

# Wait Training: Living Simply

## Exodus 16 (selected verses)

August 16, 2020

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Well, good morning, Chapel Hill. For those of you who don't know me, my name's Gunnar and I lead the worship ministry here at the church. It is so good to be with you today as we continue our journey through the Book of Exodus. We're looking at this section of Exodus through the lens of our series called Wait Training. And what we've found is that God used their time in the wilderness, the time waiting, as a means of training them to be the people he had called them to be. So, we're exploring that and applying it to our experience right now as we live through this Pandemic, our own season of waiting—how God is training *us* to be his special people in this generation.

Now, today's topic, the way that God was going to train his people, is pretty convicting—at least it has been for me. And the reason it's so convicting is because it challenges one of our more acceptable sins as a society. And that is the sin of *greed*.

If I were to try to condense the American lifestyle into a slogan, I would probably put it in three words: *more, better, faster*. In other words, we are naturally driven to a life of abundance—we want more, better, faster.

Our natural desires are driven toward this. And yet sometimes we don't even notice it. Sometimes we just grow complacent in it. And sometimes we even justify our greed. And that is what the Bible calls “the deceitfulness of riches.” That we are often fooled into thinking that while, yeah, other people have a problem with greed, that there's no way *I* could have that problem.

The good news, though, is that we're not alone in suffering from all this. Because it's not a *personal* problem, it's a *human* problem. We're going to find that the Israelites struggled with the same things we do.

We find them in chapter 16, verse three complaining about how they missed the food that they had eaten in Egypt. They missed the variety, the flavors, the ingredients. In fact, we're told the two things they missed most were meat and carbs. And, you know what, I totally understand! As you can probably tell just looking' at me, I love me some meat and carbs! But they likely had all that they needed. They just wanted more, better, faster.

What's really fascinating, is that God responds to this complaining not with punishment, but with provision. In fact, he puts them on the world's first one-day-shipping, food distribution service! Here's what God say to Moses in verses 4-5:

"Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily."

In these couple of verses, God gives his people a new way of approaching their food that would free them from the more, better, faster lifestyle. In fact, this is a precursor to what Christians have called for centuries the practice of *simplicity*. It is the discipline of living a simpler life—a life based on what we actually need, the things that we will actually use. And this is the lifestyle that God was teaching the Israelitas...

This is a controversial topic for us. And if I'm going to be one-hundred-percent honest, in Gig Harbor in particular, there is a deep propensity to get sucked in the more, better, faster lifestyle, and to fall prey to the "deceitfulness of riches." And so, God is calling us to push against that—to live simpler, more meaningful lives.

What I'd like to do today is look at these two verses and mine them for principles for living simply—four principles that I believe can free us from the vicious cycle of the more, better, faster lifestyle so that we can live the kind of lives that we truly desire. That's where we're headed today. Would you join me in a word of prayer? [PRAY]

### **Point 1: Trust in God as Provider**

So, we're going to mine this passage for four principles of Christian simplicity that are going us challenge us to live simpler, more meaningful lives. And so, let's look at the first one. When it comes to living simpler lives, the first principle is to *trust in God as Provider*. This first principle is what makes *Christian* simplicity so unique—that it's not just the minimalism that the rest of the world practices. It's not just about having less stuff. It's about making God our center, God the focus of our lives. And so, we're called to give up control of our stuff, our salaries, our status and trust God with all that we are.

Verse four begins with these words: "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you..." The verse begins with the declaration that God was Israel's Provider. That they didn't ultimately provide for themselves. But that God is the one who owns all things in his economy and he graciously distributes them as he sees fit. And so, the Israelites

were called in this most challenging time, this season of waiting, to learn to trust in the Lord as their Provider.

This is the foundational element of Christian simplicity. Because for many of us, we trust in ourselves and we depend upon ourselves more than we do God. We look to our own skills, our own efforts, our own work. And we say, you know what? I can take care of myself, thank you very much! I earned all this, and nobody is going to take it away from me. That is our natural propensity.

Friends, we're so prone to think that we built our lives for ourselves and to completely forget that we've been brought to this moment in our lives, to this place in our lives, not ultimately because of all the hard work that we've done, but because of God's gracious provision. Everything you are, everything that you own, all that you experience in this life comes from the hand of the one who made and sustains all things.

