

Simplify

Pastor Ken

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You SIMPLIFY when you identify what pours energy into your spiritual, relational, emotional, and physical aspects of life.

⁶ For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim 4-NIV)

Who does not love tomatoes? Amazing and tasty on burgers, salads, and then there is the famous fried green tomatoes. Now, some of you have a green thumb, I don't mean green tomato thumb, you like to play in soil. And Danice and I enjoyed your green thumb, or whatever color it is, because we ate the fruit of your labor throughout the summer.

Deep red. Plump. And a few oddly shaped ones sat on our kitchen table and continued to ripen throughout the summer. Shape seldom impacts taste. Many of you, horticulturalists would know that tomatoes are heavy consumers of nutrients. With every additional batch of tomatoes, the soil becomes increasingly more depleted over time.

Some of you are wondering why each year, you keep seeing fewer and fewer tomatoes? Here is your pastoral tomato tip for the weekend: allowing your soil to become depleted, reduces the chances of a crop of tomatoes sitting at the dinner table.

What is true of tomatoes carries over into the relational world. In your effort to grow in Christ, if you don't add relational nutrients back into to your spiritual soil, you will have fewer and smaller relational tomatoes.

When your relational soil is depleted, your personal growth is diminished.

Every day you neglect the importance of relationships in your life, the more your soil and soul becomes depleted. When a person neglects the significance that people, friends, and relationships play in everyday life, the cost is more than just fewer tomatoes, it is a personal world filled with overcrowding, chaos, and confusion.

Simplified living is only a pipedream for those who fail to make their relationships a priority in life. Perhaps, an up-close and personal look at what really matters at the end of one's life, will reverse the course and start you on a path to replenish your relational soil.

What would really matter to you, if you knew your time was short?

I attended two funerals this weekend. While it is devastatingly painful, the families were acutely aware this loved one would soon die. Life is a one-way street.

Let's move from funerals this weekend, back in time to a Roman dungeon in ancient time. In 2 Timothy 4, we benefit from the words of our brother Paul who takes us into the final days and final hours, before he is beheaded in Rome because of his faith in Christ.

Part of the religious ritual of an ancient sacrifice was to pour wine on the altar. The lapping up of the wine by the fire, presents the powerful image that each of our lives are a sacrifice to God. ⁶*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.*

Paul's head was not yet on the chopping block, but the axes were being sharpened and sat ready for use, awaiting Rome's orders.

You can't travel any further into 2 Timothy 4, without stepping over a couple word pictures for death. My departure is near.

The Greek word *analuō* carries the twin meanings: an anchor is pulled up,

...or those who are pulling up tent stakes and moving on from camp.

The ships anchor being hoisted reminds us of a journey to another shore, (death is a gate to a journey to another shore), and tent relocating remind us of the temporary nature of our life. And permanent accommodations await us in heaven.

Then Paul offers a quick summary of what life was like for him, and each Greek verb is in the perfect tense, **action that is completed.**

⁷I have fought the good fight-the good fight is over, and I have won!

I have finished the race- the race is over, and I have won!

I have kept the faith-and my end is near! (2 Tim 4-NIV)

What I want to do for a few minutes, is have this man-Paul sit for the portrait, he can do it better than anyone else, who has just hours to live, as Paul gives us a final glimpse of what really matters.

You may be surprised. Many of you are in these twilight years, perhaps you might benchmark what matters to Paul and see if your activities and priorities align together.

Never forget the goal of your enemy is the opposite of yours. He hates the Christ you love and loves the sin you are trying to live free from. He wants to cut your legs out from under you, and bring you down, bring me down, to a place of disqualification.

So, stay in the fight, run the race, and keep the faith.

Let me set the stage from 2 Tim 4:9-18. When you look at the letter of 2 Timothy 4, you are whisked away into a Mamertine Roman Prison, it is in Rome where an aged, almost blind, shivering servant of God breaths his last days of foul air in this life.

