

INTRODUCTION

In my humble but accurate opinion, the greatest television show ever produced was the *Andy Griffith Show* starring Andy Griffith, Don Knotts, and Ron Howard. I’m talking about the old black-and-white episodes before Opie grew up. One of my favorite episodes is called “What’s Your Hurry?” The entire show is about the folks of Mayberry going to church. Here’s a trivia question: What was the name of the church Andy, Barney and Aunt Bea attended? Answer: The All Souls Church. This particular Sunday, everybody was excited about hearing visiting preacher Dr. Breen. Andy and Barney are seen sitting together. Dr. Breen is talking about slowing down and taking it easy. In his sermon he says, “Consider how we live our lives today. Everything is run, run, run. We bolt our breakfast, we scan the headlines, we race to the office. The full schedule and the split second: these are the gauges of success. We drive ourselves from morn to night. We have forgotten the meaning of the word relaxation. What has become of the old-fashioned ways, the simple pleasures of the past? Who can forget for example, the old-fashioned band concert at twilight on the village green? The joy, the serenity of just sitting and listening. We should strive to recapture this simple innocent pleasure. ... And so I say to you, dear friends, relax, slow down, take it easy.” At this point the camera is on Barney and Andy. The preacher’s soft voice is so soothing it is putting Barney to sleep. Some of you are familiar with that experience. First his eyes begin to cross, and he fights to stay awake, until finally his head drops to his chest and he is dozing. At that moment, Dr. Breen raises his voice and shouts, “What’s your hurry!?” Barney jerks away and he looks like he is ready to jump up and run a race.

That afternoon they are sitting on the porch rocking after Aunt Bea’s delicious Sunday lunch. They start to talk about the sermon and decide they will put it into practice. Before you know it, they are making plans to reassemble the town band, rebuild the bandstand and repair all the band uniforms. As you might expect, they get so busy trying to slow down that by the end of the afternoon they are all worn out and exhausted. The comical point is that you can work too hard at trying to simplify your life!

If there is a message our fast-paced society needs to hear today it is this: SIMPLIFY. In this passage, Jesus is teaching His disciples to keep it simple. Today many people talk about the KISS theory of leadership: Keep It Simple Stupid. But just because you are simple doesn’t mean you are stupid. Country folks are often considered to be simple and stupid by sophisticated city means, but rural folks have a lot more intelligence than most people think. Once a bunch of crooks in New York were trying to make counterfeit money. Their printing press malfunctioned and instead of printing out \$20 bills, it printed out a bunch of \$18 bills. They were getting ready to throw the \$18 bills away, until one of the crooks said, “Hey, don’t waste that paper. Folks in the country are so dumb, that they won’t know the difference.” So the city slicker drove out to the country and walked into a little general store. He slapped one of those \$18 bills on the counter and said, “Can you give me change for that?” Without blinking an eye, the store owner said, “Sure, would you like three \$6’s or two \$9’s?”

There is a beauty to simplicity our fast-paced culture needs to rediscover. If Jesus were here in the flesh and followed most of us around for a couple of days I believe His first advice would be *slow down and lighten up!*

The Shakers were a small religious group existing in New England in the 18th and 19th Centuries. They never really grew because they didn't believe in enlisting new members. And their cardinal belief was celibacy, even in marriage: no children. They got their name from their habit of whirling and dancing around and shaking in religious ecstasy. You can still find examples of simple Shaker furniture. They had some outlandish beliefs, but their emphasis on simple living is refreshing. They used to sing a hymn summarizing their simple approach to life:

Tis the gift to be simple, 'Tis the gift to be free;
'Tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we won't be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
'Till by turning and turning we come 'round right.

The old medieval saint, Thomas á Kempis wrote, “By two wings man is lifted from the things of earth: simplicity and purity.”

When you look at the lifestyle of Jesus, you learn He was the Master of simplicity. In this passage of scripture, we can glean four rules for simple living. I call it “Packing Light for the Journey of Life.”

Luke 9:1-9. When Jesus had called the twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them, “Take nothing for the journey - no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.” So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed, because some of them were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about? And he tried to see him.”

