

## “Gratitude Creates Joy: Minimalism”

*Psalm 118:24 & 136:1, Ephesians 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Matthew 6:19-34, Exodus 20:3-4 & 17 & Luke 12:16-21*

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**Prayer for Understanding** Loving God fill us with your Spirit, your breath, your abundant life. Open our eyes to beauty, our ears to harmony, our hearts to love, our minds to wisdom and our souls to joy. Speak to us through your love letter to us the Bible and through one another. Amen

The last two weeks we explored how practicing gratitude creates joy. Your circumstances account for ten percent of your joy. You control 90 percent of your joy. Gratitude is the prerequisite for joy. If you have been writing a gratitude in your journey every day for the past 14 days, you are probably noticing a change that your mind is more often scanning the world for the positive. Perhaps you have even changed how you answer the question, “How are you?” to some form of “I am grateful for...” something about the person you are talking with or another gratitude from your day. Scripture proclaims: **Psalm 136:1 ESV “Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.”** The Apostle Paul said: **Ephesians 1:16 ESV “I do not cease to give thanks...”** and implores us to **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.”** Gratitude creates joy.

Minimalism is a tool to rid yourself of life’s excess in favor of focusing on what is important—so you can find fulfillment, freedom, and joy. Freedom from fear. Freedom from worry. Freedom from overwhelm. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from the trappings of the consumer culture many have built their lives around. Freedom to have more time to love. Freedom and space to savor the goodness in our lives. Freedom to be grateful creating joy.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus said: **Matthew 6:19-34 MSG “Do not hoard treasure down here where stuff gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it is safe from moth, rust, and burglars. It is obvious. The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being. Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a musty cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have! You can not worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you will end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You cannot worship God and money both. If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you do not fuss about what is on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to God than birds. Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don’t you think God will attend to you, take pride in you, do God’s best for you? What I am trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving. People who do not know God and the way God works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how God works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Do not worry about missing out. You will find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and do not get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”**

Jesus said, **“Do not worry.”** We live in a consumerism society. We are bombarded with advertising. Most ads are designed to create worry and fear, that if you do not have a certain product or service, you will miss out, be unsafe, insecure, unpopular. Conversely if you have the product or service, you will be happy, safe, secure, and popular. One cannot buy their way to happiness. Jim Carrey said: “I wish everyone could become rich and famous so they realize it is not the answer.”

After God set the Israelites free from slavery, God gave them and us Ten Commandments to keep us free, to limit our worry, to help us be grateful and joyful. Two of them relate to having too much stuff. Scripture states. **Exodus 20:3-4 MSG “No other gods, only me. No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Do not bow down to them and do not serve them. Exodus 20:17 MSG “No lusting after your neighbor’s house—or spouse or servant or ox or donkey. Do not set your heart on anything that is your neighbor’s.”**

There is nothing wrong with consumption. We all have needs. We all need some stuff. The problem is compulsory consumption, buying stuff because that is what society implores you to do through advertising instead of buying your essential needs and things that bring you joy. The problem is when we value and love our stuff more than God, more than people. Love people. Use stuff. Because the opposite love stuff and use people never works. Do you sometimes worship consumption instead of worshipping God? How do you spend your money? How do you spend your time? You have control over your money and time. Does your stewardship of time and money reveal love of God and people or love of shopping, buying, accumulating and maintaining stuff? One will never get enough of what one does not really need. We are commanded to be good stewards of the earth, to love, care and nurture the earth like God loves us. Over consumption is killing our planet. Many give too much meaning to our things, often forsaking our health, our relationships, our passions, our personal growth, and our desire to contribute beyond ourselves. Doing can be another form of consumption. Sometimes relaxing, being in the moment, sabbath, is God’s will for you.

Both MacGyver and Red Green teach us that all one needs is duct tape and a few random common items then you can fix anything, create anything, and save the world.

