

simplify.

philippians 3:13

Series Introduction

The culture in which we live today is *over-complicated*. As Americans, by and large, our lives are *over-scheduled*, *overworked* and *overwhelmed*. And it really makes no difference if you are a business executive or a stay-at-home mom. Everyone can feel the pressures and sense the impact this culture has on life.

Because of this, many people continually feel the need to declutter their lives. Some today call it *minimalism*. Whatever you call it, you know it is happening when you come home to find all your stuff stacked up in piles with price tags on them. Or when you go to the cabinet to get your favorite cup and realize everything has been rearranged...again.

Somehow we have been led to believe that if we can get everything organized, then life will cease to be as complicated. But, underneath it all there is a bigger spiritual battle taking place than what most of us understand. You see, even if your kitchen gets organized, your garage gets cleaned out and your car gets cleaned up, it is still very likely that your life will just slip right back into the same mess. This is because **the Devil has learned that if he can keep you busy, he can keep you from living the life that God intended for you to live.**

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (II Corinthians 11:3)

Satan is a master of over-complication. From the beginning, he took a simple command and tricked a woman into over-thinking it. That one decision cast all of humanity headlong into a cycle of sin that has ever since enslaved us to over-complication. Through the years, we've become even more enslaved to it.

There is an immense need to cut through the lies Satan has fed us through our culture and get back to living the way God intended for us to. Sounds good, doesn't it? But, exactly how are you supposed to accomplish such a thing?

In a word, this is how: **Simplify.**

There is simplicity in living for Jesus. Living your life for the cause of Christ puts all the other pressures placed upon you by our culture into a new perspective. When you look at life through this lens, many of the things that society tells you must be a part of your life suddenly become unnecessary or unimportant.

This type of simplicity does not come from **reorganizing your possessions**, it comes from **refocusing your priorities**. It does not come from a cleaner closet, an organized calendar or a simpler life, it comes from allowing Jesus to shape all of these things. As one person wisely put it, *"Simplifying is not so much about doing fewer things as it is about doing the **right** things."* ^[1]

In Philippians, the Apostle Paul went to great lengths to communicate the simplicity of the purpose with which he lived his life. In chapter one and verse twenty-one he stated his life purpose when he said, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* His purpose for living was clear – it was all about Jesus!

Later, in chapter three, the Apostle Paul came back to this theme once again to demonstrate that the cause of Christ was the One priority that shaped the rest of his life: *"¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but **this one thing I do**, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Notice, he said "this one thing I do" not "these forty things I dabble with." ^[2] His life was fixated on living for the purpose for which Jesus Christ had called him to live.

Wouldn't you like to have such a centralized purpose to your life? Do you think that if you lived with such focused purpose, it would simplify your life today? Throughout this year, we are going to take a journey through the Scriptures to reveal the principles from God's Word that will enable us to simplify our lives.

Introduction

As we begin this journey today, we turn first to Philippians chapter three.

- Here, the Bible teaches how to **simplify your why**; in other words, **how to simplify the purpose for which you are living**.

For so many people, the reason their lives are so complicated is because **they are continually being pulled in so many different directions**.

- One day, you live for your *family*. Another day, you live for the *job*. The next day, you live for *God*. And, on an off-day, you may live for *yourself*. But, every day, you feel like there is a competition that keeps you from giving all of yourself to any one of them.

➔ *Have you experienced this dynamic of being pulled in different directions?*

- The good news of the gospel is that God has given us a single purpose that will enable us to accomplish everything He wants us to accomplish in life.

This is what Paul is talking about in Philippians 3. **[Philippians 3:3-14]**

- Paul made clear here that the chief pursuit of the Christian life is Jesus.
 - See, if you live for Jesus, you'll be the spouse God wants you to be.
 - If you live for Jesus, you'll be the parent God wants you to be.
 - If you live for Jesus, you'll be the employee God wants you to be.
 - But, everything else in your life will be out of order until you get this one purpose back in order in your heart.
- ➔ The question that remains is this: *How can you simplify your life so that the only purpose for which you are living is the cause of Jesus Christ?*

☀ Notice, four steps you need to take to simply your why (your purpose for living).

1. **Recognize** your need to simplify. (v.13a)

The first thing Paul said is, "*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.*"

Paul didn't think he had gotten ahold of what it means to live the Christian life.

