

Once More: Faith, Wealth, & Possessions

Last Updated Saturday, 06 January 2007

Vol. 37, No. 7 _ July 2006

Mark Tabb begins his book, *Living with Less*, with these words:

Let me get right to the point: The only way to get more out of life is to choose less. Less stuff. Less activity. Less wanting more. Less of you.

I apologize if this seems a little abrupt. Believe me, I searched for a different way to kick this off. I wanted to ease into the heavy stuff to make it more palatable and less offensive. Still, more than once, I found myself hitting the Delete button on a touching story because "touching" and "heart-warming" didn't quite fit.

I also thought it might be easier if some famed contemplative hit you with the bad news. Maybe Saint Augustine wouldn't insult you while telling you all your priorities are wrong, that you've wasted your life in your pursuit of comfort and material goods. Perhaps you wouldn't be angry if C. S. Lewis told you the frustration that fills your life will never go away until you slow down and begin saying no to yourself and your children. And if Mr. Rogers confronted you with your need to crawl out of the center of your universe and assume a lifestyle of humility, who could argue?

So I searched my library for just the right quote from my favorite authors. One or two came close, but I thought it better just to come right out and say what you and I need to hear: The key to making life matter is to choose to live with less.

Give stuff away.

Simplify your lifestyle.

Deflate your opinion of yourself.

Choose less because less is more. (Mark Tabb, *Living with Less*, Broadman and Holman, 2006, ix-x).

Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
- Prov. 30:8

For several years now, an increasing number of evangelical Christians, as well as a growing number of Americans in general, have been writing about, testifying to, and highly recommending to others a simple lifestyle. Even so, those who are endorsing a simple lifestyle are a minority, especially among evangelical believers. Indeed, it is rather embarrassing that living a simple lifestyle is more popular among non-believers than it is among believers. This is in spite of the fact that it seems like every other Christian book being written deals in one way or another with living a simple lifestyle and not storing up for oneself treasures on earth. The fact that most American Christians, evangelicals included, are not listening, is perhaps because our materialistic culture and sinful nature have defined us more than we might think.

I have no doubt some of my friends will think I wrote the following. But it also comes from Mark Tabb's *Living with Less*:

We live in a culture of accumulation. Therefore, the best way to escape its grip is to do just the opposite. Rather than buying more and more, begin de-accumulating. Give things away. Cleaning out the mountain of clothes and other things you no longer use is a good place to start, but don't stop there. Discover the joy of giving gifts from things that you still use. One of the greatest gifts I ever received was a set of books that was no longer available in hardcover. A close friend gave me his set as a going-away present when my family moved to California. When he handed them to me, I asked, "Won't you still read these? How can you give them away?" His response still rings in my ears more than fifteen years later: "I would rather give them to you." That's the spirit of de-accumulation.

De-accumulating also means not buying things unless and until you actually need them. Compulsive purchases rarely translate into a wise use of resources. When you buy things, use them until they need to be replaced. Most of us use things until we get tired of them, even though they are still very useful. That's how a woman I know ended up with ten bottles of shampoo under her sink. Use what you buy and once it has outlasted its usefulness, get rid of it. Sure, that fried-chicken bucket with the picture of a NASCAR driver on the side might be worth something someday, but do you really want to keep it around for decades to find out? (Mark Tabb, *Living with Less*, 88-89).

Our materialistic bent in life as Christians should not be surprising. Quite often even our faith, especially as Western Christians, is materialistic rather than primarily spiritual, although there is widespread interest in the larger culture on

"spirituality." That this focus in being accented in more and more books is shown by the fact that early in his book, *The Cross Examination of Jesus* (Waterbrook, 2006), Randy Singer recreates for the reader Jesus' healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:20-26. He emphasizes that Jesus' first priority was the man's spiritual condition, not his physical condition. A few pages later he raises the question, "Are Jesus' priorities ours?" Singer writes:

Many in today's churches would reverse the priorities of Christ. "Get up and walk" becomes the main thing; "your sins are forgiven" is an afterthought (Singer, 36).

