

Message: “Receiving Through Relinquishing”, Week 5 of “Finding Simple”, presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 01-29-2017 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

In our scripture, we listen to the words of Jesus Christ, and we remember that as man and God, he knows our deepest fears. He also knows what lies beyond what we do not see. He tries to calm our fears by telling us not to fuss or fret over things of this world. It doesn't mean we shouldn't plan ahead and be smart, but it does mean that we shouldn't waste valuable energy worrying.

Matt 6:25-34

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

In the Gospel of John, we are reminded that Christ is the source of life. When we connect ourselves to a material source – when we put all our time and money and energy and focus on things that are not eternal, we fail to connect with what gives us life. Only Jesus can do that.

John 15:5

⁵“I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.

John 4:10

¹⁰Jesus answered, “If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water.”

May we open ourselves to God's leading in our lives. Amen.

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I heard about this man who had worked all of his life and had saved all of his money. He was pretty tight fisted when it came to his money, which he pretty much loved more than just about anything, and just before he died, he said to his wife, “Now listen, when I die I want you to promise to take all my money and place it in the casket with me. I earned it, it’s mine and I am taking whatever is left with me.”

So she promised him with all her heart that when he died, she would put all the money with him in the casket.

Well, one day he died.

He was stretched out in the coffin, the wife was sitting there in black next to their best friend. When they finished the ceremony, just before the undertakers got ready to close the casket, the wife said, “Wait a minute!”

She had a shoebox with her. She came over with the box and placed it in the casket. Then the undertakers locked the casket and rolled it away.

Her friend said, “Were you actually crazy enough to put all that money in there with that stingy old man.”

She said, “Yes, I promised, and I can’t go back on that.”

“You mean to tell me you put every cent of his money in the casket with him?”

“I sure did,” said the wife. “I got it all together, put it into my account and I wrote him a check.”

We spend a lot of time focused on the here and now. We gather and amass money and stuff that serves us here and now. But what about what comes next? What are we gathering and amassing for the biggest stretch of our lives called eternity?

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What are you going to accumulate during this time here and what are you going to store up here?

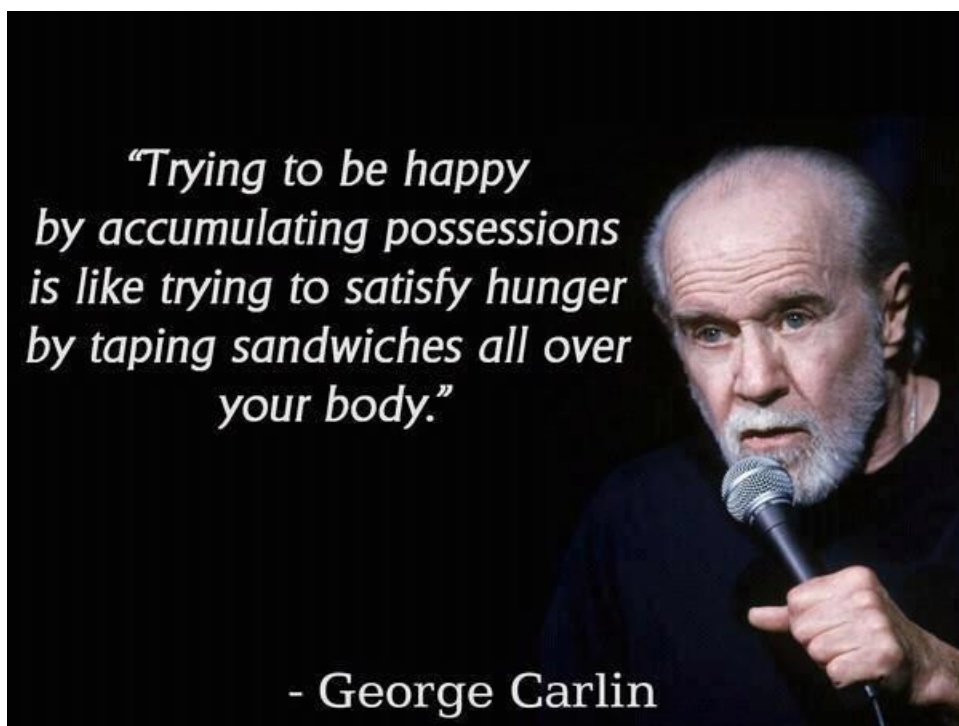
The man in the video clearly was not going to relinquish what he felt could satisfy him. He craved more and more. Why is it we don't recognize that letting go of the stuff that is not life giving can mean that we open up our lives to abundance that's eternal?



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Over the past several weeks, we’ve explored what a life of simplicity means. We know that God desires it for us because adding simplicity to our lives means making room for that which is life giving by eliminating that which is not life giving.

