

THE BEAUTY OF SIMPLICITY

1 Timothy 6:10; Prov. 22:7; Ephesians
5:16; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Mark 10:17-27

A Journey In the Way of Jesus

By

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Opening.

*One ship drives east and another drives west
With the selfsame winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
Which tells us the way to go.
Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate,
As we voyage along through life:
'Tis the set of a soul
That decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife.*

— Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Philippians 3:10 is a passage expressing Paul's ultimate desire in the Plan of God; it is a succinct summation of his deepest longing for his Lord. The Amplified Bible puts it this way: "[For my determined purpose is] **that I may know Him— that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding [the wonders of His Person] more strongly and more clearly, and that I may in that same way come to know the power out-flowing from His Resurrection [which it exerts over believers]; and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death.**" Peterson's paraphrase *The Message* translates Philippians 3:10 as, "I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience His resurrection power, be a partner in His suffering, and go all the way with Him to death itself."

The point is... **our life in Christ is a Journey, not just a destination, a lifelong Adventure, not merely a momentary attitude.** Intimacy with Jesus Christ is not an attitude of self-righteousness or self-condemnation; it is a Path walked *only* by faith {2 Cor. 5:7}, a Path of eternal perspective. The joy is found *in the Journey*, as our hearts learn to trust in their faithful Father.

I think you'll agree, in light of the world in which we live and breathe, for intimacy with *Abba* to become a reality, some *serious* changes are going to have to be made. The things which clutter our lives and cloud our thinking are going to have to be excised and eliminated. And in some cases, 'exorcised' ...like the idols they are. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20 behind every false god and overt idol is a demon. **"Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans [the 'Nations of the world'] are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons."**

Essay— The Beauty of Simplicity.

We need a starting place, a launching point. So, why not start with the obvious symptoms of our own rushed and hurried lives, lived as we all know at a far too frantic pace.

Learning How Not to Say ‘Yes.’

Let’s begin with the fact that most of us say ‘yes’ to *too* many things. Robert Frost once said, “To be ...free one must be *free* to *refuse*.” We seem to have some innate emotional need to please everyone except our Lord: the *only* One who really matters. The result is more busyness in a light-speed life. We become one of the B.U.S.Y {Buried Under Satan’s Yoke}, busier, or *busiest*... and our pace never seems to slow. Maybe it’s a fatal fear of the void within that a few hours of silence or solitude might unveil. {Cf. Mark 1:21-39: the perspective of our Savior on the dangers of pleasing everybody.}

L.S. Chafer used to tell his students at Dallas Theological Seminary, “Much of our activity today is little more than a cheap anesthetic to deaden the pain of an empty life.” **And this was the early part of the 20th century!** How prescient are those words today? Can you imagine what he would’ve said about the immeasurable things we find to distract us today and destroy us tomorrow?

No Strategies For Embracing Sabbath.

We have *no* strategies for embracing rest and rejuvenation, and no clear intent on forming any. We’re satisfied to spend ourselves in endlessly trivial pursuits. Our idea of planning involves trying to avoid overextending ourselves socially. “We can finish up Susie’s ballet at 4:30, rush over to Rusty’s soccer practice at 5:00, pick up your father from work at 6:00, then here, then there, then home.” Just stop for a moment and consider: when was the last time you blocked off a portion in your Day-Timer, marked a day off on your I-phone’s calendar, and wrote: ‘*Rest ...Relax ...Pray*’ or ‘*Play*’ in the center of it? “But you don’t know how deep in debt I am. I don’t have *time* to stop.” **You don’t have time not to.** I know exactly how deep in debt you are; it corresponds perfectly to your slavery in Satan’s system. **And that is *exactly* the issue.** Which brings us to....

In Debt to the Devil.

Most of the world owes {and this includes the majority of Christians} more than it can ever hope to repay. And so many are working their way even deeper into debt. There’s one thing critical to your faith here: **Debt is simply one more chain binding**

us to the Cosmic System, to Satanic Central. Proverbs 22:7b says, “the borrower is the *slave* of the lender.” Most of us have more things than we’ll ever get around to using, or using more than once or twice or thrice at the maximum.

