

THREE KEYS TO A GODWARD HOME: SOLITUDE, SIMPLICITY, AND SURRENDER

This message is one chapter of the book *The Joy of a Word Filled Family* available in audio and print form free online at www.dtbm.org as well as on Amazon.

A Godward home is a peaceful home,
thus we have the key to enjoying Life and Homeschooling!

Loving God supremely, that was perhaps the greatest mandate God's Word has ever given to us as believers. In Matthew 22: 37-39

Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'³⁸ "This is the first and great commandment.

That was Christ's answer when someone asked Him what was the greatest commandment could be.

For a moment, look with me at the context of that portion of God's Word. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:5-8

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.7 "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

There it is.

There is our mandate as parents, as individuals, and as believers.

A Godward Life that gives to God the first place He deserves. How do we do it?

Over these past few weeks at Tulsa Bible Church I have shared some of the core beliefs that Bonnie and I share that are shaping our family. Tonight may I summarize them in three areas?

I believe there are three Keys To A Godward Home: Solitude, Simplicity, And Surrender
A Godward Home Is A Peaceful Home,

Thus We Have The Key To Enjoying Life And Homeschooling!

How do you plan, prepare, and pursue this kind of life and home?

Solitude is resting through a Sabbath cycle

Simplicity is detaching from a worldly lifestyle

Surrender is denying our selves each day via fasting!

SURRENDER: the pathway of self denial through fasting

Finding and staying on the pathway of surrender is paramount for us because our culture¹ has reared around us a generation of strong-willed, belligerent, independent young men and women. Surrender is not a word in their vocabulary.

Too bad, since it is the key that unlocks the vault of God's best and deepest treasures. He patiently waits for us to yield, to quit fighting Him, to allow His plan to run its course, to turn to Him for our security and significance. As He witnesses our doing that, he begins to reveal Himself and His will in greater depth.

Titus 2: 11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

God's Word says we must be Mastered only by Christ and nothing else. The evidence of being brought under the power of something is that we need it to make it through our day. What do you need to make it through a day? That will be a list of the items that have cast their influential mastering power across your life.

What pushes out your hunger for experiencing the intimacy of fellowship with the Lord in your life? Do you seek food first? Entertainment first? The latest news first? The status of your investments first? The web and your computer first? The television, radio, music first? Your collections, investments, shopping first? Your sports, body building, health needs first? All of these are alone good and worthy of time but not at God's expense, He is to be sought first and deepest of all!

Biblical Fasting uncovers and exposes what ever it is that has mastered our lives in place of Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

The more we experience intimacy in fellowship with Jesus Christ the more we hunger for Him, and the greater our longings become to be with Him in Heaven. Then we see our focus in our lives begins to change, the more we long for our Great God and Savior:

- The Greater becomes our Looking for our Bridegroom's Return from Heaven
- The Greater becomes our Hating any beachhead of sin in our lives,

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 69.

- The Greater becomes our Investing our time is Christ's Body, His Church,
- The Greater becomes our seeking the Evangelizing of Lost People around the World,
- The Greater becomes our Sensing of Satan's Lies in the Media and Culture of this World,
- The Greater becomes our Asking for God's Kingdom to Come on Earth,
- The Greater becomes our Walking each day Pleasing God,
- The Greater becomes our desiring to be filled with the Knowledge of God's Will

And on and on it goes in our lives. Actually, anything less than this growing surrender to the Lord through spiritual hungering and thirsting after God, means that our appetite has been ruined through all the little things that have filled us up. It means we have neglected the greatest food - Our Father and His Kingdom for the lesser food of His gifts in life. That spells spiritual famine, weakness, and failure.

Jesus warned that a great enemy to His children would be "desires for other things" (Mark 4: 19). Jesus left us with the only weapon that will lead us into a victorious deepening hunger for intimacy and daily fellowship with our Creator. That weapon is Biblical fasting and we can measure our hunger level for God by our hunger after those other things. God is only glorified by seeking Him first!

