

Letting Go of Stuff

Travel Light

Summary: When the weight of the world is on your shoulders, it can feel like you're going nowhere in a hurry. Shake off the burdens of stress, worry, and regret and find the freedom that comes when you Travel Light. It's better to have less of what doesn't matter and more of what does.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-18, 20-24; Matthew 19:16-22¹

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Introduction

We begin today a new sermon series called *Travel Light*.² Kym, Franz and I will remind you that in a crowded, busy holiday season, it's common for people to feel weighed down by family relationships, financial pressure, regret or even failure. This series will encourage us to remember the weight we feel comes from things that God never asked us to carry, and His solution is simple: Let go of the baggage and travel light.

As we journey through life, we pick up all sorts of baggage that weighs us down. We accumulate hurts, junk, seeds of discontent that grow into problems for us. To travel light, we need to let go of the stuff that weighs us down and holds us back, so we can live the free, full and forever life Jesus promised to his friends, the kind of life our Creator always intended for us, the kind of life that brings glory, honour and praise to God as much as to ourselves.

'More Is Better' Is a Lie

Over the next four Sundays, we are going to reflect on letting go of bitterness, distractions, control and our past. Today, I want us to reflect on letting go of stuff because —and I want you to write this down and remember it— **it is better to have LESS of what doesn't matter and MORE of what does!**

The problem is everything in modern Western cultures promotes the opposite. "More, more, more!" this world tells us. And especially during the weeks leading up to Christmas. Buy now! Pay later! Great prices! Stock up for Christmas! Save money by spending money!

British mother of three, Emma Tapping, took this too much to heart in 2015. She received a barrage of condemnation after posting to social media a photo of her family's Christmas tree surrounded by more than 300 gifts. Tapping defended her mothering approach by noting her girls get 85 gifts each and her son gets about 30, but after hunting for bargains, the cost of the gifts covering her tree was only about £1,500.³

'More Is Better' is a disastrous lie eerily reminiscent of the first lie to beset humankind.

Let's consider the beginning of the human story. God created the first human and said he, and all of Creation together with him, "was very good indeed" (Gen 1:31a).

Yet was it though!

That first human, Adam, was it good for him? He had no one to cook his meals, iron his shirts, mow the lawn, change the oil in his car...

I'm kidding, of course. What we can say is it did not take our Creator long to realise his human creation lacked one thing, a partner:

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him." (Genesis 2:18)

Let's look at this situation more closely. Adam enjoyed a paradise on Earth —the Garden of Eden. He had productive and meaningful labour —to work the Garden and watch over it. And, he had a best friend to protect him and act as a kind of companion —the animals had been created, after all, including the dogs.

Yet Adam, the man, the first human, alone could not fulfil the Eternal Purpose of our Creator. Adam would need a helper, a partner, a spouse with whom to fill the Earth and subdue it, someone to correspond to him, as it is written,

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack anything good. She rewards him with good, not evil, all the days of her life. (Proverbs 31:11–12)

The first humans, Adam and Eve, man and woman, together had a beautiful paradise in which to live, they had meaning and purpose, they had a partner in each other, they had food and everything they could ever need. "All of this can be yours", the Almighty said to them, just stay away from that one tree over there, "for on the day you eat of it, you will certainly die" (Gen 2:16–17).

Now, I'm a sucker for a challenge. When I was considerably younger, I was travelling north with some friends. We stopped at a rest area for some lunch. There was a swing set there and one of the group demonstrated how he could swing high and do a flip backwards from the seat, to land on his feet. I naturally pronounced, "That looks fun! I'll give it a try."

Once I got up the courage to swing high enough, I certainly gave it a try ... only to land embarrassingly on my head.

Now, if my travel companions had known me better and said to me, "on the day you try this, you will certainly die", I almost certainly would not have tried it ... I'm almost certain, I think.

For any rational, sane person, a warning such as, "you will certainly die", could not be any clearer! Adam and Eve, the first humans in the biblical story, had everything they could ever have needed, and only one command, to avoid just one tree.

What do you find hard to avoid? Chocolate? Mince pies? A scratchie? A punt on the races? A lingering look at a guy or girl? A drink too many? Getting the last word in an argument? All of us have our temptations that won't end well. You know what will destroy you and avoid it, right?