Let's notice four ways Jesus says we can simplify our lives:

1. A SIMPLE APPROACH TO MINISTRY—GO PREACH AND HEAL

The theme of the entire ninth chapter of Luke could be called “the cost of discipleship.” As Jesus sent out the Twelve on their first mission, He told them to concentrate on doing only two things. He told them to cure sick people and to preach the Good News. That's exactly what Jesus has called everyone of us to do individually and as a church. The word “disciple” means a “follower.” Jesus was simply telling them to do what they had seen Him doing. He had been

going to where the people were and was touching them and teaching them. That’s our job as well. First, we must *go*. I’m so glad Jesus never set up a ministry compound and required all the people to come to where He was. He was constantly walking around the region going to where the people were. Our call is to go as well. Some of you probably thought all we had to do was to build this huge new worship center and people would just flock in by the thousands. And they did for the first couple of weeks—out of curiosity—but where are they today? There are a lot of empty seats here today and that’s good because we have plenty of places for those we go and reach can come and learn more about Jesus. But we are going to have to go to where the hurting people are and tell them about Jesus. If we don’t do that we can’t claim to be a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus into this world and now Jesus has sent us out into the world. The night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed these words concerning us: Jesus prayed, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” John 17:18.

I wouldn’t classify myself as a theologian, but I have read plenty of theologians. I have read Karl Barth, Wolfgang Pannenberg, and Rudolph Bultmann. It’s hard to wade through their writings. The old evangelist Billy Sunday used to say, “I’ve seen a ten-point buck run through a stand of trees that seemed to be inches apart without ever touching a tree with his antlers- that’s pretty amazing! But it’s more amazing to read through 300 pages of some theological textbook in which the theologian never gets close to touching the simple truth of the Bible.” My job as a Pastor/Teacher is to try to take the simple truth of God and make it simpler!

Sometimes theologians can get to the point. It is said once the great theologian Karl Barth was speaking to a group of theological students at a seminary. He was asked what was the greatest theological statement he had ever read or heard. As he thought for a moment, the students were poised with their pens to write down this great theological truth. Karl Barth paused and said, “The greatest theological statement I have ever heard is: ‘Jesus loves me this I know. For the Bible tells me so.’”

That’s the simple message we are to deliver. The twofold task of a disciple is simple. Jesus didn’t give us four laws or twelve steps or eighteen tasks. He basically said, “GO to where the hurting people are and help them and tell them that I love them.” That’s not just the preacher’s job, or the deacons’ job or the church staff’s job. It is the JOB #1 for every disciple of Jesus. Next, Jesus gives us:

2. A SIMPLE ATTITUDE TOWARD POSSESSIONS—DON’T LET “STUFF” SLOW YOU DOWN

Do you or someone you know tend to over-pack before you take a trip? I have lived with three women, and for my own safety, I’m not going to tell any personal stories about packing. I’ve led lots of trips overseas for mission projects and my standard packing advice is: Pack what you think you’ll need and then take half of it out of your suitcase. However, notice the packing instructions of Jesus. He not only told His disciples to pack light for their mission, He told them not to pack anything at all! They weren’t to take a suitcase, extra clothes, food, money or even a walking stick! Some have misunderstood His words to mean we should never prepare for ministry. Jesus was *not* teaching them to approach life and ministry unprepared. Elsewhere, Jesus

clearly taught that before a man builds a tower, he must first sit down and calculate the cost. We are to be prepared in everything we do for the Lord.

Jesus was teaching them to trust Him more than their own resources. Since they couldn't take money, they would have to depend on His Word that strangers would show them hospitality. Since they couldn't take food, they would have to *really* pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Since they couldn't even take a walking stick, they would have to depend on Jesus for their strength on the long journey. Jesus sent them into an environment of need requiring both faith and obedience. The ultimate test for a Christian is *not* “how much do you *know*?” Instead, the key thing God is looking for is: “How much do you trust me?”

