



Date: November 1, 2015

Title: "Simple Joy"

Scripture: Luke 12: 22-31

Description: Simple, pure joy often is the result of simple practices. This sermon identifies four practices along with strategies for employing them.

What's the secret to happiness? There is no secret to being happy. It isn't that simple. Life is too complex and you are too intricate for happiness to be simple. There is no simple secret to being happy all the time, and if you were happy all the time, you wouldn't be happy about it!

But there are practices that help, and they turn out to be pretty simple. I'm going to talk about four simple practices that can increase your level of joy.

1. Slow Down. We are in a world saturated with speed. These days, even instant gratification takes too long. We used to dial, now we speed-dial; we used to read, now we speed read; we used to walk, now we speed-walk; we used to date, now we speed date. Last week I even read of a gym offering "Speed Yoga."

We have absorbed a Road-Runner mentality. We are so marinated in the culture of speed that we are unaware of the toll that it takes. We fear that if you slow down, you're road kill, but the opposite is true. Often a wake-up call takes the form of an illness, when everything slows down as you recuperate.

I searched Amazon.com and found "The One-Minute Manager", "The One-Minute Cure," "The One-Minute Workout", "One-Minute Miracle" (The one-sentence summary discloses that the One-Minute Miracle contains 35.2% hydrogen peroxide. I wanted to read about that, but I was in a hurry.) The one that grabbed my attention, however, was "The One-Minute Bedtime Story." Are we so addicted to speed and efficiency that we take that warm, cozy, snuggle time with a child and compress it into a well-organized, time-saving sound bite at the end of the day?

I fear for our children, who grow up believing that our pace is normal. We complain about the time we spend driving our kids to school, rehearsals, practice, tutors, travel-team tournaments; what about our kids who are driven? What would happen if schools agreed to ban all extracurricular activities one day a month, or all homework one day a week? Actually, there are schools that do that, and are discovering that both grades and test scores are going up.

Why is it so hard to slow down? Speed is powerful. It is addictive, fun, sexy—all that adrenaline rush. Speed helps us hide from deep questions and deep emotions. We stay busy and in a hurry and we don't have to ask, "Am I happy? Is this working?"

"Be still and know that I am God," says the Bible. Fall in love with your inner tortoise. Let's stop overloading ourselves gratuitously. Let's change our default mode from rushaholic to unhurried. "Consider the lilies of the field," encouraged Jesus. Have you ever seen a flower in a hurry? Take time to slow down and savor your life.¹

2. What's in this box? I don't know, but it must be important because I've kept it for years and years. It now stays in our garage and I'm trying to figure out what to do with it.

We Americans have about three times as much space than we did fifty years ago. You'd think with all that additional space, we'd have plenty of room to put our stuff. Yet there is a fast-growing, \$22 billion dollar industry that has developed to provide personal storage. Triple the space, yet we need storage space to put our stuff. We've become such good shoppers that we need more space to put our stuff.

Where does this lead? ^{a)} Greater credit card debt: the average credit card balance for an American household is \$7,100. ^{b)} A huge environmental footprint. ^{c)} And our happiness levels have flat-lined.

I'll bet that you can remember a time when you had lots less space and less stuff, yet you had plenty of happiness. Your college dorm, the apartment right after you finished school, camping—you had almost nothing! It gave you a little more freedom, a little more time. Less may equal more.

Three strategies to reduce your clutter. 1) edit ruthlessly. This shirt in my closet—I haven't worn it in two years. So let it go. But it reminds me of my hike in Glacier National Park. So take a picture of the shirt...and then let it go!

Debbie talked to someone who started with the garage. They became aware of the unconscious impact it had on them when they came home and their first experience

was being inundated with clutter. So they totally emptied it out—literally a garage sale. Then hung paintings on the walls. It's created a different arrival home. I think I might want to try that—if I can find the time. Edit ruthlessly.

2) Stem the inflow. Think before you buy. Ask, "Is that really going to make me happy for a long time?" What is it going to cost, not in terms of money but in space and time.

