

## Week 4 | Part 1: Pursuing Simplicity in Our Commitments

### Overview

We lead busy lives. Really really busy lives. Statistically, we are busier than any other time in the history of mankind. Most of the people now no longer have the time, even occasionally, to stop and think. And yet, this is not because we accomplish or do so much. In fact, in comparison with other historical and some contemporary societies, we do not. We just have filled our time with so many other things that there is no room left. But, with all the convenient services and machines, life seems busier rather than easier. The more tools we have, the higher the expectations. It's as if the technical world adds to our lives as much as it helps. On top of this, we live at a frantic pace, balancing every bit of time among our families, jobs, one another, and agreed upon commitments outside of all this. Our lives are, in essence, oversaturated.

Robert Banks, author of *All the Business of Life*, notes that while our society is rich in things, we are extremely poor in time. In fact, never before in human history has a society been so things-rich and so time-poor. We live in a society that is intoxicated with busyness. And we are in many cases equal participants, aren't we? But why? Why do we willingly do this to ourselves, and those around us even if we know it leads to negative consequences on our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives?

The point here is that most of us have chosen our lifestyle and our priorities. Accordingly, we have chosen the level of busyness that accompanies that lifestyle. And if our level of busyness is a choice, we also can choose to move toward the opposite of an over-extended life. We can choose a life without hurry, a life of serenity, a life of control, a life of balance. This is the goal of this part of the simplicity study as we try to simplify our "over" committed lifestyles in an effort to "seek first the kingdom of God". In turn, we will live a happier, healthier, and a more meaningful life.

### Weekly Readings and Media

Please watch the following short film from the video series NOOMA. The title is Shells, dealing with the issue of how often we find ourselves saying, "I'm so busy" or "I just have so much to do"? It talks about how easy to get overwhelmed with appointments, gatherings, to-do lists, but then asks what are we really doing with our time? The film can be downloaded at the following address (sorry that the subtitles are in Portuguese. This is the only one I could find...):

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KJ4p\\_mfi18](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KJ4p_mfi18)

Ponder this scripture in light of your current commitments:

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Mathew 6:33*

### Assignments

This week's assignments encourage you to search the core of your life, asking deep questions in hopes of moving towards a simpler, more Godly life.

- Respond to the following questions on the short film from NOOMA, titled Shells
  - What is your life about?
  - How could answering that question help you to be more focused with how you use your time?
  - Rob Bell said in the short film that "[Jesus] had just been surrounded by this crowd that had all these expectations of him. There's all of these people and they have very strong opinions about what he should be doing and who he should be

doing it for. So Jesus retreats: he withdraws to check himself, to listen to God, to make sure that all these voices haven't pulled him off track. You never see Jesus doing anything out of obligation. You never hear him saying, 'Oh, I guess I should because I'm supposed to.'" How can we avoid letting the expectation of others dictate what we do? What does that look like in your life?

- It was mentioned the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said that a "saint is the person who can will the one thing." He was talking about the kind of person who knows exactly what their life is about. What does it mean to you to "will the one thing?"
  - Do your choices drive you toward the "one thing" in your life? If not, why?
  - Rob Bell also said "I heard this guy recently say that he's drowning in good. See the enemy of the best isn't always the worst. Sometimes the enemy of the best is the good. It's when we become so busy doing all these good things that we have no energy left to will the one thing." Who or what is suffering in your life because you're busy doing so many good things?
  - When talking about Rob's son trying to get the starfish, he said "he [was] getting more and more frustrated and more and more anxious and we're all saying to him, 'What's the problem? Just get it! What can't you get it?' And he says, 'I can't do it!' And we say, 'Why?' and he says, 'Because my hands are filled with shells!' What are the shells that keep you from grabbing hold of your starfish?"
  - What would it take to drop them?
- Reflect on the following quotes.

*It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is: what are we busy about? Henry David Thoreau:*

*He who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good. Rabindranath Tagore:*

*The feeling of being hurried is not usually the result of living a full life and having no time. It is on the contrary born of a vague fear that we are wasting our life. When we do not do the one thing we ought to do, we have no time for anything else- we are the busiest people in the world. Eric Hoffer*

*When the fire of prayer goes out, the barrenness of busyness takes over. George Carey*

- Included in this week is also the daily prayer and the weekly journaling.