- He recognized there was still more he had to gain spiritually.
- He recognized there were still some areas he needed to grow in spiritually.
- He recognized there was a need to simplify his own life to live more for Jesus.

Your journey to simplify must begin with you admitting you need to do so.

- Most of us have more pursuits in life than what God ever intended for us to.
 - This is certainly something I struggle with personally. I tend to allow myself to become busy with so many *good things*, that I miss the *God things*.
 - If you try to give yourself to too many areas, you will stretch yourself so thin that you won't be able to effectively get anything done in any area.
 - **[Rope Illustration 1]** Most of our lives have far too many purposes pulling us in multiple directions...If we continue to allow these pressures to pull us in different directions, we will eventually lose grip or get pulled apart.
 - Rope One: **Family** (For some this represents multiple ropes...spouse, kids, extended.)
 - Rope Two: **Job**
 - Rope Three: **Church**
 - Rope Four: **Friendships**
 - Rope Five: **Health**
 - Rope Six: **Extras** (t-ball, clubs, hobbies, recreation, community involvement, etc.)
 - Rope Seven: **God**
- ➔ *Do you feel the need to simplify your life so that you can effectively do what God wants you to do?*
- ◆ **Friend, it is critically important that you recognize you have not arrived.** You have some areas you need to grow in. You need to let God teach you how to simplify your life so you can live for what really matters most.

The second step you need take to **simplify your why** is to...

2. **Reshape** your values. (v.13c, 7-8)

Now that you have recognized you have not arrived and that you need to let God show you how to simplify your life, you need to take the next step to **allow Him to reshape what you value as important in your life.**

This is what happened for Paul. Notice how he expresses this: ¹³ *[T]his one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind."*

One way Paul chose to simplify his life was by allow God to reshape his values.

- "Forgetting" literally indicates *a choice to no longer care about some things*.
 - This is in the **present tense**, meaning he was actively choosing to do this.
 - It is in the **middle voice**, meaning he was intentionally doing this to himself.

- Paul daily chose not to care about the things that used to control his life.
 - He refers back to when he made this choice earlier in his life. [vv.3-8]
- In his flesh, Paul had many things others viewed as *advantages*, but he chose to value those things as *worthless* compared to what Jesus had to offer him.
 - He viewed his “gains” as “losses” – his advantages as damages.
 - Literally, all other earthly pursuits were “crap” compared to gaining Jesus!
- Paul had chosen to value all his earthly benefits as worthless, so he could have what Jesus wanted for His life.
 - He really believed what Jesus had to offer was so much better!

Simplifying your life will require you to let God reshape your values. (In other words, you must let God’s Word tell you what is really important in life.)

- Open your life to God and let Him tell you what things to “forget about.” (Let God teach you what things you need to care a whole lot less about in your life!)

Illustration: Jar of Life

- The **Jar** represents your life and the time you have to fill in it.
- The **Rocks** represent the important things in your life (God, family, church, etc.).
- The **Beans** represent the things that matter to you, but aren’t necessarily important in the grand scheme of life (job, hobbies, events, etc.).
- The **Rice** represents the things in your life that don’t really matter at all (video games, watching sports, social media, little squabbles, etc.).

Too often, you allow the things that don’t matter to fill up so much of your life that you don’t have any space left for the things that do matter. (And your life will only ever amount to a hill of beans...pun totally intended!)

- ◆ But, once you allow God to reshape your values, you will find that you are able to accomplish all the important things in your life and still have time for many of the other things that you used to spend your life pursuing. (And, by the way, your life will be a whole lot “fuller” in the end as well!)

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33)

- ➔ *Do you need to let God reshape your values in life so that you can start living for what really matters?*

A third step you need take to **simplify your why** is to...

3. **Reach** for eternal goals. (v.13d, 9-12)

Now that you have recognized you need to let God teach you how to simplify your life and you have allowed God to begin to reshape your values, you need to take this third step to **start living for the things that will matter for eternity.**

This is precisely what Paul indicates he had chosen to do: ¹³ *[T]his one thing I do...reaching forth unto those things which are before."*

Another way Paul chose to simplify his life was by **reaching for eternal goals.**

- "Reaching forth unto" comes from a Greek phrase which literally means to stretch out towards. (Like a runner stretching out to be first across the finish line!)
 - This is in the **present tense**, meaning he was actively choosing to do this.
 - It is in the **middle voice**, meaning he was intentionally doing this to himself.
- Paul daily chose to exert his life living for things that mattered for eternity.

