

Simplify

Pastor Ken

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I am both a student and struggler with the mantra, “keep it simple, sweetie.”

In the series, SIMPLIFY, I plan to be both a student and a mentor.

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mark 6-NIV

You are shaped by many influences. A local church. A pastor. A friend. Economics of the day. Even the weather. And most of all God’s word that you read and remember, hopefully every day. We call it 15 minutes in a chair.

It has been my privilege to serve in the local church, more than 40 years. After attending Convoy of Hope’s dedication of their new facilities this past Thursday in Springfield, Mo, I am more grateful to serve the local church in Wichita, Kansas-Bethel Life Center, more than ever!

As the dedication at Convoy played-out I thought of the many years, now over 10, that you Bethel Life Center, have demonstrated the heart of Jesus as you minister in service, make financial sacrifices, and show unconditional love for the community through Convoy of Hope, Wichita. And in a few weeks, Convoy of Hope Wichita, will swing into high gear as we provide over 1000 meals this Thanksgiving.

And then to sit with friends, during the celebration who have had such a big impact on the life of Bethel Life Center over the years.

I believe that the local church is the hope for the world. I love this church. Take me out of pastoring and I cease to function.

I always feel blessed to drive from West Wichita to Bethel during the week, on Wednesday and especially Sunday morning about 6:30am, and I know that on Sunday I will be speaking from the Word of God, a word that God has directed me to deliver.

And when I speak, I am to tell the truth, right from scripture. Whether it makes people mad. Or Glad.

And when I speak, I am to do it with authenticity. I want to put it on the real. About life in Christ. I don’t want to give a false image of the life in Christ.

The life of Christ is loss and love.

The life of Christ is pain and pleasure.

The life of Christ is forgiveness but, it is also repentance. Confession. Accountability.

The life of Christ is worship, but it I also work.

The life of Christ is grace, but it is also giving.

My life with Danice Squires has been wonderfully blessed. We have also known the heart ache of financial loss of a house, savings, and a hard-earned good credit score.

Our kids have faced hardship. And that has been heartbreaking. We have made mistakes as pastors.

Some who we thought, believed in the mission that all people matter to God, disagreed, and caused disruption in the church.

I have a wife that I have been married to for now, this Thanksgiving 35 years. We were married in Ft Worth, Texas. You do the math; that is 1988.

Danice this weekend has been on the leadership of the women's conference for the district of Kansas. Led you this weekend from the stage and will return to this stage in a few minutes.

She is a gifted speaker. The mother of our four kids. Next to Christ and the scriptures, nothing or anybody has influenced my life more than Danice. Often, I am the one that gets the credit, but to be honest, she truly is the wind beneath my wings. It sounds sappy and syrupy, but it is true.

I would not be here today if God had not placed her in my life. And as I said, we now have 4 adult children. At times they break our hearts. All of whom are a lengthening expression of our lives. They are our legacy. In living form. Danice and I love each of our kids deeply.

I will often think, 2 of them like us. One of them is irritated with us. And one is trying to make up her mind. And then another year will pass and 3 of them will like us, and then every year around Christmas all 4 of them don't just like us, they love us.

And if you are not yet a parent, that is a reality that I hope you experience in God. And if you are not married, my prayer is that marriage will enter your life sooner than later. And I want to remind married and someday married, this is 'until death we do part. Settle the issue of permealce today if you have not.

In fact, I am blessed to marry 3 couples in our church this fall.

But again, it is the reason that I stand up here today, that has my attention and focus. It is YOU! Each of you.

You are too valuable to lose. I enjoy the vocational calling of the pastor. And daily through, counseling, preaching, coaching, prayer, and unconditional love I carry out to the best I can my responsibility, my calling to shepherd the flock of God that is under my care.

² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5-NIV)

This past week, I joined over 25 pastors'-shepherds, who gathered at Friends University to pray for our city. One of the pastors asked to meet and talk about the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in his ministry. This is a non-charismatic church, who has a pastor that is searching for something more than **business strategies** or **church growth fads**, he wants a genuine move of God for his people.

And not a week has gone by that I don't pray that for each of you. A touch of God. Growth in your faith. Now, I have heard a theme from pastors and parishioners that has caught my attention. And it often comes in the following words.

A good portion of my leadership is coaching and counseling, both here in the US and around the world. And whether I am talking to someone from Bethel or someone from Ethiopia, I hear these same words repeated over and over.

Exhausted. Overwhelmed. Overscheduled. Anxious. Dissatisfied.

This issue impacting our physical and emotional state knows no boundaries. It is a bipartisan issue. Women and Men.

Youth and children. Fortune 500 company leaders. Mothers raising 3 kids under 5. Democrats and Republicans. Saints. Sinners. And seekers.

It has been shocking to hear the stories of those who are anxious, fearful, exhausted, and overcommitted. So, this has led me to God's word, to see what it says about burnout, rest, exhaustion.

Now, this is a topic that gets more than a tip of the hat by scripture. Jesus spells it out when identifies this saying,

I need sleep. But Jesus was sleeping. (Matt 8:24-NIV)

I need time alone. ³⁵ *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. (Mark 1:35-ESV)*

I need to eat. *(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food- John 4:8-NIV)*

I need to be removed from these people. *Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. (Mark 6:31-NIV)*

I need to recharge my spiritual batteries. *And Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about 12. (John 4:6-NIV)*

I need to move from exhaustion to energy.

I need to move from wrestling with demons to resting in bed.

