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success."

May God's Holy word sink into our hearts. Amen.

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What has that been for you? I suppose it depends upon your quality of life. Some days have more quality than others. Or, is it about state of mind?

I tend to believe that the Bible tells us it's about priorities. What is it in our life that demands our attention? If you're like most, the answer is a resounding, **Everything!**

So then, the next intelligent question is: How do we prioritize what to give attention to?

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This past week I took on a couple of projects on my to-do list. One was decluttering my kitchen pantry. It was beginning to feel like every time I went to look for something I couldn't find it, even though it was right in front of me. The way it started, I was simply looking for the Campbell's soup but it had gotten buried in all the clutter. And this shouldn't be a thing because Soup is a base for a lot of things I make. It's important, and shouldn't be buried.

Growing up, my parent's pantry did not look like this. But I also realize that my pantry is not much different than the average person's pantry. We have gotten into a habit of cluttering our spaces. Cluttering our lives with stuff that lacks value.

The irony is that we actually yearn for simplicity. We don't yearn for more. We are just so in the habit of filling our lives with more and more stuff that fixes a temporary need or urge. Stuff that has absolutely no sustaining value. That jumbo box of pop tarts... what actual lasting value does that provide?

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More and more studies have been done in regards to how we feel like we need more stuff. In 1960 an average American family was living in 63% less space. Statistically, there was one car, a one car garage for that one car, and we felt like we had what we needed.



Annual self storage revenue: **\$22,000,000,000.**  
Total number of self storage facilities in the US: **58,000.**

Now we need more stuff. We buy bigger homes for our stuff and when all our stuff doesn't fit into our bigger homes, we rent storage to store all the stuff.

A recent statistic says that the self-storage industry is worth \$22 billion dollars a year.



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You could say that we have more than what we need, but I would challenge that and say that we have a surplus of what we don't need. We're starving for what we really need. And this isn't just about stuff, it's about our activities, our thoughts, our relationships... **everything** in our lives. How do we examine all these things and decide what is important... what is life giving... what is necessary and what will bring us peace.

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It's time to take careful inventory of our lives and think about what feeds us. It sounds like this sermon series is going in the direction of letting go. But it's actually contrary to that, it's about adding something. Adding simplicity.

And yes, that might look like letting go of some things that don't serve you anymore, but it will be more about adding value to your life.

The first thing I have to do when I clean out a cluttered space is determine what is truly important and what is just a distraction. What fits in with where I want to go and what I want to achieve. What needs to go away so I can better focus on the good stuff?



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When I make that determination and make necessary changes in my life, everything improves. I open my pantry door and I am not stressed out. I easily find what I need and when I plan ahead, I can easily inventory what I need and make plans to get what I don't have.



This is an important practice in our spiritual lives. We are pulled at from many thoughts and activities. We clutter our lives with mind numbing activities. How do those things feed us spiritually? How do those things bring us closer to our creator? Like the can of soup I was searching for, we wonder why we can't find God when we're looking for him. He's right there, but is buried behind the 9 packages of outdated taco seasoning.