The first step to finding a simpler life is acknowledging that nothing that you have is actually yours. Everything that you have is simply on loan from God. And once you acknowledge that, you find greater freedom. Instead of your possessions possessing *you*, *you* can possess your possessions. Instead of your stuff using *you*, *you* can use your stuff, to the glory of God and the furtherance of his kingdom. And so, the first principle of Christian simplicity is to *trust in God as your Provider*—to find greater freedom in acknowledging that everything comes from his gracious hand.

### **Point 2: Keep Only What You Need**

The second principle is to *keep only what you need*—nothing more, nothing less. And this is where it starts to get tough! Our text goes on to say, "...and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day..." We're told later on in verse 16 that the Israelites are to, "Gather of it each one of you as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer according to the number of the persons that each have you has in his tent. The people of Israel did so. They gathered some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over and whoever gathered a little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat."

Now, the principle here is pretty clear: that the Israelites were only to take what they actually needed to eat—nothing more, nothing less.

You see, the propensity for us again is that we want more, better, faster. And so, we have to make a conscious, concerted effort to fight against that desire. And the way

that we do that is by taking stock of the stuff that we have, taking stock of the things that we want, and asking ourselves some really tough questions. Questions like, “Do I really need this?” “Will I really use this?” “Can I really use this to help others?”

As I was preparing this message, as I mentioned earlier, I’ve been really convicted. I mean, I had to ask myself, am I actually living this out? Am I actually doing what this passage calls me to do? And you know what the answer was? No. No, I’m not! I have a *lot* of room to grow! I mean, I think we all can grow in this. For me, I love books and I love food. I bet you could have never guessed that! ;) But those are my spending vices. And I need to be more aware of that, and ask myself the question—do I really need this in my effort to bring glory to God and do good for others? That’s the question we all need to ask, again and again. Because we’re called to keep only what we need. That’s the second principle.

### **Point 3: Give Away What You Don’t Need**

Now, the third principle is connected. If we’re to keep only what we need, then we are naturally going to have a lot left over. And so, the third principle is *give away what you don’t need*. Picking up in verse 4 again, it says that God was going to have them follow this divine food distribution program, “so that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.” That’s an interesting phrase. That word *law* there is *Torah* in the Hebrew, which can also mean *instruction*. And that’s how I take it. In other words, what this is saying is God is having them to go out and collect only that which they need, that which is useful to them, to see whether or not they’re going follow his instructions and actually leave behind that which they don’t need. It was an opportunity for training.

Now, we probably wouldn’t be surprised to find out that the Israelites failed the test. It’s kind of their MO. But they ended up hoarding and holding on to the things that they didn’t really need. Instead of just allowing extra manna to disappear and the extra quail to fly away, they decided that they were going to hold on to it for themselves for a rainy day.

And maybe they arrived at that decision by reasoning to themselves: Maybe one day the food *wouldn’t* come. Maybe they actually *did* need it. Maybe they actually *could* use it. That’s the kind of stuff we tell ourselves all the time, isn’t it? Well, maybe I really *do* need that. Or even if I can’t use it, and don’t need it, and it won’t really help me *right now*, maybe it will later on. So, I’m just going to hold on to that. I’m going to hold on to that nice car, that bigger house, those extra finances, because, you never know, I might need them. And besides, *I* earned them... And so, we end up hoarding instead

of giving. But when we hoard, we miss out! We miss out on being the generous, joyful people God has called us to be.

Friends, God doesn't want us to be *greedy*; he wants us to be *givers*. That's what the Bible teaches. In fact, Jesus himself made this a hallmark of his teaching. He set the example for us of what it means to sacrifice the things that we so desperately *want* to give other people what they desperately *need*. That's the Christian life. It's giving up the things that we *want* so that we can give away the things that people desperately need. Jesus embodied that. And he even called others to live that way during his earthly ministry.

Jesus is calling us to let go of our stuff, our salary, our status and give it away generously for God's glory and other people's good. Because we're not called to be greedy, we're called to be givers.

And again, this is no small feat! I personally struggle with being a generous person. Because it comes so naturally to be a *selfish* person. But, my wife and I have been wrestling with this, asking ourselves: how can we give up what we really *want* to support others in what they really *need*. And it's a matter of practically going through your spending habits, your saving habits, and asking yourself, "How can I be more generous with what God has given me?" And that requires constant reevaluation and introspection.