I need to move from working with strangers every day to hanging out with some good friends like Mary, Martha and Lazarus. ³⁸ *Now as they went on their way, Jesus^[a] entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. (Luke 10:38-ESV)*

I am thinking of 2 verses that make it blindingly clear, it was a practice of Jesus to take care of his soul, Jesus needed to recharge from exhaustion, Jesus to be alone, Jesus needed to slow down the pace. Perhaps, you could jot these down in the margin of your notes:

First, ³⁹ *Then Jesus went out and made his way, as he customarily did, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. (Luke 22:39-NET)*

The Mount of Olives was quiet. It invited a spiritual encounter with God. It gave Jesus a territorial view. And Jesus did this frequently as the scripture says. Do you have one of those places? A Lake to walk by. A garden to sit in. A hillside to overlook a view. Why not select such a place this week, and start to rebuild your soul?

Next, ¹⁶ *Yet Jesus himself frequently withdrew to the wilderness and prayed. (Luke 5:16-NET)*

Within a short time, Jesus could find a barren, isolated place to retreat. And the bible tells us he did this frequently. Jesus retreated often. Routinely. Again, and again. Time and again. If you don't, you will be left with a life that is characterized by...

Scrolling social media. Neglecting your health. Misguided priorities.

And who wants that? I love the fact that Jesus was never in a hurry, and always had time for his Father. For those of us who grew up with Harry Chapin, we are familiar with the words...

And the cats in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon
"When you coming home, son?" "I don't know when"
But we'll get together then, dad
You know we'll have a good time then.

I've long since retired, my son's moved away
I called him up just the other day
I said, I'd like to see you if you don't mind
He said, I'd love to, dad, if I can find the time
You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kids have the flu

But it's sure nice talking to you, dad
It's been sure nice talking to you
And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me
He'd grown up just like me
My boy was just like me.

Chapin tells of a heart break where the busyness of a son, keeps dad from the joy of a boy.

Jesus Christ was never in a hurry, he always had time for his Father, and accomplished everything the Father asked him to do.

So, the question that has stuck with me is, how do we simplify our lives? Now, I am a fellow struggler like you. I don't have any special formula to offer you. No key to the universe.

Like you I face these same challenges. I am asking the same questions you are asking about your life.

How do I simplify my pace of life?
How do I simplify my priorities?
How does my pain relate to my life of simplicity?
How do I decide what passions to engage in?

Those who know me well know that I wrestle with the same challenges of exhaustion, overcommitted, under resourced. I know far too much about being ... Exhausted. Overwhelmed. Overscheduled. Anxious.

I am a fellow learner when it comes to the topic of Simplify. I will be wrestling like you with the biblical text in the weeks to come. I am not naturally inclined to lead a simple life. I am driven. I am a climber. Literally. I do it all for God's glory.

I have moved from wholly ambition to holy ambition.

And my safeguard against being driven for the wrong motivations, wrong reasons is 1 Cor 10:31. ³¹ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31-ESV)*

I tend to put a lot of energy and effort into my pastoral calling, marriage, and family that I am to steward before God. I do this with regular exercise in the gym, I need to reduce stress. I put a wholehearted effort into leading. I am all in. Enthusiastic. Energetic. Passionate. You will not find me doing the fence sitting thing.

I don't foresee my life slowing to a lounge chair by the pool pace, ever. That is just the way I am wired. And many of you can relate.

Simplified living is about more than doing less. It is about being all that God has called us to be using our strengths, wirings, experiences, drives and passions to fulfill the assignment that God has given each of us.

Jesus always chose disciples who had a bias for action.

Follow me, he told Matthew.

Come down from that tree, he called to Zacchaeus.

Let's use your boat, Peter. Capacity problem.

Even Jesus is found making breakfast the old-fashioned way as his disciples mope their way around the sea of Galilee until Jesus tells them where the fish are biting. Only Jesus instructions as to where to find the fish, gave them hope.

So, they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. (John 21)

SIMPLIFY is about learning to walk away from the countless options, learning to say no, and doing the few good things with passion and purpose that God has called you.

SIMPLIFY is more than cleaning out some closets or rearranging your drawers.

SIMPLIFY is more than moving from a hoarder to a sorter.

SIMPLIFY is a lifestyle marked by satisfaction, lived in such a way, that when our heads hit the pillow at night, we can offer Christ gratitude and the Holy Spirit thanks for directing the affairs of our day knowing that it was well invested using our schedule and priorities.

SIMPLIFY allows the RPMS, of a frenetic, frantic, and fatal pace of life to sort out, unravel and reduce.

SIMPLIFY helps us distinguish between the unimportant and the essential.

If I don't simplify, I will lose perspective, and choose the essential over the eternal.

Paul had this very concern for one of his churches, whose ministry had become overcomplicated with internal fighting that resulted in Christians taking Christians to courts, people often preferred one person's preaching over another, if the Corinthians needed anything, it was to SIMPLIFY. Listen to Paul's words.

³ But I am afraid that, even as the serpent beguiled Eve by his cunning, your minds may be corrupted and led away from the simplicity of [your sincere and] pure devotion to Christ. (2 Cor 11:3-AMP)

In the final moments, let's see if I can show you the beginnings of a blueprint to SIMPLIFY. We will use Mark 6, to be our guide in the weeks ahead. We will experience the crowds with disciples. We will hear the master invite us to rest. We will take a boat ride with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee. We will experience replenishment when all we know is exhaustion. And after a time away, we will return to a pace and challenge of life that is just challenging as when we left on vacation.

Relationships and Responsibility in life drain your energy bucket.

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, (Mark 6-NIV)

Replenish your energy bucket with solitude, boat rides and time with Jesus.

...he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mark 6-NIV)

Return to your God given assignments with a full energy bucket.

³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began teaching them many things. (Mark 6-NIV)

If you SIMPLIFY you will hear God's whisper.

If you SIMPLIFY you will see opportunities to serve and give.