

Mr. Rogers said, “Life is deep and simple, and what our society gives us is shallow and complicated.” If you don’t believe Mr. Rogers, try changing wireless providers. Two weeks ago, when our daughter went off to college, we discovered that T-Mobile doesn’t work in Waleska, Georgia. Since she and Steve are on the same plan, Steve studied the options, decided on the best deal and made the call. How many of you believe that a new cell phone plan can be achieved in one phone call? Because we will need to talk honestly with you after the service about that belief, plus the Easter Bunny, the tooth fairy and Santa Claus.

It took two weeks, about a dozen phone calls, three trips to an actual store, several SIM cards and one exchange of phones to complete the deal. Multiply that by all the other things in our lives that need technical support ... computers, cars, tvs ... not to mention the non-technical things like school, work, family, finances, health issues ... and it is a wonder any of us is sane. And while we’re at it, we might as well admit that it only gets worse in August when all the routines change. Is it just me ... or do you ever feel like you’re headed downhill with your foot on the gas, gaining speed ... only to find out too late that you’ve got no brakes? Was Mr. Rogers right, or hopelessly naïve? Is life meant to be shallow and complicated, or ... in the 21st century ... can it be deep and simple?

I thought maybe today would be a good day to look at this question. It is a holiday weekend, so maybe there’s a little breathing room to think about your life and how you’re going to live the rest of this year out. Look with me at Matthew, chapter eleven (make that correction in your worship flier ... its chapter eleven of Matthew). We’re actually looking at a prayer Jesus prayed ... a prayer we saw last week in the book of Luke. When we find it in Matthew, it comes at the end of some frustration for Jesus. Basically, things have gotten shallow and complicated. The guys who followed John the Baptist came to Jesus wanting some kind of

objective proof ... beyond the miracles ... that Jesus was who he said he was. Rather than accepting what they saw, they wanted to make faith complicated. Then he looked around at some of the towns where he was doing those miracles and realized that even in the face of God's power, no one was changing their lifestyle. Whole towns were rejecting the power of the gospel in favor of business as usual. And Jesus knew that by rejecting him, they were making their lives so much more complicated than they had to be. So he looked at all this, and you know what he did? He praised God. He said (Matthew 11:25-26) - *"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned (I think he is being sarcastic there), and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.* Jesus is telling us that God prefers *simple*. That's his pleasure. So it isn't God who makes things complicated, it's us. The good news of grace that comes through Jesus Christ works ... for people who will come to it as a child comes to a gift.

Maybe you were here a couple of weeks ago when we talked about trampolines. Rob Bell talks about this ... about the difference between how children approach trampolines and how adults approach them. You will never see a nine-year-old boy check the springs before hopping up on a trampoline. It just doesn't happen. Children were not the inventors of those safety nets they put around trampolines. Children don't need to have all their fears answered before they jump on a trampoline. They simply jump.

In this prayer, this is what Jesus tells us: that life is like that. To see it as a gift ... to find joy in it ... we have to come like a child. Because old thinking will complicate it. We complicate it by trying to apply human fixes or human reason to something that was not designed for that. I wonder ... if your life is out of control ... do you need to take another look at it in the presence of God, and ask him to help you find a simpler answer?

Here's the other thing I notice that Jesus does in this passage. He prays. And this prayer is where he gets things in perspective. So let me ask again: if your life is out of control, is it time to look at it in the presence of God, so he can help you find a better answer?

Now ... let me just stop here and say that I've heard a million excuses for why people don't pray ... at least not as a habit. I've probably given most of them myself, at one time or another. If you're not a praying person, maybe this is a good time to stop and ask yourself if that's working for you. Let's look at some of the more common excuses and tell me if you hear yourself in any of these:

- I prefer to worry.

And you're saying, "I'd never say that. Of course, I would rather *not* worry." But every time you choose to wring your hands and do that mental tape-playing thing over your issues and relationships, you are choosing worry over surrender. You are choosing to make your life more complicated. Paul said (Philippians 4:6-7) - *6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* How do you get peace into your life? Pray.

- I don't deserve God's time.

I hear this one a lot from people who are on guilt overload. These people have decided that God has a yardstick and they don't measure up. I don't know where they get that. It isn't in the Bible. Jesus says (Matthew 7:7-11) - *7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened. 9 "Which of you, if your son asks for*

bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! That's a promise, and it does not depend on your worthiness but on your willingness. Another roadblock to prayer:

- God has bigger fish to fry.

I hear this one a lot. These are the people who somehow think that because God is dealing with world hunger and war, he doesn't have time to deal with our piddly little issues ... as if the creator of the universe can get spread too thin. This is what confounded Jesus when he looked around him at people who rejected the gospel ... because they couldn't comprehend the power of God. Actually, when we give God even our littlest issues, we are exercising faith in the idea that our God is an *awesome* God, and that there is no end to his power.