Jesus said, **“What I am trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving.”** There is little room to receive joy when arms, heart, and mind are overflowing with stuff. Everyone has a void that can only be truly satisfied with God. God is love. God is joy. God is shalom, complete, whole, perfect. If you want love, joy, shalom, completeness, wholeness, and perfection you will receive all of this and more from God. Jesus is the bread of life for all your hungers. Jesus is living water for all your thirsts. Jesus is the light for all your darkness. Jesus is the door for all your journeys. Jesus is the true vine, the conduit of all life, goodness, and nourishment. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. God declares God’s name to be “I am” God is all we need. “I am” gives us everything.

Consumerism falsely claims one can buy their way to happiness. Worry falsely claims if you have enough stuff, you will be prepared, safe, needed and loved. Striving falsely claims if you accomplish enough, you will be successful, popular, and happy.

Today on average we have more stuff than ever before and yet many long for even more stuff. Many have a restless search for more. Some even have so much stuff that they pay money to store their stockpile of stuff. For some accumulating stuff is an addiction. Some strive to live the lifestyle portrayed in media. Most television shows portray a lifestyle that is way higher than average. And marketing keeps telling us we need even more stuff. Today the average household has three times the space of a 1950s household. The average family uses only 40 percent of their house and then fills the other 60 percent with stuff. Acquiring stuff is a downward spiral. One must work more to get and store the stuff leading to less free time, more debt, more worry, less gratitude, exhaustion, fatigue, anxiety, being overwhelmed and little joy.

Jesus said: **Luke 12:16-21 NLT “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I do not have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I will have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I will sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’ “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”**

Studies have found that people living in tiny houses are more content, calmer, and joyful. Minimalists do not miss the stuff they give away because they find joy in freedom. In Niger, I was struck by the lack of stuff, simple shelters, shared space and the abundant joy of the people.

Minimalism is living in the smallest space that makes you comfortable, with the least amount of stuff. This means less cost, less debt, less money worries, less time spent working or chasing a higher paying job, so one has more time to love others, love God, serve others, be free, and be joyful. Minimalism simply allows you to make decisions more consciously and more deliberately.

You have control over your options. What brings you joy? Does your stuff bring you joy? If a collection or hobby brings you joy, then enjoy it if not, let it go. Pick up, or touch each item you have acquired. Is it an essential

item? Does it bring you joy? Or is it used to create or do something that makes you joyful? If not, then let it go. I find joy in imagining someone finding joy in an item I gave to them. Are there items that you enjoyed for a season but are not currently using? Then let them go. Leslie, Spencer, Abigail, and I found joy in giving away toys that we no longer enjoy. Is there an item you have not used in the last year? Then let it go. When Leslie and my parents all died and went to heaven, there was lots of stuff. We gave most of it away. We took digital pictures of some of the special stuff, so we can easily retrieve and enjoy it, enjoy the memories, and do not need to physically store it someplace. Jesus said, **“What I am trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving.”**

Imagine your life with less debt, less stuff, less clutter, less stress, less discontentment, fewer distractions, more time, more meaningful relationships, more joy. How valuable is your time? Do you want more time? Could you shop less, buy less, store less, and work less giving you more time for enjoyment? Could you rent more stuff? Could you share more stuff? Not having stuff for every circumstance helps one engage with community, to share, to build relationships.

Where is your most cluttered space? Try simplifying and decluttering. How does the decluttering make you feel? For most decluttering lowers anxiety, lowers worry, improves sleep, enhances one’s ability to live in the present, and expands joy. Does have less stuff in this space enable you to live more deliberately?

You have control over every item you are keeping in your life. Is the item adding value to your life? Is it bringing you joy? Simplifying creates joy. Minimalism enables one to relax, to let go, so one is free to let come God’s joy. Jesus came to fill you with God’s joy, to make your joy overflow. Is there space in your life to receive joy? Create the life you want.

Gratitude creates joy. What are your gratitude practices? Perhaps living a minimalist life. Perhaps experiencing all your emotions. Perhaps engaging with extravagant love. Perhaps celebrating that you belong and are enough. Perhaps writing in your gratitude journal every day.

**Psalm 136:1 ESV “Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.”**  
**Psalm 118:24 “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad!” Amen**