Deceived By Devices.

We’ve deceived ourselves into believing that amazing advances in technology have simplified our lives. I put this in the past tense because it’s a *done deal*; we’ve bought this one hook, line, and sinker. Notice the word I used was ‘lives,’ not ‘menial tasks.’ But have they really? Or are we just spending more time with our toys, and more money on maintaining them than ever before? New medicines for old ills, better treatments for the suffering and sickness of the Fall: those are excellent things; increased productivity in manufacturing, engineering, etc. All good. But with these has come the unceasing barrage of constant communication from one source or another: smart phones, I-phones, text messaging, instant messaging, private messaging, e-mail, junk mail, cable TV, satellite TV, 300 channels of *nothing* to choose from. And round and round we go, with no end anywhere in sight.

So, let me ask you. With all these incredible advances in technology, is your life *easier* today than it was five years ago, or *harder*? Is your life more rested and relaxed or more hurried and hassled? More at *peace* or just more P.O.’d? Is it more *centred* on Christ or less, more *focused* on the Father’s undying love or *less* focused than ever before? **My point exactly.** With all the wonders of the modern world, we are missing the *single* most crucial component for Life— the Time and Space necessary for God to enter in and make Himself known fully and completely. Because He will, my friends, He will. He is looking for opportunities to *enter in* to your existence, to *fight* for your heart, to *come through* for you. Remember Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:16? “**Make the most of your time** [I.e., ‘redeem the days’], **because the days are evil— understand the meaning of the moment, live with your eyes awake and aware, because you have no idea how much time is left to you**” {RRExp}.

No Room For the Practice of Prayer.

We leave no room for the practice of prayer, for time alone in the Father’s presence. As Paul told the Corinthians in his 2nd Letter, “**But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning** [his ‘craftiness, his guile’], **your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ,**” 11:3. The word translated “**sincere,**” *haplotes*, implies ‘sincerity of soul;’ it is freedom from pretension, an openness of heart which seeks to be generous toward others and not just toward self. When we’re battered by busyness, our devotion to the Divine gets lost in the *chaos* of the *kosmos*, and what is of utmost importance gets reassigned to a lower rank, relegated to the pit of our priorities.

How much time do we spend alone with our God, with the Savior of our souls and the Lover of our lives? It's a simple question. **How many *minutes* in the midst of a life lived for the temporal and the transient do you consecrate to communion with your Creator?** 20... 10... 5... 3? Is He worth more to us than a minute in the morning? No Space, Time, room or reason for the eternally essential: that about sums us up, doesn't it? **This is *who* we are as Christians in the last fading light of the West.** When the Sun sets on Western Civilization {which cannot be separated from a foundation of living faith in the Living God}, with its twin towers of freedom and honor, desire and duty, a wave of darkness will engulf this world unlike anything History has seen since the days of Noah and the antediluvian Earth.

In Mark 1:35 he tells us, **"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed."** Jesus understood prayer is not only a priority, it is an absolute necessity. No soldier on a field of conflict can survive without it. What it represents is, quite simply, 'communication,' you and I maintaining a constant contact with Headquarters. If we don't stay in touch with Headquarters— with the supply line which comes from our heavenly Father— how are we going to know where we're supposed to be and what we're supposed to be doing? We won't. That's precisely why we need to *seek* His presence and His power in prayer, every day without fail.