The man is wrinkled, bruised, barefoot, cold and still bold. The setting is dark, dank, and depressing every day. The aged apostle has reached the end of his life, and memories begin to shower him with the warmth of a life well lived,

7 I have fought the good fight-the good fight is over, and I won!

I have finished the race- the race is over, and I have won!

I have kept the faith-and my end is near! (2 Tim 4-NIV)

Paul is thinking and recalling one by one the years and the people who meant so much in each location, in each season, as an answer to a timely prayer for financial provision, for prayer relief, for a personal friendship that Paul could experience after a day in ministry.

And so, in Paul's thoughts, he writes these words to Timothy, his associate, his son in the faith. The next event on Paul preaching calendar is a beheading. A beheading, the reward for a life well lived!

This week I plan to in my 15 min in a chair and journaling, to ask Christ to forgive me for complaining about the pain, the lack, the old car, the bad government, and a host of other things For Paul, it was a beheading, the reward for a life well lived!

Clad in purple was the worst being in history, Nero, who killed all of his family, friends and associates out of paranoia and fear, and who now possesses the authority to add one more name to his murder resume." Paul the Apostle. Formerly, Saul of Tarsus. The forgiven co-murderer of Stephen.

In a palace, surrounded by wealth was the vilest man of the age. A man whose life had been reduce to evil, blood and deception.

In a dungeon below, was the wisest man of the age. Chained to the wall was the best man the world had ever seen. In the seat of justice stood the vilest of criminals acting as judge, in the prison below sat the once vile (now forgiven), servant of the living God.

The day would come years later, when men would call their dogs Nero, and their sons Paul. At this time and in this place, the dog sits on the throne. And the greatest of men, sat awaiting his death.

I call Paul's setting and this text; **what life is like at the end**. No bands. No music. No parades. No friends. With a lone candle, Paul finishes his hours, inking out 2Timothy 4. For Paul and like each of us, life is a one-way street.

With that as the background, let me show you what really mattered to Paul and what should really matter to us as we SIMPLIFY.

Reading directly from the text and in between the scriptural lines, I will present a portrait filled with pictures of relationships. Not lands visited. Not churches started. And not even biblical texts written.

Just one person after another, and their deep impact for good or bad on the apostle's life. Since Paul's final sermon weaves through a panacea of people, through a fortune of wealth of friends and shines a candle on the lasting value of relationships, **I want to make a few preliminary comments about your need for others.**

I don't think the tragedy of this current age is depression and anxiety, addiction, and fear, I think the real heart ache is loneliness. Isolation.

Living a life without a true connection to others.

And many do it, unfortunately, every day. The person you rub shoulders with may be the loneliest person on the planet.

If your relationships are in disarray and devoid of life, then simplified living will be a distant reality. A life where the critical importance of relationships sits in depleted soil is filled this exhaustion, overscheduling, misguided priorities, and most of all a clutter-free soul.

If I were to condense the complexities of relationships such as friendships, parenting, pastor-parishioner, marital to just a few short sound bites or sentence bites I would define it like this: to know and be known.

You let down your guard. You take off the mask. You quit playing the game. And you show the cards you are playing in your hand. And it reciprocal.

You are accepted and you accept that relationship without trying to squeeze into your own opinion box. Preference box. Prejudice box.

True relationships love one another, even though the other person has flaws, and sometimes pretty big ones at that. Their wiring may be short circuiting at times, you can live it. And maybe that person is a little quirky, odd, different and especially imperfect. That goes with relationships rooted in unconditional love.

True relationships serve one another. You do what is needed and best by serving the relationship over your own needs. You put their interests above yours. Now, this is not one-sided, there is a give and take part that adds joy and value to each party.

True relationships celebrate with one another. And sorrow with one another. You show up at each other's important life events. You cheer each other on to victory, make and mark each other's milestones, and declare often, I see your star rising!

So, let me see if I can wrap all of these ingredients into a nice warm blanket on a cold Kansas wintery day. Relationships include the following ingredients: knowing and being known; loving and being loved; serving and being served; celebrating and being celebrated.

Sadly, for many of you instead of a gold standard for the importance and ingredients to God designed relationships, you have settled for pewter or fool's gold. You SIMPLIFY when you identify what pours energy into your spiritual, relational, emotional, and physical aspects of life.