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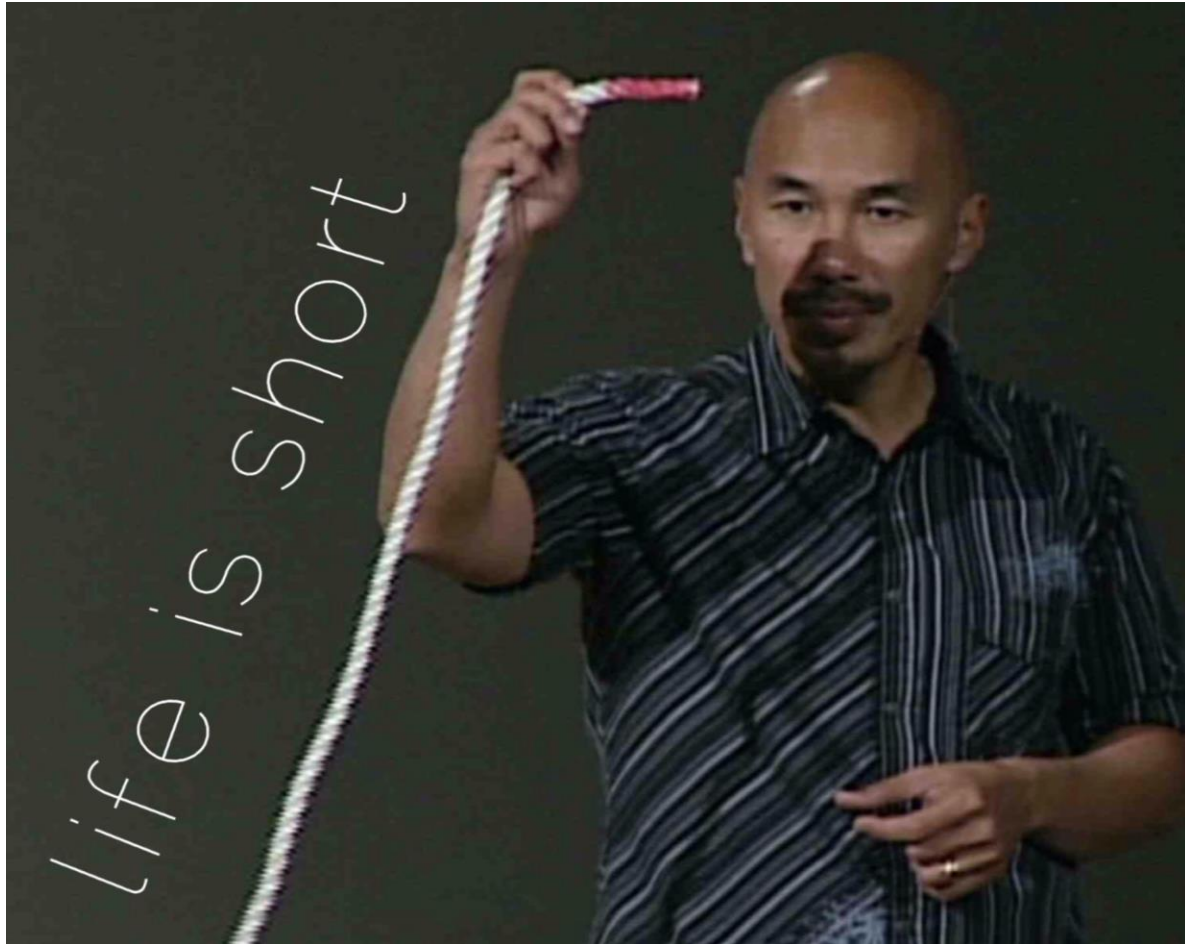


Our scripture reminds us to seek first the kingdom of God. To seek first means to prioritize.

It means to eliminate those things that get in the way of our relationship with God. God desires our company. What do we settle for instead? And what would it look like to take a careful inventory of how we spend our thoughts, our time and our energy and make some changes. What would it look like to prioritize God?



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Our life is but a tiny grain of sand on the shore of eternity. Jesus reminds us in John 3:16 that “God so loved the world that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Perish. What happens at the end of our time here on earth?

Eternal life... the vast expanse of what comes next. The part we don’t see. The endless, fascinating time where fear and grief and pain end and pure light, joy and peace begins.

So we consider how then, we should invest our time and energy as we look at the future. Our eternal future. Should we pour our time and energy, our thoughts, our finances, ourselves into this tiny drop of time called physical life? Or should we invest our interests into something much deeper – a relationship with the Most High God, who was and is and is to come.... God, who can transform our lives now.

Yes! When we focus on the eternal, we actually align ourselves with God’s purpose for us. We add something to our lives that transforms our mindset into a peace that passes all understanding.

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Today as you leave, I invite you to take another rock. On this one, write “Prioritize.” You can keep this with your rock from last week. If you were not here, feel free to take a rock and write “God” On it. Put these somewhere, as you build your tower representing simplicity. Let them nudge you into thinking about how you prioritize things in your life as you focus on the one who sustains us here and in the life to come.

As we continue our sermon series and offer tools to help you in your spiritual focus this year, we will be working with a calendar in the upcoming weeks, so if you would like to bring your planning calendar along it would be helpful. We will also be providing calendars to those who need one.

We’ll also have powerful upcoming Growth groups this spring that will help propel you into a positive direction.

We walk together as we develop our faith and witness to an all-powerful God. Praise God that we have this family of faith.

Amen.