Isaiah 55:6 says, **"Seek the LORD while He may be found** [Which is *any* time and *all* the time. 'Seek' means- '*desire* above all, *pursue* with passion,' to 'search for' the Father 'diligently in prayer and worship.']; **call upon Him while He is near."** Both are expressions of passionate prayer, of spiritual desire. One famous rabbi has translated this v.: **"Seek the LORD *because* He may be found; call upon Him *because* He is near"** ...and this is the perfect perspective. The writer of Hebrews offers us this commentary in 11:6b, that **"anyone who comes to Him** [who would 'draw near' in order to know Him] **must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him,"** that He becomes Reality to those who pursue Him with diligence and desire. Which is why we ought to begin each day's adventure with *surrender* to the Son of God, a daily consecration to Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 is a very straightforward command: **"pray without ceasing"** {NAS}, **"pray continually,"** carry on the Conversation anytime, all-the-time, anywhere and everywhere. **Prayer is the expression of the soul's desire.** And desire is a critical thing in the Life of the heart, because *desire reveals design*, and *design reveals destiny*. **Prayer reaches out in faith and calls into action the Supreme Being, the ultimate Reality of the Universe.** It seeks protection and provision, salvation and deliverance, in the shadow of omnipotent God. In the Cave of Adullam where David had fled for his life from King Saul he said, **"Have mercy on me, O God ...for in *You* my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings until the**

disaster has passed” {Ps. 57:1}. In 2 Samuel 22 he speaks of the Lord God, Jesus Christ, as his **“rock”** and his **“fortress,”** his **“stronghold”** and **“shield,”** his **“Deliverer”** and the One in whom he hides from danger {vv. 2-3}.

Prayer is the part of the Conflict which begins and ends every battle. It’s the artillery barrage laid down before the advancing infantry; it’s the air-strike called in during the heat of battle to inflict maximum damage upon our enemies. No soldier can **“stand firm and fast”** {1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:14; Phil. 4:1}, holding his ground in the midst of the mayhem without it! Prayer culminates in a **“peace which transcends all understanding,”** only *after* the Battle is fought and the dust settled. Two things here before we move on:

- I. **Prayer is our source of power in the Conflict.** Why? Because it puts us in touch with the **“God of all grace”** {1 Pet. 5:10}.
- II. **Warfare gives us the evidence of prayer’s profound necessity.** The greater the battle around you, the more *dangerous* you are; the more raging the warfare in your world, the more dangerous you are to the enemies of God.

Good, Better, or Best?

Is the temporally good keeping you from the eternally best? Here’s the thing. **Satan loves to offer us what is good, in order to distract us from what is best.** If he can keep us occupied with the wealth of this world, keep us bound and B.U.S.Y. with a million different details, he can deceive us to the divine and to *all* the Father has made available to us in the Son— Mark 4:15-19. Ephesians 1:3 tells us, **“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... has blessed in the heavenly realms with *every* spiritual blessing in Christ.”**

Remember the v. we began this journey with? Philippians 3:10a: “[For my determined purpose is] **that I may *know* Him— that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him....**” The rest of the section reads like this: **“I do not consider myself *yet* to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: *forgetting* what is behind and *straining* toward to what is ahead, I *press on* toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus,”** vv. 13-14.

Let’s expose a statement of the ‘religious spirit’ and maybe this will give you some idea of how this applies. “Well, this is the way we’ve always done it.” Ever heard that one before? These are the last eight words of a dying ministry before it breathes its final breath! “This is the way it’s always been done” is an exchange of what may be *good* for what may be *best*. It matters not to the average Christian committee or board of deacons how inappropriate to the crisis or ineffective to the Cause this may be, it’s the

way we've always done it... so it must be right. *Wrong!* **Don't allow yourself to be distracted by what *looks* good for what *is* good.**

What did Jesus say to His *Abba* when He came to the end of His Ministry and Mission? **"I have brought You glory on Earth by completing the work You gave Me to do"** {Jn. 17:4 NIV}. *That*, my friends, is a life of freedom and fullness, a life *uncluttered* by the cosmic.