If you're wondering where to even begin with these first three principles, you're not alone. And so, we're going to do a little Q&A event on YouTube, live tonight at 7:00 pm on the Chapel Hill channel. We'd love for you to join us and bring your comments and questions. Because we want to dive deeper into how we can practically live all this out. So, join us tonight if you'd like to explore this some more...

#### **Point 4: Take A Break**

Alright, those are our first three principles: trust in God as your Provider, keep what you need, and give away what you don't. And we could stop there, and we'd have plenty to work on! But there's one more principle here. And if we miss it, we miss out on one of the greatest gifts of simplicity. That fourth principle is to *take a break*. It's to take time to rest, to enjoy what this passage calls the Sabbath.

In fact, this is the first time Sabbath comes up in the whole Bible. Here's what the rest of our passage says today, starting in verse 5: "On the sixth day [Friday] when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather." What God's

essentially saying there is that he was going to provide twice as much for them on Friday so that they have enough food to cover both Friday and Saturday. And the reason for that, we're told later in the story, was so that they could enjoy a complete day of rest on Saturday—that they could set aside 24 hours to do pretty much nothing. Just enjoy God and all that he had given them.

If we're going to simplify our lives, it's not enough to just simplify our *stuff*. We also have to simplify our *schedules*. If we want to live the simple life, it requires you to simplify not just your *stuff*, but also your *schedule*. And the main ways we simplify our schedule is by having dedicated time to rest, to take a break.

Once again, this is such a challenge for me! Because I don't really like to rest! I'm not good at it. I mean, I have a tough time sitting still, and an even tougher time stepping away from my work. Because I'm one of those weirdos who *loves* to work! Any other weirdos out there that love to work? We're weird! But I've been wrestling with that recently, and I've even been reading a book about it. It's called *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less*. And the author looks at tons of studies and centuries of history to get to the bottom of why rest is so important. And the main thrust of the book is what the title says: it's that you stand to actually accomplish *more* when you work *less*—when you make rest a priority.

As we found in our passage, God knew this is about us. He knew that we needed rest. And so, before the Sabbath was a *law* to be kept, it was a *gift* to be enjoyed. Before God made a rule about the Sabbath, he gave the Sabbath to his people as a kindness, so they could really enjoy their lives. Taking off one full day to is God's gift to you in order to refresh, to re-center on what really matters, and to reset for the week ahead...

During this season of waiting, when everything's up in the air schedule-wise, I actually think this might be the perfect time to implement this principle in our lives. In fact, I've seen some people realizing this and doing it really well. And so, I wanted a couple of my friends who are leaning into this right now to share about how they're simplifying their lives, simplifying their schedules. Let's take a look at this video from them.

## **Conclusion**

That testimony is so encouraging to me. It's powerful to see how God is using a tough season, a season of waiting, to teach us how to simplify our lives. And it's no easy thing. As I've mentioned again and again today, this is a very challenging lifestyle to work towards. In fact, if we're really honest with ourselves, his lifestyle isn't just challenging, it's darn near impossible. And so, as we close, I want to share with you

where the power to live this lifestyle comes from—where the resources to live this kind of lifestyle are found. And they're not found in a principle or a practice. But they're found in a *Person*.

You see, we read about the manna in the wilderness. This special, even supernatural, substance that was designed specifically for the Israelites, and hand-delivered by God himself. But this substance was actually just a foretaste—it was just a picture of the one who could truly satisfy our hunger like nothing else can. And that is the one called the Bread of Life—it's Jesus himself. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger."

Do you want to know where the freedom from the meaningless, more, better, faster cycle really comes from? It comes from having your desires, your longings so satisfied in something greater, Someone greater, that the desires for the meaningless things of this life dissolve. It comes from finding such great delight in the one who loves you like no one else could, that the delights of this world pale in comparison to the joy he brings you. Friends, it's only by making Jesus our chief delight, our greatest treasure, that we are ever satisfied and can live a life of simplicity.

So, the question is: will you find your delight in Jesus more than anything else in this world? Will you seek him as your greatest treasure? As you do that, you will find greater power, greater grace to live differently. And as you do, you can start living a life of meaning, a life of satisfaction. A life of *simplicity*. Let's pray.