

## Simplicity In A Complex World

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An old Shaker Hymn begins, “’Tis a gift to be simple, ‘tis a gift to be free.” What might freedom and simplicity have in common? In today’s world the message appears to be the opposite: the more you have, the better life will be. However, the promised ‘better life’ sometimes leaves us coming up short, especially in areas of the heart. We are left with a feeling of emptiness and longing, and we wonder, with all of our striving and hard work, why are we feeling robbed rather than fulfilled? This feeling of being robbed was addressed by Jesus in Matthew 6:19 & 20. He warns us that earthly treasures are open to thievery and asks us instead to “store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.” He continues with another significant truth, “For where your treasure is, *there your heart will be also.*” Our hearts are of primary concern to Jesus. From our hearts originates our primary purpose for life, to love God and then to love one another (Mark 12: 30 & 31). Jesus wants nothing to prevent us from receiving and giving love to Him and to others. Furthermore, He wants our hearts protected and guarded. In John 14:27 Jesus contrasts the world’s gifts with His gifts: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Simplicity is not about the status or success of our careers, finances, possessions, social positions, or other life attainments. It is rather about the attitude of our hearts toward these things. Does the peace of Christ rule in our hearts over these accomplishments? But, above all else, do we love God and do we love one another?

Some years ago, I was privileged to spend a couple of days with a Wheaton College professor and his wife. As children of missionary parents, they grew up in central Africa and after marrying, spent years ministering to the Masai people of Kenya. They were so loved by this people, that shortly before moving to Illinois this professor had been inducted as an honorary member of the Masai tribe. Their adjustment to Western living after forty years in Africa was multi-faceted. However, it was not so much about the contrast in possessions, wealth, or accomplishments that beset them, as much as it was about the independence and self-containment of people. While sipping tea together, this professor’s wife stated to me, “The hardest thing to get used to is when a car goes by on the street, it doesn’t stop at our house. In Kenya, no one walked by our house without stopping to talk.”

Success, accomplishments, possessions, and other earthly treasures are not, in and of themselves, ungodly. However, neither are they, in and of themselves, satisfying. A question to ask ourselves is, in the midst of all of these earthly treasures, is there fellowship and love for God and for one another? Or are our hearts, instead, serving these earthly treasures? As we place the love of God

and of each other first in our hearts, these successes and treasures will take their appropriate place. We will be less troubled, less afraid. Simplicity and freedom will have a place in our lives.

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