Ever wonder why Jesus didn't choose twenty-four instead of twelve, or a hundred and twenty, ten times as many? Why He didn't move his ministry headquarters to Athens instead of Jerusalem, the center of western thought and philosophy in the ancient world? Or Rome instead of Athens, the center of civilization, the seat of human authority? Don't you want to reach the brilliant, the bold, the beautiful, the influential, so as to touch a much broader base of humanity? I mean, where were this guy's organizational skills? Doesn't He know the seven steps to mass marketing? Where were His PR people? Why didn't He saturate the media with His message? If you're going to *revolutionize* the world, *save* humanity from itself, you'd better get *with* it, buddy! Jesus deliberately limited His who, His when, and His where. **He never got distracted by the temporal from the eternal.** Oh, but that we could say the same. He kept it simple for sinners {K.I.S.S.}. And as He breathed His last breath, John recorded the words, **"It is finished"** {19:30} — *mission* accomplished.

Listen to the words of this anonymous essay. It says,

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book; He never held an office; He never owned a home. He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.

Although He walked the land over, curing the sick, giving sight to the blind, healing the lame, and raising people from the dead, the top established religious leaders turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to enemies. He went through the mockery of trial. He was spat upon, flogged, and ridiculed. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying, the executioners gambled for the only piece of property that He had on Earth, and that was His robe. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Twenty wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central Figure of the human race and the Leader of the column of progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of man upon this Earth as that One Solitary Life.

– One Solitary Life

And this One Solitary Life is consumed by what? **The beauty of simplicity and a singleness of purpose.**

The Cancer of Consumerism.

Consumerism and materialism are leaving us restless and resentful. Christian author Philip Yancey said, “Many people in societies advanced in technology go about their daily lives assuming God does not exist. They stop short at the world that can be *reduced* and *analyzed*, their ears sealed against rumors of another world. As Tolstoy said, materialists mistake what *limits life* for life itself.”¹

I want us to look closely at a section of Scripture in the Gospel of Mark — cf. **Mark 10**. The passage begins in v. 17, “**As Jesus started on His way** [‘As He was setting out on a journey,’ NAS], **a man ran up to Him....**” This is the “**rich young ruler**” of Matthew and Luke. In Luke’s vss. of the story he’s called an *archon*, a title of pre-eminence and power. The Jewish historian Josephus used this as a technical term for a member of the Sanhedrin, which would mean he could very well have been either a Sadducee or a Pharisee. The rabbis of the 1st century used this term for a ‘great man’ or a ‘prince.’

He ran to Jesus “**and fell on his knees before Him.**” Picture the scene. Here is this well-heeled, powerful political animal kneeling before the penniless prophet from Nazareth. This would be the equivalent of the Gen. Secretary of the UN kneeling before a homeless beggar on 5th Ave. in NY and asking him, “How do I find Eternal Life?” “**Good Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit Eternal Life?’**”

What we see here is both humility and presumption, all at the same time: the humility to kneel before the Messiah of Israel, and the presumption to think he knows who this man really is, *or* that flattery would influence His response in any shape, form, or fashion. **The concept of ‘doing’ is the *main* problem with the man’s question.** *Poieo* means- ‘*make or manufacture, execute or accomplish:*’ “What shall I *do* here, what shall I *manufacture* for the Messiah, what shall I *accomplish* for the Kingdom to gain eternal life?” Major problem number one is his approach to both the King and the Kingdom.

V. 18, “**Why do you call Me good?**” Jesus answered. **‘No one is good except God alone.’** “**Good**” here is *agathos*: this is good in the absolute sense, good in its intrinsically perfect sense, the good that God is. It’s the same term used in 2 Corinthians 5:10 for *divine* good, the service and production which comes forth from a life lived in the Spirit of Christ, pictured by the “**gold, silver,**” and “**precious stones**” of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. Notice two things here. What He’s saying is [i] “You don’t have any idea who I am. Don’t speak of what you do not know;” and [ii] “*I Am* God ...and if you want to *know* who I am, to know Me personally and intimately,

are you ready to accept this? Have you counted the cost of that statement yet?"