Using the final hours and days of the Apostle Paul's life, I can see several ingredients that pours or evaporates energy from your relational aspects of life.

Paul's Welcome Lights and Warning Signs to Relationships

Timothy-come to me now. (vs. 9)

Paul writes in verse 9, to the man he loves in his early 40's who has traveled with Paul. Has loved Paul. Has been mentored by Paul. Is a son in the faith - *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, ² To Timothy my true son in the faith:*

One of the most unselfish and selfless servants of Christ, in these last hours, makes a personal request.

Do your best to come to me quickly (2 Tim 4:9-NIV)

Do it quickly. Don't hesitate. Move this request to the top of your priorities. Pack your bag now, Timothy, and start your journey to Rome. In the last hours Paul wanted to hear his voice, see his face, be held by Timothy's strong arms.

Do you have such a person? In your hour of need. That would make the journey. Take the time to sit with you. To be with you.

Later Paul writes, those touching words, come before winter, a journey of about 5 months. Timothy has no idea how close Paul is to death, and Paul has no idea how close Timothy is to Rome.

Let that thought sink in. Timothy started right away. And the insight from Timothy's actions and Paul's request, make relationships a priority.

Not work. Not exercise. Not accumulation. Not working on your truck.
People. Friends. Buds. Girlfriends.

Just as you enjoyed friends in your high school years, college days, you really need them now. And if your life is characterized by exhaustion, misguided priorities, hidden sin, you really need them now.

You need those relationships to keep you accountable. To keep you from drifting, to keep you emotionally strong.

Demas has deserted for other affections. (vs. 10)

Why does Paul need Timothy, the next verse, (10) for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and gone on to Thessalonica. (2 Tim 4-NIV)

Why does Paul ask Timothy to come? Look at the verse...for, because, since this...one who was once close to me is no longer.

Here is the other side of relationships. Here is the hurtful side. The dark side. Some people will leave your friendship sandbox. Some will abandon you. Others will just drift out of your life.

And many will leave for ludicrous reasons. Many will leave for lust-filled reasons. Many will leave for lazy reasons.

Here is one of Paul's team members, someone in the faith, who became enamored and attracted to the glitter and gold of this life. And the relationship that Paul once enjoyed with Demas is now severed.

Paul is not dumb, ignorant, or stupid, he knows what the cause is...the attractions to the Disney rides of this life in Thessalonica.

Demas was more in love with the physical instead of the invisible. In love the temporal over the eternal. In love with the kingdom of this world, over the kingdom to come.

I think the pain of desertion is worse than Paul's pain of isolation. For isolation is only temporary for Paul, but desertion unless it is reversed is for eternity.

Let me say this carefully, others will hurt you, disappoint you and you must not slip into bitterness, hurt yes, that will heal.

Resentment no, sadness yes, that will give way to joy.

Unforgiveness never, God will bring another along. And you will once again enjoy relationships to the fullest.

My word of counsel, something in Demas heart, that even the joy of serving alongside Paul and God's work could not hold him, and so he slipped into an easier life in Thessalonica. In the end Demas turned his back on God's work. Not necessarily on God, but on God's work.

Demas left Paul when he really needed him. My counsel, get over those who disappoint and leave you. Your life will be filled with names of people who will leave you, and you will leave. You are not perfect. I have done it, and so have you.

Moved on for whatever reason. Some good. Some Godly. Some just plane goofy! Goofy reasons that leave our head spinning. Don't be naïve and think that somehow you are so charming, so debonair, so amazing spiritually or off the charts in your business skills, others won't leave you.

If you are not careful those loss of relationships will send you into a pattern where you are too careful about people, too cautious about people, too caustic with people, and in the end too suspicious about their motives.

I have learned this lesson, people who walk away don't often announce their departure. Can I say to those who live here, it is worth the risk of doing it again!

Now, mean spirited people do. They make all kinds of noise. Levy all kinds of criticisms, accusations, and hurl insults. But don't confuse those with real relationships, those people at some point along the way left your sandbox, a long time ago!