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Insightful author and pastor John Piper says, "The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for Heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the x-rated video, the prime time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. For all the evil Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet of His love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14: 18-20) The greatest adversary of love to God is not His enemies but His gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God Himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable".²

Are you incurably hungering after God or this world? Are you incurably delighting in God's Word or trivial pursuits? The greatest destroyers of intimate hunger for God may be things that are good and right in their place like coffee and lawns and hobby and travel and retirement planning and mall walking and TV watching and computer mastering. But any that take God's first place, and become easier to turn to than God and His Word and His intimate communion, they are then deadly destroyers of our hungering and thirsting after God.

SIMPLICITY: the pathway of detaching from a worldly lifestyle

² Piper, Hunger for God, p. 14.

Jesus shared some revolutionizing words about this lifestyle of simplicity in Matthew 6:31-33

Matthew 6:31-33 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"³² "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."³³ "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Tonight, if we are really honest, aren't most of our frustrations, fears, and troubles tied to things like cars, houses, bills, and so on? Let me draw from an old school of thought that has studied this concept. Listen to some ancient wisdom often unheard in our times. If what³ we have we receive as a gift, and if what we have is to be cared for by God, and if what we have is available to others, then we will possess freedom from anxiety. Freedom from anxiety is characterized by three inner attitudes. *This is the inward reality of simplicity.*

1. To receive what we have as a gift from God is the first inner attitude of simplicity. We work but we know that it is not our work that gives us what we have. We live by grace even when it comes to "daily bread."
 - ✓ We are dependent upon God for the simplest elements of life: air, water, sun.
 - ✓ What we have is not the result of our labor, but of the gracious care of God.
 - ✓ When we are tempted to think that what we own is the result of our personal efforts, it takes on a little drought or a small accident to show us once again how utterly dependent we are for everything.
2. To know that it is God's business, and not ours, to care for what we have is the second inner attitude of simplicity. God is able to protect what we possess. We can trust him. Does that mean that we should never take the keys out of the car or lock the door? Of course not. But we know that the lock on the door is not what protects the house. It is only common sense to take normal precautions, but if we believe that precaution itself protects us and our goods, we will be riddled with anxiety. There simply is no such thing as "burglar proof" precautions. Obviously, these matters are not restricted to possessions but include such things as our reputation and our employment. Simplicity means the freedom to trust God for these (and all) things.
3. To have our goods available to others marks the third inner attitude of simplicity. If our goods are not available to other believers when it is clearly right and good, then they are stolen goods. The reason we find such an idea so difficult is our fear of the future. We cling to our possessions rather than sharing them because we are anxious about tomorrow. But if we truly believe that God is who Jesus says he is, then we do not need to be afraid. When we come to see God as the almighty Creator *and* our loving Father, we can share because we know that he will care for us. If someone is in need, we are free to help them. Again, ordinary common sense will define the parameters of our sharing and save us from foolishness. When we are seeking first the kingdom of God, these three attitudes will characterize our lives. Taken together they define what Jesus means by "do not be anxious." They comprise the inner reality of Christian simplicity. And we can be certain that when we live this way the "all these things" that are necessary to carry on human life adequately will be ours as well.

Now, what are the ways we cultivate this discipline of Simplicity? Here are the essentials that simplicity experts have gathered:

³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA.: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988, p. 88-95.

First, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.

Second, reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.

Third, develop a habit of giving things away. De-accumulate! Masses of things that are not needed and they always complicate life. They must be sorted and stored and dusted and re-sorted and re-stored *ad nauseam*. Most of us could get rid of half our possessions without any serious sacrifice. We would do well to follow the counsel of Thoreau: *"Simplify, simplify."*

Fourth, refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry. Timesaving devices almost never save time.

Fifth, learn to enjoy things without owning them. Owning things is an obsession in our culture. If we own it, we feel it will give us more pleasure. The idea is an illusion. Many things in life can be enjoyed without possessing or controlling them. Share things. Enjoy the beach without feeling you have to buy a piece of it. Enjoy public parks and libraries.

Sixth, develop a deeper appreciation for the creation. Get close to the earth. Walk whenever you can. Listen to the birds. Enjoy the texture of grass and leaves. Smell the flowers. Marvel in the rich colors everywhere. Simplicity means to discover once again that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1).

Seventh, look with a healthy skepticism at all "buy now, pay later" schemes. They are a trap and only deepen your bondage.