Now Jesus turns to the Law, He turns to what the rich young ruler knows. **"You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.' 'Teacher,' he declared, 'All these things I have kept since I was a boy [*Phulasso*, a military term, means- 'I have *guarded*:' 'I have guarded all these things from my youth, like a sentinel on watch.'].'** [I love Mark's next phrase:] **Jesus looked at and *loved* him [*Agapao*, the powerful love which flows from the heart of God: redeeming, reconciling, and restoring love.]. 'One thing you lack,' He said, 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come, follow Me,'" vv. 19-21.**

Jesus gets right down to the heart of the matter, to the core of this man's faulty convictions, to his understanding— like those of the rabbis around him, and Jewish society in general— that wealth was a sure sign of God's blessing, God's favor, God's grace resting upon him. The prevailing mentality in 1st century Judaism was that if a man was wealthy, if a person were rich materially, they had been blessed by God, resting in His favor, and were *one* step away from the Kingdom. Jesus is saying, "Turn loose of your idol and find your freedom in Me." It was time for him to sell out completely, and in this case *literally*, to the Son of God and Savior of Man!

In essence, our Lord is asking, "How bad do you really want it?" Those who long for Heaven find it; and those who want Hell get it. As C.S. Lewis said, "All get what they want in the end. All, however, do not like what they get." It was the lack of *desire* that killed his momentum, the malady of *not* wanting Jesus bad enough. And isn't this the same with us; isn't this more often than not what happens to our momentum? We simply *do not* desire Jesus more than the things of this world. The Lesson: **If we're going to err, let it be on the side of *passion* and *desire* and not the lack thereof.**

"Come, follow Me" is a strong exhortation, an outright command laid down in the present active imperative. The imperative is the mood used by a commander, or in this case a King. The active voice is a challenge to the will of the rich young ruler: **if he is to take up his cross, he must lay down his wealth. And no one, no one else on Earth can do it for him.** The present tense tells him, and us, to '*keep on following*' — no matter what this requires.

The word Jesus draws on is *akolouthéo*. In secular Greek the ideas of 'following someone' or 'going behind another' in *akolouthéo* give rise to those of following a speaker intellectually, following a teacher ethically, or following a leader spiritually. It was used in Classical Greek for an audience following an orator in thought, or a wise man in his wisdom, a servant after her master, or a lover after his love.

These previous ideas evolve into the *action* of following someone as their disciple. **And that is *never* a passive process.**

Akolouthēin in the NT has a very specific spiritual connotation to it: **for a Disciple of Christ.** Apart from a single occurrence in Revelation we find it exclusively in the Gospels. In fact, Peter will use it in v. 28 when he says to Jesus, **“We have left everything to follow You!”** implying a *conscious* commitment willing to break *every other* tie in life, if necessary, to follow the Son of God. Peter’s following was a literal and outward one, a following which grew by the time of Jesus’ Ascension into a deep internal desire for His Lord, a powerful passion of the heart. Our discipleship in the 21st century is no less real because it begins with an internal *decision* and grows into a deepening *desire*. The fact that we don’t have the physical Jesus to follow makes *no* difference in the *weight* of the call He’s placed upon our lives.

“Come, follow Me... and as you listen to My words, as you learn from My Life, as you follow in My Path and walk in My Way, you will find exactly what you seek — Love and Life Eternal.” For the earliest Body of Believers, what some scholars have chosen to call ‘primitive Christianity,’ there is only *one* discipleship, and it is an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the reason Scripture includes so much poetry in and outside the narrative, so many parables and stories, so many visions and emotional letters, is because it is attempting to describe a *relational* break man tragically experienced with God and a disturbed *relational* history man has had since then and, furthermore, a *relational* dynamic man must embrace in order to have *relational* intimacy with God once again, thus healing himself of all the crap he gets into while looking for a *relationship* that makes him feel whole. Maybe the Gospel of Jesus ...is all about our relationship with Jesus rather than about ideas. ...Perhaps our lists and formulas and bullet points are nice in the sense that they help us memorize different truths, but harmful in the sense that they blind us to the necessary relationship that must begin between ourselves and God for us to become His followers. And worse, perhaps our formulas and bullet points and steps steal the sincerity with which we might engage God.²

Akolouthēo means- ‘*be a follower or companion;*’ literally, ‘*be one going in the same direction.*’ We’re going to translate it- ‘*be a disciple,*’ because as you can see it obviously includes so much which is beyond translation in any single English word. Here is this rich young ruler, and here is the challenge of Christ Jesus, the Message of the Messiah. Allow me to paraphrase the intentional ideas of our Lord. **“Come here, now, lay aside the idol of Mammon and find your freedom in a relationship with Me. Follow, listen, learn and obey, then continue in these things and you will have treasure in Heaven and Life there as well,”** v. 21 {RRExp}.