How different that is from most of us. We pack our suitcases to overflowing because we like having our precious “stuff” with us. But when we are loaded down with our own stuff, we often depend on our possessions rather than on God. Are you trusting God to provide your needs, or are you trusting your job, your bank balance, your securities portfolio, or your 401K to meet your needs? Jesus issues a strong warning in Luke 16:13: “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” Living a life of simplicity demands we love God rather than possessions.

Last summer, my family visited Versailles where the French King Louis XIV built a world of unbelievable opulence and luxury. Of course there is the main palace stunning in its beauty and size. But the royal family had so much money, they even built a smaller palace on the same property to retreat to. It was called the Grand Trianon, and then they built the Petite Trianon so they could retreat from the palace they used to retreat from the main palace! Nearby they even built their own little French Village to play in. It's easy to see how the French people revolted because they were starving while the royals lived in such extravagance. America in the 21st Century is approaching the same level of wasteful living—it's just a little more widespread. And we have more gadgets than the French had! The American dream involves spending our entire lives accumulating more and more stuff. I don't want you to mess with my stuff and you don't want me to touch your stuff. And most of this stuff we don't even use; we just want to have it anyway. Over the past 20 years one of the fastest growing businesses in America has been the storage business. I can remember growing up, you never saw storage garages people would pay money to rent to store their stuff in. Today, it is a booming business. What does that say? We have so much stuff that we can't even keep it all in our houses, we have to rent additional space just to store our stuff.

Those who study airline disasters have uncovered a chilling fact about Americans. One of the biggest problems airlines have had when they have to make an emergency landing or even in a crash is that many passengers try to retrieve their carry-on luggage from the overhead bins before they evacuate the aircraft. There are many incidents of people clogging the aisles getting their bags while the plane is on fire. Even when airplane is burning, Americans don't want to give up their stuff.

To me, the words of Jesus echo over 20 centuries and tell us life is a journey and to really enjoy it we should pack light. Why? Because too much stuff will slow us down and keep us from

enjoying the trip. Cindy is always telling me when we drive to Florida, all I want to do is to get there as fast as I can. When I travel I have a disease called “get-there-itis.” I’m primarily concerned about the destination and the fewer stops we can make the better. On the other hand, she wants to enjoy the trip. She wants to stop at every mall or outlet center we pass. I’ve been told that is a fundamental difference between men and women—maybe that’s one reason women outlive men by about seven years on the average!

Life is like a journey we are taking. Each of us is going to spend an average of about 75 years moving from birth to death. Some people get so focused on the next destination, they really don’t enjoy the trip. They rush to finish high school, just to go to college. Then they speed through college, just to get a job or go to graduate school—land that job! Then they spend forty years or so working hard, aiming toward retirement. Finally they arrive at retirement, and what’s next? There *is* more to the journey of life than that, and the happiest and most blessed people are those who take some time to really enjoy the journey. After all, life is what happens in between all the plans you have made.

Okay, if we are supposed to pack light, who is going to take care of us? God will. How will He do it? Look again at the words of Jesus. He knew in every village there were people who would respond to those who came announcing the Good News. Jesus required His disciples to depend on the generosity and hospitality of the people in each village. God uses different sources to meet the needs of His people. He fed the children of Israel for forty years by giving them manna every morning. God could have done that here, but instead, He was going to use the hospitality of good people to meet the physical and material needs of His servants. Some people are always looking for a radical, supernatural miracle when God sometimes simply works miracles through human instrumentality. In other words God gives us stuff so we can share it with others and when we have a need they can share their stuff with us.

You’ve probably heard the old story about the man whose house was flooded. He cried out to God to save him. Some folks in a boat came by and offered to help the man, but he replied, “No, God is going to rescue me.” The water kept rising, until the man had to retreat to the second floor of his house. Another boat came by to help him, but he refused saying, “No thanks, God is going to rescue me.” The water kept rising until he was sitting on the only dry spot, the top of his roof. A helicopter hovered over him and offered him help. Again, he refused saying God would rescue him. Well, the water kept rising until the man drowned. When he got to heaven, he complained to the Lord. “Lord, I trusted you! I asked you rescue me and I drowned. Why didn’t you help me?” God said, “What do you mean? I sent you two boats and a helicopter!”