In case his readers disagree with him, Singer takes us to two typical church meetings. The first one, taking place in Madison Square Garden, is led by a well-known television evangelist. At the climax of the service people come forward to be healed, physically healed. Singer notes:

Strangely, nobody comes on stage to announce "only" a change in his or her spiritual condition. This crowd wants miracles, not just repentance. Sure, they know Jesus can heal us spiritually, but what about our bodies? He wants to heal us physically, too....To say that Jesus doesn't answer prayers for healing today would be to call Him a liar.

But I am saying that Jesus doesn't owe us physical healing. He's not obligated to heal all of our ailments anytime we utter the magic prayer words. And I'm also saying that the spiritual, not the physical, should be our primary concern (Singer, 37-38).

In the second church meeting, a mid-week prayer service, the pastor of the church preaches for thirty minutes, and then takes prayer requests. The vast majority of the requests are for those who are sick, who have some sort of cancer, or are undergoing treatment, church members on the road who need traveling mercies, a member who needs a job. In short, the focus is largely the same in this meeting, although there are no healings. In other words, the focus is on the physical and material needs of believers, not on the spiritual ones. Singer writes:

There is, of course, nothing wrong with heartfelt prayers for our physical needs. Does Jesus care about those needs? You bet. He healed hundreds, maybe thousands. Even the hairs on our head are all numbered (see Matthew 10:30). Every physical challenge we face has been filtered by God. He uses our weaknesses to glorify Him and to help us grow in grace. But He doesn't want us to focus primarily on the physical needs of this world....

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," Jesus warned (Matthew 6:21). But how do we pray? Bless our business. Help us get this house or that car or this raise or that promotion. Basically, help us heap up treasures on earth (Singer, 39).

It is refreshing to find in an apologetics book on the person of Jesus this kind of emphasis. But, then, we need it desperately. It is regrettable that Singer has to state the truth of Scripture and Jesus' teaching in contrast to what is found in our churches.

That this teaching is emphasized throughout the Old Testament as well as the New Testament becomes evident when one carefully reads Exodus. In His provision of manna for the Hebrews, God was very particular about how it was to be gathered. In Exodus 16 we read: 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days".... 13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.' 17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. 19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." 20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. 21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. 22 On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much - two omers for each person - and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. 23 He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" 24 So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 25 "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." 27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? 29 Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. Do you see the many lessons God was teaching in this passage? Of course, one of them is that as His children, we can depend on and trust in God to provide for us. God sent the manna

to teach the Hebrews they could depend on Him for all their needs. In his commentary on Exodus, Philip Graham Ryken notes that back in the Old Testament, the New Testament (John 6), and still today, believers tend to be more interested in God's material or physical blessings than His spiritual blessings. He observes in John 6, that when Jesus explained He would meet all their physical (temporal) needs, "but more than that, He would meet all their deepest spiritual needs forever" (Ryken, *Preaching the Word: Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Crossway, 2005, 430), the crowds were more interested in what Jesus could do physically and materially for them. Ryken writes: When the people heard this, they did exactly what the Israelites did in the wilderness: They grumbled and complained. They wanted God on their own terms; so they weren't interested in what Jesus had to offer. They didn't understand that this was a matter of life and death, that the difference between eternal salvation and everlasting damnation is faith in the Son of God (Ryken, 430). Note those words, "They wanted God on their own terms." In his teaching of Exodus in August 1990 at Indian Springs Camp Meeting, John Oswalt, like Ryken, made reference to the fact many Christians today are more focused on themselves than they are on God. Oswalt referred to the modern believer's "lust for blessing." If you don't think this is much of a problem, take careful note of the Christian books which become bestsellers, such as Joel Osteen's *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (Warner Faith, 2004). The personal pronouns in the title speak volumes about the kind of gospel Osteen proclaims. Many believers in the church are willing to follow God as long as He meets and supplies their needs "on their terms." What Osteen and others in the church fail to see is Scripture's clear teaching that, yes, God will provide our physical needs, but on His terms, and in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, what is emphasized is our daily needs. In Exodus 16:4, in His effort to teach the Hebrews to depend on Him, God said, "The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." In other words, "that day only." The only exception was on the sixth day, the day before the Sabbath, when they could gather twice as much (Ex. 16:5). They were not to hoard manna. Indeed, they could not. In the New Testament, when Jesus taught the disciples to pray, it should be no surprise that He makes this same emphasis: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3). Many Christians all over the world repeat this prayer in their worship services. There is nothing wrong with that, but are we serious about what we are praying? Do we really depend on God for our daily meals? This emphasis is even found in Proverbs (Prov. 30:8). In this time of refrigerators and freezers, don't we tend to think, "I can take care of my meals for today and tomorrow and the day after that"? This is exactly why so few Christians are serious about a simple lifestyle. We believe we can meet our own basic needs. What we want God to do is give us more of everything we crave, so that we have more than enough of the things we really need, while we are blind to the danger God was trying to teach the Hebrews, namely, that we must depend on Him every day for our basic needs. Because America is no longer the nation sending out the most missionaries, and because there are more missionaries being sent to America from other nations than we are sending out to the nations, many of us have been very embarrassed when our overseas Christian brothers and sisters come into our homes and raise the question, "How many of your family live in this house?" When many Americans say "two," their next question is very natural: "Why do you have five bedrooms?" Don't worry, I won't list the other questions they raise. Why was it so hard for the Hebrews not to hoard food? For the same reasons we have difficulty today. Deep within our sinful human nature there is lust for material things, fear that we won't have enough of what we want, and pride in terms of what we can do for ourselves. Regarding lust, this has nothing to do with sex. It is simply the fact that, not unlike a child, we see so many things we want to possess, things we believe will make us happier and life easier. Again, it is rather embarrassing to observe that more non-Christians than Christians are writing and talking about "less is more." Regarding fear, we are fearful God won't give us everything we want. We are correct in that fear, and the reason God doesn't give us everything we want is the same reason we don't give an infant everything he or she wants, but only what the child actually needs for safety and growth. As for pride, when God doesn't provide our needs the way we want, in our pride we do whatever it takes to get what we want. We may even give God the credit, however it is impossible to have the attitude, "I can take care of myself" and at the same time believe, "I must depend on God to meet my needs. Philip Ryken writes concerning Exodus 16: God has sent us bread from Heaven. This raises a practical question: Will we trust - really trust - that in Jesus, God will provide everything we truly need?... Most of the Israelites were willing to trust God for their daily bread. "However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them" (Ex. 16:20). Moses was right to be angry. Instead of only taking what they needed, some of the Israelites tried to make God's provision last an extra day. Not only was this unnecessary, but it showed a lack of faith in God's promise. These people failed God's test because they were worried about tomorrow... This was partly a lesson about contentment. By giving everyone the same rations, God was teaching His people to be satisfied with their daily provision. How much is enough? We live in a culture of accumulation, where enough is never enough - we always want a little bit more. But all we really need is our daily bread, which God has promised to provide. As God sustains us from one day to the next, we are called to live in daily dependence upon His providence. Why does God tell us to trust Him for our daily bread? Maxie Dunnam writes, "He does it for our sakes, that we may know the peace and strength that come from continual dependence upon Him, the joyful life that is ours when we trust Him and see the truth of our trusting. The happiest people I know are not people who don't have any needs, but people who experience the meeting of their needs by God" (Ryken, 432, quoting Maxie Dunnam, *The Communicator's Commentary: Exodus, Word*, 1987, 195). Perhaps the reason so few Christians are interested in living a simple lifestyle, and truly believe more is less, is the focus of most people's lives is happiness. Everyone wants to be happy. But most of us define happiness in terms of what we own, and so we are willing to do whatever it takes to get what we want and be happy. Our quest for happiness is often more important to us than our spiritual needs being met in Christ, at which point we make Christianity and following Christ man-centered, we follow Christ for material blessings rather than spiritual; when we should be following Christ primarily to know Him rather than anything else (cf. Ex. 18:11; John 17:3). Actually, this is why God saves us through Christ, that we may know Him. His

forgiving us of our sins is important, but it is the means to His real purpose: that we may know Him. Linda Breen Pierce has written two major books on living more simply: *Simplicity Lessons* (Gallagher Press, 2003) and *Choosing Simplicity* (Gallagher Press, 2000). Linda lived the so-called American dream. She earned a six-figure income as an attorney, wore expensive silk suits, and spent her vacations at lavish resorts. But after practicing law for 10 years, she realized that the price tag for this lifestyle was too high. The long hours and the stress inherent in her work left her little time and energy to enjoy other areas of her life. Starting in 1991, Linda and her husband, Jim, proceeded to simplify their lives. They moved from Los Angeles to the Monterey Peninsula in central California. They "downsized" their standard of living and enhanced their quality of life by working less, wanting less, needing less, and spending less. Linda and Jim now enjoy life much more than in their previous lifestyle of high-pressure work in the city. Linda works only part-time as an attorney and consultant, leaving plenty of time to engage in her passions of hiking and foreign travel. Linda and Jim are not Christians that I know of, much less evangelical Christians. I say this because of their focus on themselves. But if two non-believers can learn and do this, why can't believers? Most believers do not say, "I can take care of myself and I don't need to depend on God," rather we say, "Yes, of course, I am depending on the Lord." But in reality, we are depending on our guaranteed salary, retirement, life insurance, etc., so that if God should go on a vacation, we would never miss Him. Listen to what Pierce has to say in her article, "Recipe for Simplicity" (2000). Again, I do not necessarily agree with everything she says, but it is always interesting what non-believers have to say about a simple lifestyle, and how they link it with spirituality. My comments are in brackets: "Simplify, Simplify..." More than a century after Henry David Thoreau uttered these words, his plea for simplicity has more significance now than ever before. We work hard and play hard, filling nearly every moment with activity. Most families believe they need two incomes to pay for a standard of living that has doubled in the last 50 years. But do we? Based on my three-year study of over 200 people who have simplified their lives, I found that we can work less, want less, and spend less, and be happier and more fulfilled in the process. Here are ten suggestions to simplify your life. Don't try to simplify your life in a few weeks or months; most people need an initial period of three to five years to complete this transition. Small, gradual steps are best.

1. Don't let any material thing come into your home unless you absolutely love it and want to keep it until it is beyond repair. Too much stuff - it's suffocating us. Purchasing, maintaining, insuring, storing and eventually disposing of our stuff sucks up our precious life energy. [Don't let any material thing come between you and God.]
2. Live in a home with only those rooms that you or someone in your family use every day. Create a cozy home environment that fits your family. You will find this is much more satisfying than living in a museum designed to impress your friends. Spending time and money to maintain a home that is larger than you truly need diverts these resources from more fulfilling endeavors.
3. Limit your work (outside of the home) to 30 hours a week, 20 if you are a parent. To live a balanced life, we need "down" time - time to daydream, to relax, to prepare a leisurely meal, to take a walk. If we surround our structured activities with empty spaces, those activities will become more productive and meaningful.
4. Select a home and place of employment no more than 30 minutes away from each other. Commuting time is dead time. It nourishes not the body, the mind, nor the soul. Preserve your energy and money for more rewarding life experiences. [Listen to the Bible being read on tape or CD.]
5. Limit your children's extracurricular activities to one to three a week, depending on age. Otherwise, you will exhaust yourself and your children will grow up addicted to constant stimulation.
6. Take three to four months off every few years and go live in a foreign country. Living in a different culture fascinates, excites, and vitalizes us. It teaches us to live in the present, a core practice of simple living. We gain perspective when we experience a foreign culture. We learn how much we have to be grateful for. [Short-term missions]
7. Spend at least an hour a week in a natural setting, away from crowds of people, traffic, and buildings. Three to four hours of nature time each week is even better. There is nothing more basic, more simple, than the natural world. [Spend this time in prayer and reading the Bible.]
8. Do whatever you need to do to connect with a sense of spirit in your life, whether it be prayer, religious services, journal writing, meditation, or spiritually-related reading. Simplicity leads to spirituality; spirituality leads to simplicity. Cultivate a practice of silence and solitude, even for 15 to 30 minutes a day. Your spirituality will evolve naturally. [Allow God to speak to you.]
9. Seek the support of others who want to simplify their lives. Join or start a simplicity circle if you enjoy group interaction. Living simply in our culture can be a lonely journey. Your friends and family may still be on the work-and-spend treadmill and are unlikely to give you support. Participating in a study group will give you support and validation for your choices.
10. Practice saying no. Say no to those things that don't bring you inner peace and fulfillment, whether it be more material things, greater career responsibility, or added social activities. Be vigilant with your time and energy; they are limited resources. If you say yes to one thing (like a job promotion), recognize that you are saying no to something else (perhaps more time with family). Live consciously and deliberately (Linda Breen Pierce, article found at <http://www.gallagherpress.com/pierce/recipe.htm>).

So I searched my library for just the right quote from my favorite authors. One or two came close, but I thought it better just to come right out and say what you and I need to hear: The key to making life matter is to choose to live with less.

Give stuff away.

Simplify your lifestyle.

Deflate your opinion of yourself.

Choose less because less is more. (Mark Tabb, *Living with Less*, Broadman and Holman, 2006, ix-x).

Keep falsehood and lies far from me;

give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.

- Prov. 30:8

For several years now, an increasing number of evangelical Christians, as well as a growing number of Americans in general, have been writing about, testifying to, and highly recommending to others a simple lifestyle. Even so, those who are endorsing a simple lifestyle are a minority, especially among evangelical believers. Indeed, it is rather embarrassing that living a simple lifestyle is more popular among non-believers than it is among believers. This is in spite of the fact that it seems like every other Christian book being written deals in one way or another with living a simple lifestyle and not storing up for oneself treasures on earth. The fact that most American Christians, evangelicals included, are not listening, is perhaps because our materialistic culture and sinful nature have defined us more than we might think.

I have no doubt some of my friends will think I wrote the following. But it also comes from Mark Tabb's Living with Less:

We live in a culture of accumulation. Therefore, the best way to escape its grip is to do just the opposite. Rather than buying more and more, begin de-accumulating. Give things away. Cleaning out the mountain of clothes and other things you no longer use is a good place to start, but don't stop there. Discover the joy of giving gifts from things that you still use. One of the greatest gifts I ever received was a set of books that was no longer available in hardcover. A close friend gave me his set as a going-away present when my family moved to California. When he handed them to me, I asked, "Won't you still read these? How can you give them away?" His response still rings in my ears more than fifteen years later: "I would rather give them to you." That's the spirit of de-accumulation.

De-accumulating also means not buying things unless and until you actually need them. Compulsive purchases rarely translate into a wise use of resources. When you buy things, use them until they need to be replaced. Most of us use things until we get tired of them, even though they are still very useful. That's how a woman I know ended up with ten bottles of shampoo under her sink. Use what you buy and once it has outlasted its usefulness, get rid of it. Sure, that fried-chicken bucket with the picture of a NASCAR driver on the side might be worth something someday, but do you really want to keep it around for decades to find out? (Mark Tabb, Living with Less, 88-89).

Our materialistic bent in life as Christians should not be surprising. Quite often even our faith, especially as Western Christians, is materialistic rather than primarily spiritual, although there is widespread interest in the larger culture on "spirituality." That this focus in being accented in more and more books is shown by the fact that early in his book, *The Cross Examination of Jesus* (Waterbrook, 2006), Randy Singer recreates for the reader Jesus' healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:20-26. He emphasizes that Jesus' first priority was the man's spiritual condition, not his physical condition. A few pages later he raises the question, "Are Jesus' priorities ours?" Singer writes:

Many in today's churches would reverse the priorities of Christ. "Get up and walk" becomes the main thing; "your sins are forgiven" is an afterthought (Singer, 36).

In case his readers disagree with him, Singer takes us to two typical church meetings. The first one, taking place in Madison Square Garden, is led by a well-known television evangelist. At the climax of the service people come forward to be healed, physically healed. Singer notes:

Strangely, nobody comes on stage to announce "only" a change in his or her spiritual condition. This crowd wants miracles, not just repentance. Sure, they know Jesus can heal us spiritually, but what about our bodies? He wants to heal us physically, too....To say that Jesus doesn't answer prayers for healing today would be to call Him a liar.

But I am saying that Jesus doesn't owe us physical healing. He's not obligated to heal all of our ailments anytime we utter the magic prayer words. And I'm also saying that the spiritual, not the physical, should be our primary concern (Singer, 37-38).

In the second church meeting, a mid-week prayer service, the pastor of the church preaches for thirty minutes, and then takes prayer requests. The vast majority of the requests are for those who are sick, who have some sort of cancer, or are undergoing treatment, church members on the road who need traveling mercies, a member who needs a job. In short, the focus is largely the same in this meeting, although there are no healings. In other words, the focus is on the physical and material needs of believers, not on the spiritual ones. Singer writes:

There is, of course, nothing wrong with heartfelt prayers for our physical needs. Does Jesus care about those needs? You bet. He healed hundreds, maybe thousands. Even the hairs on our head are all numbered (see Matthew 10:30). Every physical challenge we face has been filtered by God. He uses our weaknesses to glorify Him and to help us grow in grace. But He doesn't want us to focus primarily on the physical needs of this world....

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," Jesus warned (Matthew 6:21). But how do we pray? Bless our business. Help us get this house or that car or this raise or that promotion. Basically, help us heap up treasures on earth

(Singer, 39).

It is refreshing to find in an apologetics book on the person of Jesus this kind of emphasis. But, then, we need it desperately. It is regrettable that Singer has to state the truth of Scripture and Jesus's teaching in contrast to what is found in our churches.

That this teaching is emphasized throughout the Old Testament as well as the New Testament becomes evident when one carefully reads Exodus. In His provision of manna for the Hebrews, God was very particular about how it was to be gathered. In Exodus 16 we read: 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days".... 13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.' 17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. 19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." 20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. 21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. 22 On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much - two omers for each person - and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. 23 He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.' 24 So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 25 "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." 27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? 29 Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. Do you see the many lessons God was teaching in this passage? Of course, one of them is that as His children, we can depend on and trust in God to provide for us. God sent the manna to teach the Hebrews they could depend on Him for all their needs. In his commentary on Exodus, Philip Graham Ryken notes that back in the Old Testament, the New Testament (John 6), and still today, believers tend to be more interested in God's material or physical blessings than His spiritual blessings. He observes in John 6, that when Jesus explained He would meet all their physical (temporal) needs, "but more than that, He would meet all their deepest spiritual needs forever" (Ryken, *Preaching the Word: Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Crossway, 2005, 430), the crowds were more interested in what Jesus could do physically and materially for them. Ryken writes: When the people heard this, they did exactly what the Israelites did in the wilderness: They grumbled and complain-ed. They wanted God on their own terms; so they weren't interested in what Jesus had to offer. They didn't understand that this was a matter of life and death, that the difference between eternal salvation and everlasting damnation is faith in the Son of God (Ryken, 430). Note those words, "They wanted God on their own terms." In his teaching of Exodus in August 1990 at Indian Springs Camp Meeting, John Oswald, like Ryken, made reference to the fact many Christians today are more focused on themselves than they are on God. Oswald referred to the modern believer's "lust for blessing." If you don't think this is much of a problem, take careful note of the Christian books which become bestsellers, such as Joel Osteen's *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (Warner Faith, 2004). The personal pronouns in the title speak volumes about the kind of gospel Osteen proclaims. Many believers in the church are willing to follow God as long as He meets and supplies their needs "on their terms." What Osteen and others in the church fail to see is Scripture's clear teaching that, yes, God will provide our physical needs, but on His terms, and in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, what is emphasized is our daily needs. In Exodus 16:4, in His effort to teach the Hebrews to depend on Him, God said, "The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." In other words, "that day only." The only exception was on the sixth day, the day before the Sabbath, when they could gather twice as much (Ex. 16:5). They were not to hoard manna. Indeed, they could not. In the New Testament, when Jesus taught the disciples to pray, it should be no surprise that He makes this same emphasis: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3). Many Christians all over the world repeat this prayer in their worship services. There is nothing wrong with that, but are we serious about what we are praying? Do we really depend on God for our daily meals? This emphasis is even found in Proverbs (Prov. 30:8). In this time of refrigerators and freezers, don't we tend to think, "I can take care of my meals for today and tomorrow and the day after that"? This is exactly why so few Christians are serious about a simple lifestyle. We believe we can meet our own basic needs. What we want God to do is give us more of everything we crave, so that we have more than enough of the things we really need, while we are blind to the danger God was trying to teach the Hebrews, namely, that we must depend on Him every day for our basic needs. Because America is no longer the nation sending out the most missionaries, and because there are more missionaries being sent to America from other nations than we are sending out to the nations, many of us have been very embarrassed when our overseas Christian brothers and sisters come into our homes and raise the question, "How many of your family live in this house?" When many Americans say "two," their next question is very natural: "Why do you have five bedrooms?"

Don't worry, I won't list the other questions they raise. Why was it so hard for the Hebrews not to hoard food? For the same reasons we have difficulty today. Deep within our sinful human nature there is lust for material things, fear that we won't have enough of what we want, and pride in terms of what we can do for ourselves. Regarding lust, this has nothing to do with sex. It is simply the fact that, not unlike a child, we see so many things we want to possess, things we believe will make us happier and life easier. Again, it is rather embarrassing to observe that more non-Christians than Christians are writing and talking about "less is more." Regarding fear, we are fearful God won't give us everything we want. We are correct in that fear, and the reason God doesn't give us everything we want is the same reason we don't give an infant everything he or she wants, but only what the child actually needs for safety and growth. As for pride, when God doesn't provide our needs the way we want, in our pride we do whatever it takes to get what we want. We may even give God the credit, however it is impossible to have the attitude, "I can take care of myself" and at the same time believe, "I must depend on God to meet my needs. Philip Ryken writes concerning Exodus 16: God has sent us bread from Heaven. This raises a practical question: Will we trust - really trust - that in Jesus, God will provide everything we truly need?... Most of the Israelites were willing to trust God for their daily bread. "However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them" (Ex. 16:20). Moses was right to be angry. Instead of only taking what they needed, some of the Israelites tried to make God's provision last an extra day. Not only was this unnecessary, but it showed a lack of faith in God's promise. These people failed God's test because they were worried about tomorrow... This was partly a lesson about contentment. By giving everyone the same rations, God was teaching His people to be satisfied with their daily provision. How much is enough? We live in a culture of accumulation, where enough is never enough - we always want a little bit more. But all we really need is our daily bread, which God has promised to provide. As God sustains us from one day to the next, we are called to live in daily dependence upon His providence. Why does God tell us to trust Him for our daily bread? Maxie Dunnam writes, "He does it for our sakes, that we may know the peace and strength that come from continual dependence upon Him, the joyful life that is ours when we trust Him and see the truth of our trusting. The happiest people I know are not people who don't have any needs, but people who experience the meeting of their needs by God" (Ryken, 432, quoting Maxie Dunnam, *The Communicator's Commentary: Exodus*, Word, 1987, 195). Perhaps the reason so few Christians are interested in living a simple lifestyle, and truly believe more is less, is the focus of most people's lives is happiness. Everyone wants to be happy. But most of us define happiness in terms of what we own, and so we are willing to do whatever it takes to get what we want and be happy. Our quest for happiness is often more important to us than our spiritual needs being met in Christ, at which point we make Christianity and following Christ man-centered, we follow Christ for material blessings rather than spiritual; when we should be following Christ primarily to know Him rather than anything else (cf. Ex. 18:11; John 17:3). Actually, this is why God saves us through Christ, that we may know Him. His forgiving us of our sins is important, but it is the means to His real purpose: that we may know Him. Linda Breen Pierce has written two major books on living more simply: *Simplicity Lessons* (Gallagher Press, 2003) and *Choosing Simplicity* (Gallagher Press, 2000). Linda lived the so-called American dream. She earned a six-figure income as an attorney, wore expensive silk suits, and spent her vacations at lavish resorts. But after practicing law for 10 years, she realized that the price tag for this lifestyle was too high. The long hours and the stress inherent in her work left her little time and energy to enjoy other areas of her life. Starting in 1991, Linda and her husband, Jim, proceeded to simplify their lives. They moved from Los Angeles to the Monterey Peninsula in central California. They "downsized" their standard of living and enhanced their quality of life by working less, wanting less, needing less, and spending less. Linda and Jim now enjoy life much more than in their previous lifestyle of high-pressure work in the city. Linda works only part-time as an attorney and consultant, leaving plenty of time to engage in her passions of hiking and foreign travel. Linda and Jim are not Christians that I know of, much less evangelical Christians. I say this because of their focus on themselves. But if two non-believers can learn and do this, why can't believers? Most believers do not say, "I can take care of myself and I don't need to depend on God," rather we say, "Yes, of course, I am depending on the Lord." But in reality, we are depending on our guaranteed salary, retirement, life insurance, etc., so that if God should go on a vacation, we would never miss Him. Listen to what Pierce has to say in her article, "Recipe for Simplicity" (2000). Again, I do not necessarily agree with everything she says, but it is always interesting what non-believers have to say about a simple lifestyle, and how they link it with spirituality. My comments are in brackets: "Simplify, Simplify..." More than a century after Henry David Thoreau uttered these words, his plea for simplicity has more significance now than ever before. We work hard and play hard, filling nearly every moment with activity. Most families believe they need two incomes to pay for a standard of living that has doubled in the last 50 years. But do we? Based on my three-year study of over 200 people who have simplified their lives, I found that we can work less, want less, and spend less, and be happier and more fulfilled in the process. Here are ten suggestions to simplify your life. Don't try to simplify your life in a few weeks or months; most people need an initial period of three to five years to complete this transition. Small, gradual steps are best. 1. Don't let any material thing come into your home unless you absolutely love it and want to keep it until it is beyond repair. Too much stuff - it's suffocating us. Purchasing, maintaining, insuring, storing and eventually disposing of our stuff sucks up our precious life energy. [Don't let any material thing come between you and God.] 2. Live in a home with only those rooms that you or someone in your family use every day. Create a cozy home environment that fits your family. You will find this is much more satisfying than living in a museum designed to impress your friends. Spending time and money to maintain a home that is larger than you truly need diverts these resources from more fulfilling endeavors. 3. Limit your work (outside of the home) to 30 hours a week, 20 if you are a parent. To live a balanced life, we need "down" time - time to daydream, to relax, to prepare a leisurely meal, to take a walk. If we surround our structured activities with empty spaces, those activities will become more productive and meaningful. 4. Select a home and place of employment no more than 30 minutes away from each other. Commuting time is dead time. It nourishes not

the body, the mind, nor the soul. Preserve your energy and money for more rewarding life experiences. [Listen to the Bible being read on tape or CD.] 5. Limit your children's extracurricular activities to one to three a week, depending on age. Otherwise, you will exhaust yourself and your children will grow up addicted to constant stimulation. 6. Take three to four months off every few years and go live in a foreign country. Living in a different culture fascinates, excites, and vitalizes us. It teaches us to live in the present, a core practice of simple living. We gain perspective when we experience a foreign culture. We learn how much we have to be grateful for. [Short-term missions] 7. Spend at least an hour a week in a natural setting, away from crowds of people, traffic, and buildings. Three to four hours of nature time each week is even better. There is nothing more basic, more simple, than the natural world. [Spend this time in prayer and reading the Bible.] 8. Do whatever you need to do to connect with a sense of spirit in your life, whether it be prayer, religious services, journal writing, meditation, or spiritually-related reading. Simplicity leads to spirituality; spirituality leads to simplicity. Cultivate a practice of silence and solitude, even for 15 to 30 minutes a day. Your spirituality will evolve naturally. [Allow God to speak to you.] 9. Seek the support of others who want to simplify their lives. Join or start a simplicity circle if you enjoy group interaction. Living simply in our culture can be a lonely journey. Your friends and family may still be on the work-and-spend treadmill and are unlikely to give you support. Participating in a study group will give you support and validation for your choices. 10. Practice saying no. Say no to those things that don't bring you inner peace and fulfillment, whether it be more material things, greater career responsibility, or added social activities. Be vigilant with your time and energy; they are limited resources. If you say yes to one thing (like a job promotion), recognize that you are saying no to something else (perhaps more time with family). Live consciously and deliberately (Linda Breen Pierce, article found at <http://www.gallagherpress.com/pierce/recipe.htm>).

Living with less is not the key to life, but it may be indicative of where our real treasure is at (cf. Matt. 6:19, 21).