

“Simplicity and Abundance” Rhythms and Revival #5

You may not need to sell everything and give to the poor, but if you are honest, there are probably things that are taking more of your time, energy and money than is healthy. What is one area you can adjust so that its priority in your life doesn't eclipse your relationship with God?

John 10:9-10 ESV - 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Let's rethink what we consider as our treasures. The things of this world simply cannot compare to the abundant, eternal life offered to us by Jesus. It is our relationship with God that yields the greatest return on our investment. So, let's invest ourselves wisely in rhythms and practices that bring us a vibrant life in Jesus.

WRAP-UP

God doesn't make it difficult for us to live abundant lives. There are so many things that compete for our time, attention, energy and money. But our relationship with God deepens as we observe simple practices that focus on Him. Prayer, fasting, and giving don't have to be complicated rituals of detailed rules to follow. Keep God at the center of your focus and those practices in their simplest form will yield an abundance of blessing in your life.

MEMORY VERSE

John 10:10 ESV - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge- Look for one way to simplify your life so that you can enjoy more time with God.

INTRODUCTION

It's easy for us to get caught up in the hectic pace of our everyday lives and view our spiritual practices as adding more complexity to our already busy days. If we see these practices as meeting the expectations of others or obligations that we must perform then we are missing the point and missing the blessings. Let's look at how we can approach them with simplicity that produces an abundance of blessing. We will do this by looking at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to find out what He said about three practices that grow our relationship with God: prayer, fasting and giving.

Ice Breaker

What 3 things would you grab first if you had to evacuate your home?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Prayer

In Matthew 6:5-15 Jesus taught the people how to pray. Prayer was assumed to be part of his listeners lives already, but Jesus drew attention back to simply focus on the reason for, and the practice of, their prayers.

Matthew 6:5-6 NLT - 5 "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. 6 But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Jesus begins by telling us what not to do. What does verse 5 tell us is the audience and the reward of the hypocrites? In contrast, who is the audience we should focus on in our prayers? When it says your Father will reward you, what are the rewards you receive when you pray? Are they more than God's response to your petitions?

Matthew 6:7-8 NLT - 7 "When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. 8 Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

How do verses 7 and 8 encourage simplification of our prayers to the Father?

Matthew 6:9-13 NLT - 9 Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10 May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today the food we need, 12 and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. 13 And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

You probably didn't learn the Lord's Prayer in New Living Translation, so while it may sound unfamiliar, it can help you see the simplicity in the way Jesus instructed his followers to pray.

Jesus didn't say "pray these words" but "pray in this manner"¹. Summarize each verse of this prayer using a single word. For example, for verse 9 you might choose the word "relationship" or "reverence". Your five words represent the simple essence of your prayer to God. What would you say is the abundance you receive in return for such a simple prayer?

¹hoytō- thus, so, after this manner

Have you considered that if your prayer to God is "give **us** the food **we** need" and you are personally blessed with an abundance of food (or resources) God may be using you as a conduit of blessing to others in your family or community? In fact, it may be God using you to further the mission of the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven". But we need to be focused simply on God and His purposes rather than on ourselves alone.

2. Fasting

Just as Jesus presumed his audience would pray, He also presumes they will fast. And once again He begins by telling us how not to fast.

Matthew 6:16-18 NLT - 16 "And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. 17 But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. 18 Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

We should immediately remember what Jesus said of prayer- who should **not** be our audience and reward versus who should be our audience and our reward. And again, the practice of fasting has one purpose, to bring our focus back to God and away from ourselves. Fasting shines a spotlight on the attention our bodies demand of us. It represents our deliberate choice to put God and our eternal spiritual needs above our body and its temporary physical needs. That's a big statement to make.

If fasting is not a comfortable practice for you now, what is it that causes you to avoid fasts? Rather than being concerned with the details of how long and which things are allowed, what is the simplest fast you can describe to "do without food, for a period of time, for the purpose of drawing nearer to God".

3. Giving our Treasures

Matthew 6:19-21 NLT - 19 "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

At the conclusion of this section Jesus addresses our "treasures". It is not because God needs our wealth, but because He desires our hearts, and they will follow whatever we value the most. Treasures are what we invest our time, energy and money into. If we aren't careful, the temporary things in this life can steal our hearts.

Luke 12:33 NLT - 33 "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it.

What did Jesus' reply to the rich young ruler reveal about his priorities and values?

Focusing our lives on "things" can rob us of our time and energy and ultimately turn our hearts away from God. The things themselves are not bad but allowing them to diminish our relationship with God is.