

gracepoint



EXTREME
SIMPLICITY

EXTREME CHRISTMAS 2010

DEVOTIONAL
WEEK ONE

Monday 6 December 2010

The essence of simplicity

Scripture readings:

Matthew 22 vs 33-40

2 Corinthians 1 vs 12

Our world is a complicated place. Relationships can get really messy and confusing. Situations often escalate quickly and become extremely intricate and the web of interconnected systems that make up our lives are never easy to understand or manage. We often view faith in the same way as the rest of our complicated existence – as something big and complex and rather daunting. While the God we serve is beyond our comprehension and it may seem that there are many questions and complications when it comes to our journey with Him, in essence our faith in God boils down to something very simple and pure: a love relationship with Jesus Christ.

Our walk with God may involve many dos and don'ts, commandments, commissions, spiritual fruit and moral pitfalls but really, everything revolves around one simple thing...LOVE. When Jesus was asked to summarise thousands of years of law, teaching, study and interpretation, when He was asked what God *really* wants from us – what the essence of our faith and our relationship with Him is, He said this: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' " (Matthew 22 vs 37-39)

As the world around us becomes more and more complicated, may we be reminded that the very simple core purpose of our existence is simply to love God with all we are and to love His people.

Extreme Simplicity Challenge 1:

Take up the challenge today to honestly evaluate whether you truly live up to the essence of what God requires: do you love Him with your whole heart, soul and mind? What is one thing you can practically do to simply love Him more and live out this love in your everyday life?

Tuesday 7 December 2010

Simple obedience

Scripture readings:

1 Samuel 15 vs 22

John 14 vs 21-31

2 John 1 vs 5-6

Jesus makes it clear in John 14 that love works itself out in obedience. A pure, single-minded love for God will be revealed in obedience that simply follows where God leads and does what He says. Sometimes the answers to the deeper questions of our lives and destinies are really much simpler than they appear and can be boiled down to two important questions?

1. What was the last thing God told me to do?
2. What is the next right thing to do?

Our natural tendency is to want to understand everything about God or what He is asking us to do before we obey, but in reality, understanding often follows obedience, and as Rick Warren writes, "Delayed obedience is not obedience at all." God's ways are also higher than ours and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55 vs 8-9). There are many things we will never understand when it comes to our walk with God, but He still asks us... in faith and out of a simple, trusting love... to obey no matter how we may feel or what we do not yet understand.

When it comes down to it, with all the demands and pressures we face in our hurried lives, what God has really asked of us – what it all comes down to and all He truly requires, is for us to love Him wholeheartedly and to enact and enable that love by obedience.

"The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience." – Oswald Chambers

Extreme Simplicity Challenge 2:

Dare to obey – to abandon yourself to God and His plan – and do whatever it is God has told you to do, or whatever the next right thing in your life is.

Wednesday 8 December 2010

What really matters?

Scripture readings:

Matthew 25 vs 31-40

1 Corinthians 3 vs 11-15

Hebrews 12 vs 1-2

One of the most practical ways to simplify our lives is to get our priorities in order and to ensure that we are doing more things that really matter and fewer things that don't really matter. When we are clear about what is truly important we will be less tempted to get busy and distracted with things that consume a great deal of time and energy but don't mean much in the long run.

If you had to honestly evaluate how you spend your time and to what you dedicate your energy, how much of it would you say is ultimately significant?

The Bible makes it clear that one day, we will give an account of what we did with our lives. Our works will be judged and weighed and only that which really matters in light of eternity will remain. We are called to fix our eyes on Jesus and to try at all times, to live with an eternal perspective and to see the world through God's eyes, so that our priorities align with His and we can commit ourselves to simply doing what is important to our God Whose plans never fail and Whose promises endure forever.

"The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

– Stephen R. Covey

Extreme Simplicity Challenge 3:

What are the things that pull you in many different directions and cause stress in your life? As you plan for 2011, commit to scheduling less of these things and more time for you and God and for you and your loved ones. Commit to making and keeping time aside to enjoy the simple things in life.