The situation enjoyed by the first humans could not have been any better nor could it have been any easier, so they have absolutely no excuse for what came next:

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1)

The answer is, no! God did not really say they couldn't eat from ANY tree in the Garden. He told them they should not eat from ONE tree. One tree to avoid, out of a whole garden of trees and plants and flowers, that was all.

With this clever wordplay, the snake was able to lead the first humans into their first temptation and through to the first sin. He helped them to believe **what you don't have is what you need to be happy, fulfilled and complete!**

That was and is a lie!

The first humans already had all they needed and were abundantly blessed by God. They were already happy, fulfilled and complete, but **more is always better**, right? Wrong.

I did not grow up in a financially stable home. My mother sustained our family with government assistance and drug dealing.

For a few years, my family lived in the middle of a triplex, three homes in one building. Each family in each of the homes had two children living at home and two parents. All the children were friends and the parents got along, most of the time.

The differences between the three families really came down to income levels. My mother's boyfriend had a job, so we were doing okay. The parents to the left of us both worked, so they were doing really well. The parents to the right of us were on government assistance exclusively, so they were not doing very well at all.

This difference in income levels really showed up at Christmas.

The more well off family to the left had presents to spare, more than they knew what to do with. My brother and I were basically happy with what we received, but not when I compared myself to my friends on my left. My friends on my right got water pistols, at least as far as I can remember.

There will always be people who are better off than you and who have more resources. There will always be people who are less well off than you and have less resources.

But we don't want to be those with less; **we want to be those with more!** We want to be better than those with less.

If you have 1 dollar, 2 is better; if you have 1 car, 2 is better; if you take 1 vacation, you immediately begin planning a 2nd because who doesn't want more vacation time? Who doesn't want more, more, more?

Better one handful with rest than two handfuls with effort and a pursuit of the wind. (Ecclesiastes 4:6)

In *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, we read the wisdom of The Teacher that having a little, with rest, peace and tranquility, is better than having more you've had to work hard for, in a never-ending, uncertain pursuit.

In other words, **it is better to have less of what doesn't matter and more of what does!**

Our Creator intended for us to have a pleasing and peaceful life. To that end, he provided us all we could ever need, yet he did not take into account our greed and posturing with each other.

For example, *The Gospel of Luke* describes a man who approached Jesus and asked him to intercede with his brother over the issue of their inheritance. To the request, Jesus replied,

He then told them, “Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15)

In the Jewish culture of that time, the eldest brother inherited the largest share of the family fortune. However, that was meant to set up the whole family, not just himself.

So, the brother here was wanting not just more of the family fortune for himself but he also wanted independence from the family and household business.

It is not surprising Jesus could easily see the heart of the matter was this man’s greed.

Once you have all you need, more is not better because the more will be of what does not matter. Greed leads to needless effort and an uncertain pursuit, for once you have decided all you have is not enough, more will never be enough.

Once greed creeps into your heart, Jesus said, WATCH OUT, be on your guard, for danger is lurking. The danger is thinking your life consists in the abundance of possessions. You are not what you have. Your quality of life is not enhanced by the quantity of possessions.

We need only watch the documentaries on hoarders to see the pain and anguish caused by an addiction to collecting things.

Say it with me: I am not what I own. I am not what I drive. I am not what I wear.

You are more than what you have. And what you have is not what you need to be happy, fulfilled, complete, joyful, cool, to fit in, to feel good, to be significant, to be important, to be pretty, to be popular or anything else.

It is better to have less of what doesn’t matter and more of what does!

How To Let Go

Yet, get ready, because the onslaught has started already.

This time of year, in the lead up to Christmas, every commercial, every banner, every social media post, the messages fly loose and fast, telling us the opposite to the biblical message. Companies and businesses, media and politicians will be working overtime to convince you you are what you have, own, drive and wear, so you had better upgrade what you have to upgrade yourself. AND you are not a loving person unless you give all sorts of useless junk to your kids, to your spouse, to your friends, to your coworkers, to your postman, to your neighbours, to your dog.

It will be hard to resist the messaging, but for your sake, and the sake of your family and friends, you need to curb the craziness. Having and giving more stuff is actually robbing you of the life you need, robbing you of being happy, fulfilled and complete.

If the Bible is correct, that one handful with rest is better than two with toil, then we need to do something about our stuff.

“What does One Handful Living look like?” you might be wondering.

Throw Out

The first thing you can do to let go of stuff is to **throw out**. Throw out as if your life depends on it —because it does! Your life does not consist in an abundance of things.