Simplifying your life will require you to reach for eternity goals – to start living for the things that will matter for eternity.

George W. Truett, a well-know pastor in Texas, was invited to dinner at the home of a very wealthy Texas man. After the meal, the host led him to a place where they could get a good view of the surrounding area. Pointing to the oil wells covering the landscape, the Texan boasted, *"Twenty-five years ago I had nothing. Now, as far as you can see, it's all mine."*

Looking in the opposite direction at his sprawling fields of grain, he bragged, *"They're all mine."*

Then he turned east toward huge herds of cattle, and said, *"They're all mine."*

Then pointing to the west at a beautiful forest, he bragged, *"That's all mine too."*

Then he paused, expecting Dr. Truett to compliment him on his great success. But Dr. Truett placed one hand on the man's shoulder, pointed toward the sky and simply asked, ***"How much do you have in that direction?"***

Then the man hung his head and confessed. *"I never thought of that."* [3]

➔ *Friend, may I ask you, how much do you have in **that** [*pointing up*] direction?*

Jesus counseled us with these words, "¹⁹ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: ²⁰ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: ²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

"³⁶ For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? ³⁷ Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37)

Paul advised you to "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:2)

- There is a misconception about living for things that will matter for eternity: **You think it means you'll have to cut out some things that really matter to you.**
 - **[Rope Illustration 2]** Remember our ropes from earlier that were pulling us in all types of different directions? Those who misunderstand God think if they live for Him He will make them cut some ties with things that matter.
 - But, that is not at all how God works! God knows what you need better than what you could possibly understand.

Luke 12:30 says that "[Y]our Father knoweth that ye have need of these things."

- Instead of cutting out important things from your life, when you start to live for God (reaching for eternal goals), He intertwines all your conflicting priorities and enables you to accomplish them all with singular focus.
- Then, instead of all these purposes pulling you in different directions, God makes it to where you can accomplish them all simultaneously as you pursue His great purpose for your life!

- ◆ If you try to hold your life together without God, you'll lose. But, if you hand your life over to God, He will give you a life that matters for eternity.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." (Mark 8:35)

- ➔ Do you need to hand your life over to God so that you can start living for what will matter for eternity?

The final step you need take to **simplify your why** is to...

4. **Run toward God's purpose for your life. (v.14)**

Paul said it simply, *"¹³ [T]his one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

He chose to live his life for this one thing: **pursuing God's purpose for his life.**

- Early on in his Christian life, God had revealed to Him what this calling was.

"¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, ¹⁶ To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen;" (Galatians 1:15-16)

- Paul's calling was **to know Christ** and **to make Him known.**
- He knew this was a pursuit that would not stop until he entered eternity.
- He also knew that on that distant horizon was a "prize" waiting for him. (He believed it was worth running for!)

Toward the end of his life, he wrote again about how he was looking forward to soon receiving that prize: *"⁶ For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* (II Tim. 4:6-8)

To simplify your life, **you must start pursuing for God's purpose for your life.**

- God's calling on the life of the believer has not changed: **it is still simply to know Jesus and to make Him known.**
 - How this plays out in your life will look different than it will in mine.
 - For me, living out this calling means me pastoring this church.
 - For you, it may mean you continue your job, love your family and be faithful to serve in this local church while sharing the gospel with anyone you can.
 - For some of you, this may mean you need to do something different to pursue what God is calling you to do with the life He has given to you.
- ➔ *How can you make the decision today to pursue God's calling for your life?*

Conclusion

God has given you a single purpose that will enable you to accomplish everything He wants you to accomplish in this life.

If you want to start your journey towards simplifying your life for God's purpose:

- (1) **Recognize your need to simplify.** (*Have you felt the ropes pulling you in different directions?*)
 - (2) **Allow God to reshape your values.** (How many of you have some "big rocks" that need to be put back in the right place in your life?)
 - (3) **Start reaching for eternal goals.** (How many of you need to let God take all the ropes of your life and intertwine them for His eternal purposes?)
 - (4) **Run for God's purpose for your life.** (How many of you would say today, "I want to start pursuing God's purpose for my life this year?")
- ◆ Church, let's make the decision together this year to ***simplify our lives for God's glory.***

End Notes

1. Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO), 2003.
2. John Phillips, *Exploring Ephesians and Philippians* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995), p. 143.
3. <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/61046/giving-general-by-sermon-central,01/07/2022>.