Do you need to unpack your suitcase a little bit? You say, “What am I going to do with all my stuff?” Why don’t you become like the people Jesus said would freely help His disciples in need. In other words, find a disciple of Jesus who has a need and give some of your stuff to them. Lighten your load and see if you don’t enjoy the journey a little better.

3. A SIMPLE ACT TO DEAL WITH FAILURE—SHAKE OFF THE DUST AND MOVE ON

Jesus told the disciples that if they were not accepted in a certain village to “shake the dust off their garments as a testimony against them.” This bit of instruction has been misunderstood by people who see it as some kind of a “curse” or “punishment” directed toward that city. But that’s not what Jesus intended because later in this very chapter, He passed through a Samaritan city and they refused to let Him enter. Some of the disciples were so insulted they asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven to burn up that city. Jesus refused to punish the city and rebuked His disciples. He explained He didn’t come to destroy life but to give life.

When Jesus told them to “shake the dust off their clothes” He was teaching a spiritual principle that we need to understand and practice today. If a pair of disciples entered a certain city and began to talk about Jesus, they faced the possibility of rejection. If the people didn’t accept them or their message, they had to feel they had failed. The act of “shaking off the dust” was a symbolic way of saying, “I don’t want anything in that city to remain on me. I don’t want their bitterness, their rejection, and their lack of faith to remain part of me.” Jesus didn’t want their feeling of failure to bog them down. Instead, He told them to just shake it off and move on to the next village.

My friend, Jay Strack, has written a book entitled *Shake off the Dust*. Jay was physically and emotionally abused as a child. He started doing drugs when he was 13 and by the time he was 16, he was hooked and was dealing drugs to pay for his habit. He was busted and found himself as a teenage junkie and criminal. He met Jesus, but it took him a long time to shake off the dirt and dust of his troubled past. In his book, he writes, “As long as you remain a prisoner to your past, you will never know the freedom of the future. You can’t spend the rest of your life sitting in the ashes of devastation, crying over what went wrong. You’d don’t have to carry around the dirt of your past mistakes. Get up, shake off the dust, and go on.”

Some of you are carrying around a load of dust and dirt on your personality. You have failed in the past and that failure is dragging you down and holding you back. There is a voice in your head that keeps telling you that you are a rotten failure and you’ll never be anything else—there is no hope for you. I want you to know this voice comes from Satan. The Bible calls him “the accuser of the brothers.” Satan and his demons love to slip up to Christians and whisper, “You’re no good, you’re no good, baby, you’re no good.”

Even the very best followers of God stumble and fall at times. Judas was one of the trusted disciples and he sold out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Peter was the unofficial spokesman of the disciples and on the night Jesus needed his support most, Peter cursed and denied three times that he knew Jesus. What was the difference between Judas and Peter? Judas couldn’t handle his failure. He killed himself. On the other hand, although Peter felt as badly as Judas did, he recognized his failure, he wept bitterly at his mistake and then he got up and shook of the dust from his failure and moved on.

The Bible says in Proverbs 24:16: “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.” Maybe you have fallen and failed the Lord but get up and shake off the dust and move on. Don’t become a victim of your past. You can’t do anything about your past mistakes except learn from them. But once you have recognized your mistake, move on. I love the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:13-14, “This one thing I

do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal ...” Here was a man who at one time opposed Jesus to the point of having Christians executed for their heresy. He stood by, consenting to the brutal stoning of Stephen. I’m sure the devil would have loved to have kept that image before Paul but he shook off the dust from his past and kept on moving ahead.

Have you failed morally? Shake off the dust and keep on moving ahead. Have you failed relationally? Shake off the dust—keep on moving ahead. Have you failed financially, or in some business? Stand up, shake off the dust and try again.

Thomas Edison once worked for months to find a filament that would burn for more than a few seconds for his incandescent light bulb. He tried over 700 filaments and each one was a failure. One reporter interviewed Edison and said, “It must be frustrating to work so hard and see no results.” Edison replied, “Oh, I have lots of results. I know 700 things that *won’t* work!”