3) Small is sexy. Why do we have four and six burner stoves when we rarely use more than two? "Do this in remembrance of me" said Jesus, and to make their last time together memorable, he did not offer a six course meal. Maybe less might equal more, and it might make room for the good stuff.²

3. Money can't buy happiness, they say. Well, they're wrong. *More* money doesn't buy happiness. Lottery winners a year after winning report greater stress, more pressure, and way more relatives and friends asking for money. So they took all kinds of measures to protect themselves from people and safeguard their privacy. More money made them less happy and anti-social.

In an experiment on a college campus in Vancouver, they asked students to report how happy they felt. Then they gave the students an envelope containing some cash. "By 5:00 p.m., spend this on yourself," they were instructed. Most of them went directly to Starbucks. The experiment showed that if you give college students \$5 dollars, it looks like coffee to them. At 5:00 p.m. the students reported their happiness levels as about the same, often a bit less.

They gave other students an envelope with the instructions, "By 5:00 p.m., spend this on someone else. It's \$5 dollars, what can you do, right? A card and a candy bar; one gave her mom some costume jewelry. Yet many of these students reported they were happier at the end of the day.

Affluent undergrads in Vancouver—would they get the same results anywhere else? So they did the same thing in Uganda. People who spent the money on themselves reported no greater happiness; people who spent the money on others were happier. Except they purchased things like a malaria vaccine for a neighbor's child.

If you spend money on yourself, it makes you less happy. If you spend it on others, it makes you more happy. If you think money can't buy happiness, you're not spending it right.

Here's a pledge card. Here's a tree with rooms for more "leaves of healing." Here's a place that uses contributions as effectively to personally benefit people as any organization I know. Do I need to say more?³

4. Gratitude. There's a connection between happiness and gratefulness. But happiness is not strongly connected with what happens to you. There are lots of people who have everything it would take to be happy—success, wealth, good looks—but they complain all the time. You also know people who have had so much loss and misfortune and they are so happy. Happiness doesn't make us grateful, but the other way around. Gratitude makes us happy.

When you're grateful, you're not fearful. Being grateful evokes trust while fear evokes violence. When you're grateful, you act out of a sense of enough and not a sense of scarcity. Then you become willing to share. But you can't simply tell yourself to feel thankful and it happens. What can you do to infuse your daily life with gratitude? Try this: stop, look, put it in words. (Now this material is beginning to fold in on itself.) We miss so much because we are in such a hurry. We cannot be thankful for that which we do not even notice. We have to get quiet. Build stop signs in your life. 1) The first thing every morning, before your feet hit the cold floor, *give God the first greeting of the day* and say a quick thanks. A quick "hello" is plenty; God may not have had a cup of coffee yet either. "Lord, good morning. Here I am, with you for a new day, and here you are with me as always. Talk to you later." 2) *Give God a thanks at every meal.* Sometimes my table grace is "Please help me not dribble this burrito on my clothes while I'm driving!" But even when I may be driving and texting and listening to the radio, saying thanks may help me to taste the food and touch base with the Creator who provides everything. 3) *Give God the first response to every pleasure.* This puts words to the "stop and look" part. You've probably had the same experience I have of being somewhere alone, seeing something beautiful—a sunset, a rainbow, an act of kindness—and wishing a spouse or a friend were there to share it with you. So share it with God; after all, if it was beautiful, God was likely behind it. 4) *Give God the first part of every paycheck.* This moves gratitude from the left-overs, I'll give if I have some to spare and when I get around to it. Giving the first part places gratitude as a first priority. Simple, right? Simple practices, simple generosity simplify lead to simple joy, which is the purest kind of joy. Shall we put it into practice by sharing a simple meal?

1. This material was adapted from a presentation by Carl Honore on Ted Talks.
http://www.ted.com/talks/carl_honore_praises_slowness.
2. This section summarizes a speech by Graham Hill on Ted Talks.
http://www.ted.com/talks/graham_hill_less_stuff_more_happiness.
3. This study was cited in a presentation by Michel Norton in
http://www.ted.com/talks/michael_norton_how_to_buy_happiness.
4. These practices are recommended by Brian McLaren in his book, *Naked Spirituality*.