- I don't have time for this.

This is usually my excuse. "I'm too busy to pray, God. Can't you see that?" Years ago, I knew a minister who had a really busy parish. He usually worked fourteen-hour days, and one day he was complaining about the schedule to his supervisor, who said, "I want to ask you to spend an hour in prayer every day." The minister said, "Did you not just hear me? I hardly have time to sleep as it is. My days are crammed full. I don't have time to pray for an hour." To which the supervisor replied, "Okay, well then, if you're that busy, I'd like to ask you to pray for two hours a day." The point is, if we have so much to do that we don't have time to pray, then we have too much to do. Another roadblock to spending time with God:

- I don't believe God will listen/help/care.

None of which is consistent with what we know of God's character. John tells us that God is love. He says (1 John 4:9-10) - *9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* God cares, because God loves us and he has already proven that, by sending Jesus. One more:

- I'm afraid of what God might make me give up/ do/ face/ admit.

This might be the most common excuse of all. But what possible good could we be doing by allowing ourselves to live with less than God's best? Let me assure you ... God will never send you in a direction that is inconsistent with the way you're made. He might send you in a direction inconsistent with your sin, but never in a direction inconsistent with your purpose.

Prayer is a simple, deep, effective response to a life out of control. And it works. Our problem is that we assume prayer is one more thing to master like we master algebra or auto mechanics. But remember ... Jesus says that God is happy when we come like a child. Listen to how Jesus puts it in Revelation. I don't know if he could make it any simpler than this. Jesus says (Revelation 3:20) - *20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.* How hard can that be? All we are asked to do is knock. So if your life is out of control, is it time to knock on God's door and let him help you find a better answer?

Go back to Matthew 10:27. First, Jesus prays, and then he centers himself on the simple truth of the gospel. He says (Matthew 11:27) - *"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* Jesus is saying here that everything we need, we can

find in him. He is like a cosmic Super WalMart! (I am amazed, actually, that they don't sell caskets at WalMart ... then we'd never have to leave. Actually, Jesus is better than the Super WalMart because with him, we get eternal life! You will not find that in the Super WalMart!)

Right here, Jesus reminds us ... when things get complicated ... to center on the truth. And the truth is that Jesus is the center. Jesus is everything. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:22) - *Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach **Christ crucified**: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.* Again, Paul said (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) - *When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom ... 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except **Jesus Christ and him crucified**. 3 I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. (like a child) 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.*

Is your life centered on Christ? Because you know what happens? We get into trouble when we try to bend and shape the gospel to fit our needs or our comfort. We start adding things into it. We make excuses for why we are living with someone. We make excuses for why we don't give. We make excuses for our hurts, habits and hang-ups. We complicate it, and then we wonder why faith is so complicated!

Last week, I made rice crispy treats for the first time ever. People in my home group were amazed that I'd never made rice crispy treats before. I can't even say I've ever looked closely at a rice crispy treat before last week so as I was making them, I noticed just how white the marshmallow part makes the whole thing. It seemed *too* white. I always thought rice crispy treats were generally more rice-crispy colored, so I figured maybe the recipe must be off. I just

kept adding rice crispies ... beyond what the recipe called for ... until the mix looked right to me. And I put it all in the pan, and refrigerated it and cut it into squares and put them on a plate. And they looked really wonderful. Until about ten minutes later, when the first of our home group arrived and we walked into the kitchen and what we had on the plate ... basically ... was a rice crispy blob. Because the marshmallow-to-rice-crispy ratio was so far off, the squares fell apart.

That's what happens when we mess with the recipe. I talk to people every week whose lives are sort of a mess, and I think how much easier it would be for them if they would just admit the truth and then stand in it. Because the fact is, the truth that comes through Jesus Christ is not intended to make our lives more difficult. Paul says (2 Corinthians 3:17) – *The Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* Not bondage, but freedom.

At the end of this little scene in Matthew ... after Jesus has prayed and praised God for a simple life ... and after Jesus has rehearsed the simple truth ... he turns himself out toward the world and makes this incredible invitation to freedom from shallowness and complicated living. He says (Matthew 11:28-30) - 28 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* I can not read that passage without feeling the peace of it wash over me. What a wonderful invitation.

Folks, we make it so complicated ... but we are not designed for "complicated." We are designed for "simple and deep." Which means that if right now, you're feeling weighed down and like you've got way too much on your plate to do any of it well, then chances are, you're

tied to the wrong things. Hear the invitation again: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

This is an invitation to re-organize your priorities. What do you need to let go of ... without apology ... so your life has room for the things that really matter? Maybe this would be a great day to make a list. Here are all the things in my life. Here are the things I can let go of. They may even be good things, but if they are necessary, someone else will take care of them. Here are the things that I know are not centered on the truth. So I will trust God and let go of them. Here is a time I can give God for prayer ... because I'd like him to be in charge again.

Will you take some time now to let God into your life?