The key is working out what you need and what you do not need. Don’t just de-clutter, de-own. Owning less is much better than organising more.

Yet when it comes to throwing out, there are limits.

There is a really stupid DoorDash commercial on the television these days.⁴ In it, a wife begins the process of selling the family car because, she argues, her and her husband don't need it. They can simply pay for DoorDash to deliver everything!

I am not encouraging anyone to be silly nor irrational. If you can be honest with yourself, you probably have all sorts of junk in your closet, in your attic, in your garage, that is so overflowing that you can't even park your car in it! That stuff is not your life, it's a lie. De-own; get rid of stuff.

Just then someone came up and asked him, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16)

In the Bible, there is a story of a rich young man, an elite in his community, with position, power and privilege. Yet he was lacking something, he knew not what.

He approached Jesus with this famous and eternal question, "What good must I do to have eternal life?" He knew, deep down in his bones that eternal life would make him happy, fulfilled and complete.

What was Jesus' answer?

"If you want to be perfect," Jesus said to him, "go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard that, he went away grieving, because he had many possessions. (Matthew 19:21–22)

Get rid of your stuff, Jesus told him, and you will be free to follow me. I will show you what is the free, full and forever life I have promised to my friends. Don't worry about your treasures on earth; store up for yourself treasure in heaven. **Let go of what doesn't matter and take hold of more of what does!**

Even though this rich young man knew something was missing in his life, even though he wanted to do what was right, even though he knew what he needed was eternal life, letting go of his stuff was just too much for him to bear. How sad!

It's not wrong to have things. What is wrong is when you let what you own to have you. Your attention is on your stuff. It distracts you from what truly matters. It has become for you an idol. **Throw it out!**

Two Reasons We Hold On

But why? Why couldn't the rich young man just let go of his stuff? Clearly, he had more than he needed anyway and knew that something else was what he was actually chasing. So, what was he actually saving up his stuff for? Why couldn't he just give away what he didn't need?

There's two reasons we hold on. One is **fear**.

We're afraid we might just need this stuff in the future. Or the kids might want it. Or it might become valuable later.

We don't want to waste anything, we want to be a good steward of what we have. We can become so emotionally tied to what we have.

For some, it's protection against need, of not having enough. For others, it's a sign of standing. There can be any number of reasons you cannot let go of your stuff and most of them all come down to fear. Now that you have it, you are afraid to let go of it.

The second reason we hold on to our stuff is **sentiment**.

Your first tooth. Your first ribbon at pole vaulting or whatever you were once good at. Your child's first drawing. Your baby's first diaper. Who knows what? We keep things because we are sentimental about them, they have a nostalgia tied to them, fond memories, it all means something for us.

Sentiment is a powerful emotion. So too is fear. We do not throw out our stuff because they have a hold on us.

What was that wisdom we heard earlier? Better one handful with rest, peace and tranquility. If you harbour fear or sentiment around your stuff, then you are not at rest or peace or tranquil, are you?

There is no reason to fear when you trust God to be your provider. So when you get one of something, give one away. Or, as Marie Kondo encourages, if you haven't used something in the last year, move it out of the closet. Thank it for serving its purpose and **throw it out!** (well, maybe give it to an Op Shop, where it can serve a useful purpose for someone else)

Do not let the stuff in your life crowd out what matters most. Rest, peace, tranquility are more and better than the fear and sentiment that comes with hoarding, which requires an effort that is as useless as is chasing after wind.

It is better to have less of what doesn't matter and more of what does matter!

Buy Less

The next things we can do to let go of stuff is to **buy less!**

It is a sad report that found 62% of people admit to shopping to cheer themselves up. That stat doesn't account for anyone here, right?

Maybe some stress is overwhelming you, so shopping becomes a chance to escape. Or it provides an entertainment that lifts your mood. Or maybe you feel soiled by an experience that a purchase of something will make you feel new and clean. In each of these ways, something you buy can provide or hold a momentary significance for you.

On the other hand, maybe it is just such a good deal that you end up spending money you don't have on something you don't really need.

I will be the first to admit the temperature of life can get so high sometimes that anything that provides a moment's relief is welcome. Yet the wisdom of the scriptures is,

Bend my mind to your affirmations and not to profit. Help my eyes pass from seeing emptiness; bring me to life by your way. (Psalm 119:36–37 BE:NT)⁵

We are friends of Jesus because we believe **life is full in Christ!** We don't need stuff to fill a void. That is a temptation, a trap.

When we buy less we have more money available to us for the things that matter most. And do you want to know what is more valuable than our stuff? Experiences.

Some of my favourite memories are of holidays with my wife and kids.

We had an opportunity to travel to Vanuatu for a week before the pandemic and did not have an extravagant vacation but we did have all sorts of great experiences we now cherish. Jumping off high tree branches into a blue water hole with local children, perusing the local markets, walking through a dark suburb looking for somewhere to eat, enjoying the free sweet potato chips before a local cultural feast and kava, snorkelling among the fish and

coral, visiting a Worldvision community-building project and enjoying the chocolate and coffee, and admiring the crafts.

We didn't come home with a lot of stuff, but we have great memories to cherish.

According to Adrian R. Camilleri, Senior Lecturer in Marketing, University of Technology Sydney,

It turns out people end up happier when they buy experiences rather than things. For example, a study that tracked how older adults spent their money found that only one category of spending was related to happiness: leisure purchases, such as going on trips, seeing a movie at the cinema, and cheering at sporting events.⁶

You can't take your stuff with you when you die but we believe in eternal life, and you will certainly be able to take your memories with you. So **buy less and spend your money on more of what matters.**

Give More

A final principle for One Handful Living comes from *The First Epistle to Timothy*:

Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17–19)

I do not really want to lay a guilt trip on anyone with this message today, but if you live in Australia and have a job, you are easily among the top 10% richest people in the world! It may not feel like it compared to your next door neighbour's standard but you have enough and probably have at least a little to spare.

When we visited that Worldvision project in Vanuatu, it was an accident. We were looking for the coffee and chocolate!

What we discovered there was a reminder of how much of a difference even a little can make because what we consider to be a little can be a lot for someone else.

Sponsoring a child through Worldvision costs roughly \$40 a month. Yet Worldvision is able to take that small amount I barely notice and join it to the small amounts other Australians barely notice, and use that small amount of money to transform a community that certainly notices the difference a little makes because for them, that little is a lot.

Yet what does our world tell us? Buy more, keep what you have for yourself, hoard it all, pay later!

I am pretty certain if you were honest with yourself, then you know you have what you need and a whole lot more besides. So give more! Give more of your money to a worthy cause. Give more of your stuff away to someone who could make better use of it. Give more of your time away to a group doing good in the world. Give more of your talent spreading beauty in the world. Give more.

It is better to have less of what doesn't matter and more of what does matter!

Conclusion

When the weight of the world is on your shoulders, it can feel like you're going nowhere in a hurry. Shake off the burdens of stress, worry, and regret and find the freedom that comes when you Travel Light.

How to let go of the hold stuff has on you? Say it with me: Throw out. Buy less. Give more.

When you have less of what doesn't matter, you will be free in mind, body, heart and spirit for more of what does matter. Like time with the people around you, doing the things you enjoy, without caring about keeping up with the Joneses. That sounds an awful lot like rest, peace and tranquillity, doesn't it?

When you are not chasing after the wind in the never-ending, uncertain pursuit our fallen world encourages, you will be free for one handed living. And having one hand free allows you to help someone up, to give, to encourage, to offer praise.

Never let the stuff you have keep you from living the life you want and need. **It is better to have less of what doesn't matter and more of what does matter!**

Travel light.

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 Based on a sermon series prepared by Craig Groeschel, Tim Doremus & Chris Beall, "Travel Light", *Open Network*, <https://replug.link/3f4e1f90> (accessed 25-Nov-2022).
- 3 Inside Edition, "Mom Defends Buying 300 Gifts: Who Doesn't Want To See Their Kids Smile?", *Youtube*, 22-Dec-2015, <https://replug.link/55fcc640> (accessed 25-Nov-2022).
- 4 DoorDash, "DoorDash Australia: For Sale", *Youtube*, 30-Sept-2022, <https://replug.link/87b23000> (accessed 25-Nov-2022).
- 5 Goldingay, John, and Tom Wright, *The Bible for Everyone: A New Translation*, (London: SPCK, 2018).
- 6 Adrian R. Camilleri, "Spending too much money? Tempted by sales? These ways to 'hack' your psychology can help", *The Conversation*, 24-Nov-2022, <https://replug.link/295b5d80> (accessed 25-Nov-2022).