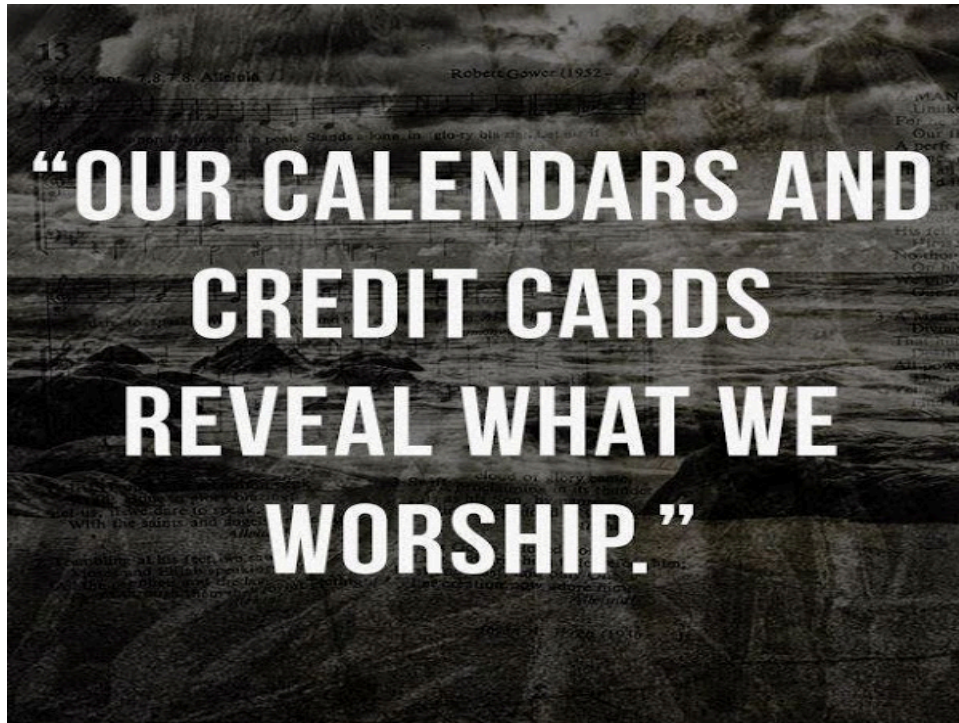
According to scripture, there is only one thing that is life giving, and when we connect ourselves to that source by prioritizing God in our lives, we are blessed with more than what we need. You’ve heard the phrase, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” But we know that he who dies with the most toys still dies. And he who dies with the most toys has wasted opportunities to let go of those toys and fill themselves with true riches.



Our culture has focused way too much energy on amassing tangible treasure. Bigger, better, faster. And even if we recognize this illness, we still fall into a culture that esteems those who have rather than those who do not. We live vicariously through them. We secretly covet. We like our earthly treasures. They bring us comfort and joy. But they also bring burden.

And we hand down this burden to our children. We perpetuate desire for material possessions. When is the last time you heard a child say, “I really don’t want anything for Christmas... Just to spend time with those I love is the best treasure I could hope for.”

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One of the areas of focus we've talked about is prioritizing. We prioritize what's important to us. Scripture tells us, "Where your heart is, your treasure is also." What's important to us should be what gives us life. The two should be synonymous. Unfortunately, what's important to us is often not life giving.

For instance, if we were asked to a meeting by our boss, we would prioritize it on our calendar. We'd make certain we planned around it. But where do we put worship?

We've talked about prioritizing our schedules to put God first. To drink from the source of life so that we can have life.

We've talked about what it means to eliminate things that get in the way of what's important when it comes to material items. Less actually is more.

When we put these things together, we explore what is truly important in regards to how we spend our time and what we put in our life. To truly enjoy these things, we need to let go of other things.

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Each year in the spring, after the ground isn't so muddy and I can get out into my yard, I take my wire rake and I begin to pull back the dead scrub from the prior fall. I'm always pleased to see the little hosta chutes that grow fast once they see the sun. If I didn't do this, the buds could possibly rot and die underneath the heavy, wet accumulation of dead foliage.

Likewise, we need to scrape away the stuff that is not alive so that the buds of potential can rise within us. But it's hard to recognize what is life giving and what is not.

I have been slowly weeding through my mother's things that were important to her in her lifetime. What do I keep? What do I throw away? As I pour through all of her treasures, that are now in my basement, there are several things I am not doing. The time I spend is taken away from me spending time with my daughter, exercising, building relationships, enjoying nature or working on important messages to share with you.

Eliminating that which holds us back from building eternal treasures is like raking away the dead brush from the buds. If we don't eliminate these things, we will simply thirst for more and more. I've found this true for myself. I still suffer a bit from clutter bugitis. I have items that I've moved from place to place – some of these items still in boxes after three or four moves. I have to find space for these things and continue to deal with them. Likewise in my finances, I've certainly spent money on things that serve me temporarily. And that's money that could have been used to make this world a better place for all of us. Money that could have been spent to further God's kingdom rather than end up wasted on stuff.

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I've been with people who are standing in the doorway about to meet God. Beside them is only one pile of things – the things/money/ time spent that will stay here. It will rust and decay. It is material. But there is also another pile – those things that have been stored away in eternity. The stuff that is waiting for them. Our choices here determine which pile we're adding to.

There's a true story that comes from the sinking of the Titanic. A frightened woman found her place in a lifeboat that was about to be lowered into the raging North Atlantic. She suddenly thought of something she needed, so she asked permission to return to her stateroom before they cast off. She was granted three minutes or they would have to leave without her.

She ran across the deck that was already slanted at a dangerous angle. She raced through the gambling room with all the money that had rolled to one side, ankle deep. She came to her stateroom and quickly pushed aside her diamond rings and expensive bracelets and necklaces as she reached to the shelf above her bed and grabbed three small oranges. She quickly found her way back to the lifeboat and got in. Now that seems incredible because thirty minutes earlier she would not have chosen a couple of oranges over even the smallest diamond. But death had boarded the Titanic. One blast of its awful breath had transformed all values. Instantaneously, priceless things had become worthless. Worthless things had become priceless. And in that moment she preferred three small oranges to a crate of diamonds.

It dishonors God for a Christian to be in a state of anxiety about things that are not life-giving. Jesus has called Christians to seek Him and release the rest. And in this way, we gain life. Amen