Eighth, shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

SOLITUDE: The pathway to resting through a Sabbath cycle

Feasts of the Lord

Feast	Historical Aspect	Messianic Fulfillment	Spiritual Application(<i>Halacha</i>)
Passover (Pesach)	Israel's deliverance out of Egyptian bondage	Death of <i>Yeshua</i> on the tree	Repent(<i>teshuvah</i>) and trust by faith (<i>emunah</i> in the shed blood of <i>Yeshua</i>).
Unleavened Bread (Hag HaMatzah)	The going out of Egypt	Burial of <i>Yeshua</i>	Sanctification and separation from evil represented by water immersion (<i>mikvah</i>).
First Fruits (Bikkurim)	Crossing the Red Sea	Resurrection of <i>Yeshua</i>	Walking (<i>halacha</i>) in newness of life.
Pentecost (Shavuot)	Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai	Pouring out of the Holy Spirit(<i>Ruach HaKodesh</i>) on Shavuot	Immersion in the Holy Spirit(<i>Ruach HaKodesh</i>) and growing in faith(<i>emunah</i>) in The Lord (making spiritual <i>aliyah</i>).
Rosh HaShanah (Yom Teruah)	Blowing the shofar; Jewish New Year	The resurrection of the dead/rapture(<i>Natzal</i>) of believers	Hear(<i>shema</i>) the calling (<i>shofar</i>) of The Lord for our lives.
Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	Priest entered the Holy of Holies Cleansing of people's sins	The day of the Messiah's second coming	Yielding ourselves to The Lord so we may live (face to face) in His presence.
Tabernacles (Sukkot)	Entering the Promised Land Great rejoicing	The Messianic era /Millennium (<i>Athid Lavo</i>)	A daily rest (<i>shabat</i>) in the Messiah and having the rest (<i>menuchah</i>) of His Kingdom in our hearts.

The Bible⁴ provides several powerful reasons for studying and understanding the seen festivals of the Messiah:

1. The feasts are in the Bible, and *all* the Bible is inspired by The Lord (2 Timothy 3: 16-17).
2. The feasts are a shadow of things to come that teach us about the Messiah (Colossians 2: 16-17; Hebrews 10: 1).

⁴ Adapted from Kevin J. Conner's *The Feasts of Israel*, (Portland, Oregon: Bible Temple Publishing, 1980), p.1.

3. The feasts are prophetic types and examples foreshadowing significant events in The Lord's plan of redemption (1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 11).
4. The Lord gave the feasts so we could learn and understand God's plan of redemption for the world and our personal relationship to Him (Romans 15: 4).
5. The feasts, as part of the Torah (which means "instruction"), are as a schoolmaster or tutor that leads us to the Messiah (Galatians 3:24).
6. The feasts will point to the Messiah and The Lord's plan for the world through the Messiah (Psalm [*Tephillim*] 40:6-8; Hebrews 10:7).
7. *Yeshua* (Jesus) came to fulfill all that was written in the Old Testament (Tanach), which consists of three parts: the Torah, the prophets (Nevi'im), and the writings *Ketuvim* (personified by the Psalms) concerning Him (Luke 24:26-27, 44-45; John [Yochanan] 5:46-47).
8. The feasts set forth the pattern of heavenly things on earth (Hebrews 8:1-2, 5; 9:8-9, 23; Exodus [*Shemot*] 25:8-9, 40; 26:30; Numbers [*Bamidbar*] 8:4; Ezekiel [*Yechezekel*] 43:1-6, 10-12).
9. The Lord gives the natural to explain the spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:46-47).
10. By studying the natural, we can understand the spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:9-13; 2 Corinthians 4:18).

Two ways we can share in some blessings of solitude: a shabbat meal and Rosh HaShanah

What Is Rosh⁵ Hashanah?

The Hebrew word Rosh means "head" or "beginning." Hashanah means "the year." This name is used only once in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 40:1 says, "...at the beginning of the year..." The more common biblical name is "The Feast of Trumpets." This celebration of a new year is not in conflict with New Year's Day, January 1, which is our national holiday. Rather, it is intended to be a celebration marking a "spiritual" new year, a special time set apart for a new beginning with the Lord. It celebrates the Birthday of the World *Rosh Hashanah celebrates the birthday of the world* - If you have young children, put candles on the Honey Cakes and let this be a birthday party for the world.

Talk about all of the ingredients it would take to make a proper cake. How big would it have to be? It would take all of the wheat from all of the wheat fields, all of the milk from all of the cows, all of the eggs from all of the chickens, etc. Don't forget the frosting! Let the stars be the candles on the giant birthday cake. Put on jackets and go outside together. Look up at all the little star candles and say "Happy Birthday" to the world. You will probably want to thank God together, for creation.

The Hebrew calendar is very old. It is believed that the counting of years originated with creation. There are a number of ways to count the months. One system begins the counting in the spring. Each month opens with the appearance of a new moon. Every time there is a new moon, a new month begins. Hebrew festivals are calculated on this lunar calendar. In keeping with tradition it is fitting that the seventh month is holy, just as the seventh day has always been honored. Therefore, the calendar begins with the seventh month.

⁵ Martha Zimmerman, *Celebrate the Feasts*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1981, p. 126-129.
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In the Bible this day is called Yom Teruah, the Day of Sounding the Trumpet. "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month of the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation" (Lev. 23:24). It is the beginning of ten days called the "High Holy Days," or "Days of Awe." Because of their meaning these days are also called Days of Repentance, Days of Admitting, Days of Returning. The observance concludes with Yom Kippur, the "Day of Atonement" (see Chapter 6).

First, it is a day to honor the *kingship of God* and His authority over creation.

Secondly, it is a *Day of Remembrance*.

The third thread refers to the *revelation of God*.

Preparation for Shabbat⁶ actually begins early Friday afternoon. Since it is a holy day, the most festive linens and silverware decorate the dinner table. It is customary to serve the finest meal of the week on the evening of Shabbat to emphasize its special quality. Two candlesticks are set on the table, or in another prominent place. They symbolize the two-fold commandment to remember and sanctify. These candles are lit, according to rabbinic interpretation, eighteen minutes before sunset so that the act itself will not be considered work on the Sabbath. The Hebrew blessings are normally said by the woman of the house, though anyone may perform this duty. With a scarf covering her head, the woman lights the candles. She then circles her arms around in a motion as if to draw in the warmth of the light. Next she repeat the following blessings:

*Barukh atah Adonai Elohenu melekh ha-olam, asher kidshanu
b'mitzvohtav v'tzi-vanu l'hadleek ner shel Shabbat.*

*Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has
set us apart by your commandments and has commanded us to
kindle the Sabbath lights.*

At this point, the woman closes her eyes for a moment of silent prayer. With the candles lit, the family now says the blessing over the grape juice, which is in a special *kiddush* cup, a cup of sanctification. The fruit of the vine has always symbolized the joy of God's provisions in our everyday lives (Psalm 104:15). This may be a single cup or all those present at the table may have their own. As the cups are raised, the man of the house (if applicable) leads the group in the following blessing:

*Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who
brings forth bread from the earth.*

The bread is usually broken by hand, not sliced with a knife. The idea is to symbolize the day when all weapons of war will be done away with at the coming of the Messiah (Isaiah 2:4). A portion of bread is shared with each member at the table. Some people salt the challah to symbolize the salt on the sacrifices in the Temple era. As the bread is shared by all, greetings of "Shabbat Shalom" (peaceful Sabbath) are given to one another, often with a kiss or hug. A final blessing is given before the actual meal the prayer over the children. The father places his hand on the head of his son and says:

May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:20).

⁶ Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Times, A Practical Guide for Understanding and Celebrating the Biblical Holidays*. Baltimore, Maryland: Lederer Publications, 1993, pp. 3-7.
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The wife is also blessed, by reading *aishet khayee* the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:10-31. Shabbat is meant to be a wonderful time of worship to the Lord God and a time of family sharing. The festival dinner is now served and leisurely table fellowship is enjoyed by all. For a change, no one is in a hurry. Even after dinner, many traditional *z'mirot* (songs) are sung, including the grace after dinner in Hebrew.