Is there some dirty, dusty experience or failure from your past still lingering on your character? What a simple way to deal with failure: shake off the dust and move on. Or like the wounded military hero, Clebe McClary said years ago here at Green Acres: FIDO, which stand for Forget It and Drive On.

Here’s one final lesson:

4. A SIMPLE AMBITION—TO DISCOVER: “WHO IS JESUS?”

In verse 7, the scene shifts from Jesus and His disciples to the palace of Herod Antipas - what a contrast! Herod was extremely troubled by what he had been hearing about this itinerant preacher, Jesus of Nazareth. Months earlier, Herod imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptizer. Rumors were flying that John had come back from the dead. In verse 9 Herod cries out, “But I beheaded John. Who then is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him. In the 23rd chapter, Luke will record that on the day Jesus was to be crucified, Pilate sent Jesus to stand before this same Herod who was visiting Jerusalem during Passover. Herod wanted Jesus to perform a miracle and He asked Him many questions. Jesus stood there silently and refused to even talk to Herod. In mockery, Herod placed a royal robe on Jesus and sent Him back to Pilate to be crucified.

From these two scenes, we can see Herod was obsessed with this question: WHO IS JESUS? Herod’s question expresses the bottom line question every person must answer.

Let me ask you: Who is Jesus? You will have to answer that question in this life or the next. Don’t just give an *historical* answer: Jesus was a Jewish prophet who lived and taught 2,000 years ago. Don’t just give a *theological* answer: Jesus is the Son of God. You must give a *personal* answer. Let me rephrase the question: Who is Jesus—to you?

When you can answer that question, you have answered the most important question in your lifetime. Once you know Who Jesus is, He becomes the center of your life. The Apostle Paul was

a one-topic preacher. He wrote to the church in Corinth, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Can you say that? Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you know what He did for you when He was crucified? Life can be pretty complicated, but if you can answer that simple question and make knowing Jesus the one ambition of your life, your life will be blessed for all eternity.

Who is Jesus? He’s all you need for this life and the life to come. Someone has written that to the baker, He is the Bread of Life; to the electrician, He is the Light of the World; to the architect, He is the Chief Cornerstone; to the florist, He is the Lily of the Valley; to the gardener, He is the True Vine; to the carpenter, He is the Door; to the geologist, He is the Rock of Ages; to the jeweler, He is the Pearl of Great Price; to the astronomer, He is the Bright and Morning Star; to the doctor, He is the Great Physician; to the student, He is the Truth; to the lawyer, He is the Counselor. He is all in all and in Him all things consist.

Once the great conductor Toscanini was conducting Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. The orchestra was playing as one man and as the great music soared to the dramatic conclusion, the audience stood to their feet and cheered. Toscanini bowed and the applause grew louder. He pointed to the orchestra and as they stood, the cheers increased in volume. The audience was so moved, the ovation continued for several more minutes. As the appreciative crowd was cheering, Toscanini leaned toward the orchestra and shouted. The orchestra had to lean forward to understand his words above the applause. He said, “Gentlemen, you are nothing.” They weren’t surprised because Toscanini was a tough conductor who expected only perfection. Then he said, “Gentlemen, I am nothing.” That surprised the orchestra because Toscanini had an enormous ego. Then in the midst of the cheers he said, “Gentlemen, Beethoven is everything, everything, everything.”

If I could leave you with one thought this morning, it would be this: In the midst of a busy, crazy world, remember—you are nothing; and I am nothing; but Jesus is *everything, everything, everything!*

OUTLINE

1. A SIMPLE APPROACH TO MINISTRY—GO PREACH AND HEAL

Jesus prayed, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” *John 17:18*

2. A SIMPLE ATTITUDE TOWARD POSSESSIONS—DON’T LET “STUFF” SLOW YOU DOWN

No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. *Luke 16:13*

3. A SIMPLE ACT TO DEAL WITH FAILURE—SHAKE OFF THE DUST AND MOVE ON

For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity. *Proverbs 24:16*

One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal ... *Philippians 3:13-14*

4. A SIMPLE AMBITION—TO DISCOVER: “WHO IS JESUS?”

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
1 Corinthians 2:2



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes