

Stuff: Sacrifice or Sanctify?

Rhythms of Life Series

[action:]

Walk in carrying a cross from the back door singing:

“Oh, it’s hard to imagine
the freedom we find
from the things
we leave behind.”

(over and over until I get up on stage and set the cross in its stand that is already in place.)

Mark 8:34-36

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

[repeat:]

“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

We want more, more, more... the whole world. What we have is not enough. As soon as we have something we want more.

Last October, Amanda and I made the decision to pay off the car that I owned. You see, Amanda’s car was already paid off, but mine was not. So when she married me, she married my car debt 😊. Anyway, we decided it was wise to pay it off. So we did. We became car-debt-free.

But do you know what? Since then I have really wanted a new car. I think it is all those awesome car commercials!

Mazda 626’s zoom-zoom zooming down the road! Or...

Ford’s Trucks = built Ford tough! Or...

The fancy Mercedes all-new redesigned SUV!

Wow! I like that stuff! I think, if I have one of those, I will be satisfied!

I like cars.

I am also a gizmo kind of guy. I like gadgets and gizmos, and techie kinds of things. My newest thing is that I want a Mac mini... A computer which is 2" x 4" and 2" high, and does some neat stuff.

Really cool! I think, if I have one of those, I know I will be satisfied!

But you know what I have found? Perhaps you have as well... Things do not satisfy. Getting a new car is great...a wonderful feeling, but after about a month of babying the thing...it becomes just a car. Or the Mac mini computer... I suppose it is great to have one, but it is still just a computer.

You see, things do not satisfy... I want the whole world, at the cost of my soul.

What trips your trigger?

What do you always want more of?

In what things are you trying to find satisfaction?

You want the whole world, at the cost of your soul.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

Well, this is it. We are wrapping up our series called "Making Room for Life." Pastor Mark is back... 7 weeks... mission accomplished. We all can go on about our lives just like before, right?

Well, let me ask you a question:

What has changed in your life in the last 7 weeks?

Have you made more room for life?

If you have made room for life, how has that changed your life?

If not, why haven't you?

Don't worry, there isn't some sort of divine police agency that is watching how you are... or are not making room for life...

That's quite easy to tell the difference.

Anyone can tell if you are making room for life...

Do you want to know how?

Life.

By watching your life... the way you live... the decisions you make... how you spend your time... how you spend your money.

Life – actual living – is the arena that spirituality is played out. What people see and experience in and through your life tells them if you are making room for it.

Better yet, your life tells them who you are living for (yourself or Jesus).

Spirituality in the world is not found in taking the time to read the Bible or in the amount you've read. (although it is a good and necessary thing)

Spirituality is not found in how much or how often you pray.

or serve

or where and to whom and what you give your money...

although these things are good and necessary.

Spirituality is not measured by all these things.

Spirituality is measured by how you live your life, in real actual life. Fruit.

- 1) You see... Reading your Bible prepares you to live life. It equips you to expand your mind beyond yourself and realize that you are part of a grand story... while you live life.
- 2) Praying prepares you to live life. It focuses your attention and dependence upon God while you live life.
- 3) Serving people prepares you to live life. It helps to develop and nurture a love for your fellow human beings while you live life.
- 4) Giving your money prepares you to live life. It imprints on our hearts that God owns all our resources and we are not to horde it for ourselves, but to share it with others... while we live life.

These things impact life and how we live it before others and God.

How are you doing at living life?

Does what you do on a Sunday morning stay on Sunday morning?

Do the people out there (or even the people in here) know—by your life—that you follow Jesus?

And yet, life tends to distract us...from Jesus

Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

How dare Mary just sit and listen to Jesus!

What with all the preparations that needed to be made!

Martha had just cause to complain, didn't she?

Of course.

It is not that what she was doing was bad...

it was important.

It needed to be done.

But still Jesus tells her: "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

[paraphrase:]

"Martha, these preparation things are good, but doing what Mary is doing is better. Following me is better. Don't let the distractions keep you from listening and being more important than following me in life."

You may not have realized it, but the last six weeks have been about the distractions in life...
The Martha stuff.

1. Remember the junk drawer metaphor?

- a. We shove things into the junk drawer when there is no place for the clutter or when we do not know what to do with the clutter.
- b. This represents the stuff (clutter) in our lives that we shove into our souls (our own personal junk drawer). Therefore crowding out of our lives a place for rest. We can never truly rest when our souls are cluttered.
- c. Distraction #1 = clutter

2. Remember hype and type?

- a. Do we live according to all the hype out there (like you will look more sexy with this new car!)?
- b. Distraction #2 = hype

3. Remember living before an audience of one?
 - a. This was living inner-directed not outer-directed. Outer-directed means people-pleasing and according to other's expectations
 - b. Distraction #3 = Outside expectations
4. Remember saturation and simplicity?
 - a. Being flooded and filled in our lives—saturated with things. Needing to develop a heart of gratitude even with the mundane of life.
 - b. Distraction #4 = saturated with stuff
5. Remember the dance?
 - a. This was living amidst the chaos of our lives. Remembering to dance with Jesus without distractions, cutting in, and song changes...
 - b. Distraction #5 = chaos
6. Remember last week?
 - a. That the "musts" is attached to the stuff/clutter while the "shoulds" are attached to relationships. This is backwards.
 - b. Relationships need to be central, while stuff (duty and obligations) need to be "shoulds."
 - c. Distraction #6 = stuff in place of relationships

[review:]

clutter

hype

outside expectations

saturation with stuff

chaos

stuff in place of relationships

This is the Martha stuff.

These things are not necessarily wicked or evil in and of themselves.

Most are quite necessary.

But when they take the place of listening to Jesus, following the Lord in your life, then they become major hindrances.

In the process of overcoming the abuse of alcohol, many have found sobriety in the twelve steps program of Alcoholic Anonymous. The only requirement to join A.A. is a desire to stop drinking. Here are the first two steps:

Step 1 "We admit we are powerless over alcohol - that our lives have become unmanageable."

Step 2 "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity".

Most all of us are addicted to clutter, stuff, chaos, hype, etc and it is hindering our lives.

Let's try the A.A. approach together.

This is voluntary.

You do not have to participate.

But if you want to...

if you have a desire to be sober from clutter and stuff, etc. in your life, please stand.

Step 1 – Repeat after me: "I admit... that I am powerless over my addiction to stuff... that my life has become unmanageable..."

Step 2 – Repeat after me: "I believe... that a power greater than myself... can restore me to sanity..."

Good!! You may be seated.

Well we're on our way.

Recognizing and owning your problem are great necessary first steps.

Now comes the difficult part...

Mark 1:16-20

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

These young men were most likely rejected "talmudeen" (disciples). Aspiring young teenage boys were taken under the wing of a respected rabbi and taught the ways of Torah—the Jewish law.

This was affluence. Families got respect within the community if their son was a talmudeen of a great rabbi.

Jesus' call to follow him was met with instantaneous action: they left everything—their job, their home, their family—everything. And followed, became the "talmudeen" of Jesus the Rabbi.

Would you drop everything for Jesus?

[song:]

"Oh, it's hard to imagine
the freedom we find
from the things
we leave behind."

Mark 10:17-22

¹⁷As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹You 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.'"

²⁰"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. "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."

²²At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Bummer. A chance @ becoming a "talmudeen" of Jesus, walking with true humanity itself... and he walked away sad, because he had great wealth.

Apparently this Rich Young Man would not give up everything to follow Jesus... only the things he was comfortable with.

He wanted true life, but he found it in the wrong things—wealth...stuff...things that do not satisfy. And when he had authenticity, true life, the very son and image of God... he did not recognize him.

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also..."

This young man's heart was wrapped up in treasure that wasn't really treasure.

[funny story:]

I saw an old "twilight" episode awhile back. It was about three conniving men who brought gold with them into the future. They backstabbed and thwarted each other on their march through a hot desert to get to a city. They all died. A futuristic vehicle pulls along the body of the last man who was carrying the gold. A man jumps out, checks the body and the contents of the sack. Puzzled, he climbs back into his car with a bar of gold. He muses to his wife: "I wonder who that poor man was. He was carrying this." "That's silly," the wife says. "I know," replied the man. "Why would he be in the desert with only this? Gold is nearly worthless now that we have figured out how to manufacture it chemically."

You see, treasure is relative. What you think is valuable, may not really be valuable. The Mac mini probably wouldn't be worth very much during the Middle Ages. There was no electricity to power it...

Like Pastor Heath said last week, relationships are what are truly valuable.

"...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."

[song:]

"Oh, it's hard to imagine
the freedom we find
from the things
we leave behind."

Mark 10:23-31

²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

²⁸Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

²⁹"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Leave it behind.

There are some things that we just need to let go of. They are distracting us, keeping our attention and eyes focused elsewhere. Let it go... It is a conscious choice.

[story:]

I went into the CheqTel office here in Hayward earlier this week to switch over our phone package with them to our new house. Our package has telephone, DSL, and digital cable. Amanda and I had decided that we wanted to downgrade our package to just telephone and DSL... we didn't need the TV (actually, I didn't need the TV). So I told the saleslady that was helping me that we wanted to cancel the cable. A few minutes later she asked me why I wanted to cancel... I was honest with her: "I watch too much TV." This seemed to shock her. She said, "Well, why don't you just not watch it so much." Good question I thought, but then why would we keep paying the extra \$35? I told her that and I told her that I needed to watch less TV... I was addicted. Sometimes I would stay up well into the night watching X-files or other dumb stuff. The funny thing was that she looked at me like I was from another planet. It was great! I guess not many people tell her that kind of thing...

Maybe for you it is TV...

 Maybe it is video games...

 Maybe it is the internet or the computer...

 Maybe it is too much sports and needs to be limited.

Maybe You fill in the blank.

This is a gradual process. Remember, half of the battle to rid your life of distractions and clutter is recognizing it. Psychologists speak of naming the issue or distraction, thus eliminating the power-base that issue has over you.

But Jesus calls us to lay it down. Not stuff it in the junk drawer of our lives, our soul, but lay it at the foot of the cross, the real, ultimate, unlimited junk drawer.

Sacrifice it.

 Nail it.

 Kill it.

 Put it to rest.

 Let it go.

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Throwing off everything that hinders... not sin... hinders:
Like TV, the things that distract from Jesus and life.

And the sin that so easily entangles...

Like pornography,
Premarital sex or adultery,
Alcoholism, drugs,
Worrying,
Hating someone in your heart.

(Trust me, I know if you are hating someone in your heart... it comes out in the way your children behave and act... they reflect you...)

Maybe that is motivation enough for you to take a good hard look at the sin that so easily entangles.

Throw it off... get rid of it. Yeah, I know it's hard. Addiction and patterns we are set in are tough to get out of. Cutting out TV altogether for me is tough. Really. It may sound simple, but it is hard for me.

Can I do it? In the name of Jesus, you better believe it...

And you can too.

1. Recognize your issues and distractions, seek the Lord, he'll reveal it to you, if you are willing.
2. Then sacrifice it. Lay it down @ the cross. Let go of it. And don't pick it back up again.

And you find freedom.

Galatians 5:13

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

Galatians 5:1

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."

[song:]

"Oh, it's hard to imagine
the freedom we find
from the things
we leave behind."

Some of you sitting here may be thinking:

"Okay, there are some things that I really need to think about leaving behind, sacrificing, laying before Jesus, but then there are a lot of things that I cannot 'leave behind.' Like my job. That is a major distraction in following Jesus, but I cannot quit that. Or my kids. However much I would like to sometimes, I cannot toss them outside. Or responsibilities at church or club or coaching or you-name-it. What about these things?"

Good questions. I am glad some of you are thinking. The process is almost the same.

You must first, recognize it, whatever "it" is.

Then, instead of sacrificing it, you need to sanctify it.

Encapsulate it and bring it before the Lord and let him make it holy.

Ask Him what to do with it.

Maybe you need to let go of your control over "it"

Maybe you need to change your perspective of why the Lord has you working at a gas station or McDonalds.

Maybe you need to let the Lord take charge of your life...

Surrender. Give up everything.

Mark 8:34-36

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

This cross really gets in the way sometimes doesn't it? To really follow Jesus takes work, commitment, tenacity, sacrifice, and faith.

It doesn't take a whole lot of faith, just faith the size of a little mustard seed.

Choose Jesus. Believe in Jesus. Have faith in Jesus.

Recognize the distractions that prevent us from living our lives as "talmudeen" of Jesus.

...and...

Sacrifice or Sanctify... or maybe both.

This cross is up here as a stark reminder that Jesus died for your stuff. Don't forget that. I'm going to give you a minute or two of silent prayer before the Lord. In that prayer... release your burdens, your distraction... cast your cares upon him, for he cares for you. Then either sacrifice or sanctify, or maybe both.

[prayer:]

[communion:]

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it & said, "This is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Exit to your left, come down to the front, take the bread dip it in the cup, and take in the body and blood of Jesus, personally. In Jesus' name.

[song: Things We Leave Behind]

[benediction:]

May you go forth and make room for life,
May you honor the Lord with your life,
May you model his grace and peace to the world,
May you live out the Gospel of Jesus,
May you live, may you truly, truly live.

And may we recite The Lord's Prayer...