Thursday 9 December 2010

The King in the manger

Scripture readings:

Luke 2 vs 1-18

Matthew 20 vs 25-28

Revelation 19 vs 11-16

Jesus was not the king the Jews were expecting. The One Who is King of kings and Lord of lords had a very humble start in life and never lived up to royal expectations. He Himself said that He came to serve, not to be served.

Jesus Christ lived a very simple life and yet, it is the most significant life in history. It is also interesting to note that those who gathered around that humble manger in which the Lord of all lay as a helpless infant are all simple, ordinary people. Mary was an ordinary young woman with no status or influence. Joseph was a carpenter. Those who were first told the great news of Jesus' coming were not the powerful, wealthy or popular – they were ordinary, lowly shepherds who were going about their commonplace lives when the angel brought them the startling and life-changing message of joy. And yet, these ordinary people were invited to a part of that holy moment at the manger.

If Jesus were born in a palace fit for the King of kings, the ordinary and commonplace would probably not have had access to Him, but from the very beginning, Jesus' life was an open invitation for anyone who would accept it. Today, His message and invitation remains... He invites the simple and ordinary to draw near to Him and to be used in extraordinary ways as part of His eternal story.

Extreme Simplicity Challenge 4:

There is no great distinction between the secular and the sacred. In God's eyes, everything we do is sacred because all we do should be done for Him and for His glory. What are the "ordinary" things you do that you could be doing for the glory of God with a bit of a shift in perspective or performance?

Friday 10 December 2010

Simplicity & purity of devotion to Christ

Scripture readings:

John 10 vs 10

Revelation 2 vs 1-5

2 Corinthians 11 vs 3:

“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ...”

When we are led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ our faith often begins to feel like a burden or a set of regulations that must be followed instead of a journey of joy and abundant life. One of the primary ways we can re-simplify our devotion to God is to come back to moments of Truth in our journey with Him and remember what He has done for us.

Now and then in our spiritual journeys we have great mountaintop experiences with God. We have moments of divine insight and revelation... moments of clarity in which we really see God and hear Him speaking to us, but the reality is, that we inevitably come down from the mountaintop, into our regular lives and routines and often, the insight and clarity we achieved is lost in our hum-drum daily activities. When we feel like our faith is burdensome and tedious, we need to think back and remember those moments in which we encountered God and undeniably saw His hand move in our lives. How simple and clear it all is in that moment of conviction when we first offer our lives to God and reach out for His extended hand of grace... in that moment our faith is completely uncomplicated because we have a deep awareness of His grace and our unworthiness, of His mercy and love and our desperate need for it. May you remember today what God has done and may He grant you clarity and revelation that will simplify and purify your devotion to Him.

Extreme Simplicity Challenge 5:

One simple and practical way to simplify our lives is to de-clutter! Commit to take up the challenge to get rid of unused and unwanted items in your home and donate these things to those in need.

Saturday 11 December 2010

Celebrating simply

Scripture readings:

Isaiah 9 vs 6-7

Psalm 118 vs 21-24

“Once again we find ourselves enmeshed in the Holiday Season, that very special time of year when we join with our loved ones in sharing centuries-old traditions, such as trying to find a parking space at the mall. We traditionally do this in my family by driving around the parking lot until we see a shopper emerge from the mall, then we follow her, in very much the same spirit as the Three Wise Men who, 2000 years ago followed a star, week after week, until it led them to a parking space.” – Dave Barry

Christmas celebrations have a way of running away with us – with family visits, crazy last minute shopping, preparation of enormous quantities of food and a general sense of hurry and busyness.

This year, may we be challenged to remember what Christmas is all about – simply remembering and rejoicing in the amazing gift of God in Jesus Christ for each of us. May we be reminded that He came to bring us hope, peace, joy and abundant life and to celebrate simply – without frills or fuss – so that we can spend our time and energy focused on Him and those we love.

Extreme Simplicity Challenge 6:

Take the challenge to celebrate Christmas simply, focusing on its real meaning and the things that really matter. Commit not to using your bonus or credit to buy any Christmas gifts this year.