“At this the man’s face fell [It ‘fell’ into much sadness.]. And he went away grieving

[*Pierced* to the center of his soul.], **because he had great wealth,**” v. 22. He was shocked and alarmed, heartbroken and dispirited over the words of Christ, because the idol he had erected was his **“wealth”** ...and he was holding on to it tightly with both fists. In v. 23 Jesus and His Disciples watched this man walk away, head bowed low, downcast and dejected, back to his life of money and ease, a self-absorbed life of material possessions. **“Jesus looked around and said to His Disciples, ‘How *hard* it is for the *rich* to enter the Kingdom of God!’”**

“Rich” is from *chremata*, the plural of *chrema*, which was defined by Aristotle as ‘all that which can be measured by *money*,’ the value of which {we would say} is determined by dollar signs. Chachiiiiinnnggg! We’re looking at ‘*property, wealth, means, money*,’ that’s what’s being spoken of by *chremata*.

It says in v. 24, **“The Disciples were amazed at His words.”** I want you to notice their amazement and astonishment. This isn’t the last time it comes up or the last time it’s expressed; two vv. from here it says, **“They were even *more* astonished, even *more* amazed...”** {*thambeo*}. The *reason* is Jesus had just taken their entire understanding of morality, of formal adherence to law and order, and the accepted agreement that this always resulted in wealth, in blessing, in the favor of God showering a man, and turned it *upside down*. Thus, if a man had all the outer accoutrements, he must by necessity be a righteous man with one foot in the Kingdom of God. The rabbinic argument of 1st century Judaism, *universally accepted*, was that wealth was a sure sign of rightness with God and thus blessing from His hand. Jesus takes this entire notion and turns it right-side up, whereas before it had been upside down.

“But Jesus said again [reinforcing His original point], **‘Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God** [‘How utterly and incredibly *difficult* for those bound to the idol of Mammon.'].” The KJV, which uses a different manuscript from the NIV and NAS, has, **“How hard it is for those who trust in money** [‘who trust in riches’] **to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle** [Greek word here and in Matthew 19 is ‘a sewing needle;’ Luke uses the term for a ‘surgical needle.’ It’s a proverb for the *impossible*.] **than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.”** A couple of points along this line.

- I. **Possessions have the ability to *rivet* our souls to this world, to satanic central.**
As Samuel Johnson was being shown a beautiful castle and its gorgeous grounds in the English countryside he said, “These are the things that make it *difficult* to die.”
- II. **When our motivation is materialism, we begin to think of everything in terms of its price {and sometimes everyone}.** The idea is, “Well, if I can afford it, and I’m not hurting anybody else, then there shouldn’t be anything wrong with it.” **But you see, price and value are two different animals.**

We live in a prosperous country, a luxuriant culture, that knows the *price* of everything and the *value* of nothing!

There's a true story from the early 20th century of a shepherd who tended his flock in the highlands of Scotland. His children were raised in those lonely hills; they were simple, unsophisticated, believers in a simple, unsophisticated Savior. Their father was given a position in the nearest town with a salary and a much higher standard of living. The children, when introduced to 'life in the city' and the culture of the *kosmos*, began to change radically and almost immediately... and *not* for the better. His wife wrote a fascinating letter to the local paper, the last paragraph of which read: "Which is preferable for a child's upbringing— a lack of worldliness, but with better manners and sincere and simple thoughts, or worldliness and its present day habit of knowing the price of everything and the true value of nothing?" Mmhhmmmm, which indeed?