Luke-only Luke is present. (vs. 11)

You are not alone. If you look a little closer at your life, you will see that Luke is still present. It is so easy to take many for granted you don't even see them, that when others leave, you forget that you still have Luke.

Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.* ¹² *I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. (2 Tim 4-NIV)*

5 of Paul's friends. All, at one time or another, played a key role in Paul's life. Some of you might have to wait in line for some time with key people in relationships. Some people are busy. Others are important. Many are just unable. 5 of Paul's friends, each taking a turn to invest and be invested in.

It is easy to read these two verses and miss a key feature. His name is Mark. Or John Mark. A friend of Barnabas who got on the wrong side of Paul in the early years. Paul thought Mark was too soft for the kind of ministry that was demanded, so Mark went with Barnabas and Paul took Luke and Silas.

Barnabas whose name means encouragement and Luke whose profession was all about blood, trauma, and pain. In that season of Paul's life he needed a certain type of friends.

Here is my point, in certain seasons of your life, you need different types of friends. Some seasons people who will weep with you, other seasons people who will work with you, and still others seasons people who will worship with you.

Oh, that is good! By the way, if you spend your time securing relational capital by restoring people, you will never be out of friends.

Parchments-bring my books and parchments. (vs. 13)

I love this next verse. At the end Paul is still spending time in the scriptures. ¹³ *When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. (2 Tim 4-NIV)*

The scriptures are filled with the stories of people. With relationships. And how they resolved getting right with God and making plans for eternity with Christ. You should do the same with your time in God's word.

Figure out how to work on being right with God, and working on your relationship with him that will go on forever in eternity. The best day of your life will be the day you die! For the believer. I suggest you put more work into that day! Your best day is not your death day, it is your departure day!

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. (vs. 14)

No specific details are given. A common name. Notice Paul instructs, to be on your guard for these types of people.

Can I be honest to say, they are not all in the world, not all in the world, some sit I pews just like you are sitting right now. The point I want to make is... watch out for those who want to harm you!

If you do this you will guard against nativity, disillusionment, and depression. Everywhere you go there will be critics. Others who will harm you, unintentionally and intentionally. ¹⁴ *Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. (2 Tim 4-NIV)*

If this is not happening in your life, you are either death or a dead beat. And nobody wastes their time with either of those.

It is easy to think that all you do is draw these kinds of people like flies. No. And again No. It is a part of God's plan to shape and sharpen your character. I am no matter, and neither

are you, but people will take shots at you, they don't like all that you do, and some are out to get you!

Put on your BIG BOY Christian pants and accept and acknowledge the reality. Otherwise, you are in for some turbulent emotional days. A fall and disaster await those who don't get this truth.

I have probably not faced anyone as mean as Alexander the Copper Smith, what can he do anyway? This life is so temporary. Nobody is responsible for how you feel. Only you. And you feel the way you do about any situation or person because you're thinking often goes ROGUE.

Some will misunderstand you. Some will accuse you falsely. Some will want to harm you. Some will lie about you. Here is a spiritual piece of advice.

Get Over It!

At then finally, the Lord stood with me. There you go. Keep the Lord in full focus. Continue to grow in Christ. Continue to take risk with people.

The Lord stood with me and gave me strength. (vs. 17-18)

Continue to keep your eyes on the author and finisher of your faith. In fact, let's go back to Paul's original words:

*⁷I have fought the good fight-the good fight is over, and I won!
I have finished the race- the race is over, and I have won!
I have kept the faith-and my end is near! (2 Tim 4-NIV)*

¹⁷But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength... (2 Tim 4-NIV)

Continue to love Jesus with your whole heart. Pour your soul out to him. Continue to release the hurts that others have caused you. And where there are holes, aloneness, invite the Holy Spirit to join you in those moments.

Make the Lord your full focus. It takes a willingness to allow Christ to take the lead, call the shots, and get all of the glory.

You will simplify your life, if you fine tune your relational world-circumstantial friends, friends for a season and lifelong friends.