To think in terms of price and not in terms of value and worth is to forget that there are precious gifts being offered in life which cannot be bought. **There are things in the hearts and lives of men and women more valuable than *all* the *wealth* of this world.** It's a fatal flaw in the thinking of Man when we come to believe {as so many in our society do today} that everything worth having has a price tag attached to it.

III Jesus was saying that great wealth often leads to great worry. It ends up becoming two things to men and women: [i] a true test of character— for every hundred men who can withstand adversity only *one* can withstand prosperity; and [ii] a very real responsibility: to *use* it and not abuse it. **Money is always judged by two criteria: how you get it; and how you use it.** The more money one has, the greater the responsibility resting upon them. The *real* question is are you going to use it as if you're its undisputed possessor— as if God has no claim to His Creatures— or as a steward of the Savior, a servant of the Master?

After His second discourse on the difficulty of the wealthy laying everything aside but faith, the Disciples "**were even *more* amazed** [*amazed beyond measure, exceedingly astonished*'] **and said to each other, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but *not* with God; all things are possible with God,'"** vv. 26-27. What we have in v. 27 is Jesus stating the doctrine of grace in salvation in a nutshell: "*If* salvation depended on man's effort or ingenuity, on man *doing* anything, it would be utterly impossible. But salvation is the gift of God {offered in grace and received in faith} and *all* things are possible with *Abba*!" The man who trusts in him self or his savings can never experience Eternal Life; the woman who trusts in the saving power of Christ and the redeeming love of the Father can enter the fold freely and find all the pasture her heart desires.

This single thought is the foundation of the Christian Faith.

I think it's enlightening in an Age seemingly *unable* to look *beyond* itself— either to learn from the past or live in light of Eternity— to read the final thoughts in this section. Peter say's to Jesus in v. 28, **"We have left *everything* to follow you!"** To which Jesus replies, **"I tell you the Truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for Me and the Gospel will fail to receive a *hundred times* as much in this present Age ...and in the Age to Come, Eternal Life. But many who are first [and believe they *deserve* to be] will be last, and the last [who believe they deserve to be *also*, will be] first," vv. 29-31.**

Once again, the *cancer* of consumerism is eating us alive. So if consumerism has made you crazy and materialism left its angry mark, maybe it's time to lift some of that burden and unload the unnecessary. If you've got a car you don't drive, a TV you don't watch, a computer you don't touch, or toys that take time, energy, and effort which could be put to better use elsewhere, somebody in the Body probably needs what you have. **If you don't want to sell it, then give it away in grace. Don't let what you own in the end own you. Because it will, if you don't watch it.** If you don't live with your eyes wide open, awake to the fact the world can take you out by your toys, they will do just that. You may end up eliminating some things which are nice because you realize they're unnecessary. The truth is they may be standing like a silent wall between you and a deepening of your relationships, a strengthening of your marriage, an enhancement of your intimacy with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. **And *if* so, they need to go.**

Finale.

What do we do? **We simplify, then simplify some more.** We clear away the clutter of all that is distracting us from desiring our King over all of Creation. Soviet dissident and combatant of communism Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once wrote,

Do not pursue what is illusory. All that is gained at the expense of your nerves decade after decade and is confiscated in the fell of night. Live with the steady superiority over life. Don't be afraid of misfortune. Do not yearn after happiness. It is, after all, all the same. The bitter doesn't last forever. And the sweet never fills the cup to overflowing. It is enough if you don't freeze in the cold. And if thirst and hunger don't claw at your insides, if your back isn't broken, if your feet can walk and your arms can bend, if both eyes can see, if both ears hear, then whom... whom should you envy?

Whom indeed? The haunting words of Henry Thoreau echo my belief in the Three Ds of the Cosmic System {distractions, deceptions, and destructions}: "Our life is frittered away by detail," he wrote, "simplify, simplify." Amen.

May we begin this very moment, in the strength of the Spirit of God, to do this very thing.

1 : Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*, Introduction

2 : Donald Miller, *Searching for God Knows What*, pp. 154-155 {Italics in original}