

Abbey Baptist Church, Reading  
Worship Service with communion 10:30am - 8<sup>th</sup> March 2026  
Bridget Gurney leading and Simon Bird preaching  
[www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk](http://www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk)  
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## Learning to be Content: Simplicity

### Call to Worship

We come to worship, adore and learn from you, Lord. We open our hearts to your great love and joyfully sing your praises.

### Hymn BPW 553

Great is your faithfulness, O God my Father,  
you have fulfilled all your promise to me;  
you never fail and your love is unchanging,  
all you have been you for ever will be.

Great is your faithfulness!  
Great is your faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed your hand has provided-  
great is your faithfulness, Father, to me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon and stars in their courses above  
join with all nature in eloquent witness  
to your great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin, and a peace everlasting,  
your living presence to cheer and to guide;  
strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow-  
these are the blessings your love will provide.

*T. O. CHISHOLM (1866-1960) © 1923, renewed 1951, Hope Publishing Company / CCL Licence Number: 1763*

### Family time

**Hymn 357** (The offering will be taken during the singing of this song)

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,  
and his righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added unto you;  
allelu-, alleluia.  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia!

Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word,  
that proceeds from the mouth of God;  
allelu-, alleluia.  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia!

Ask and it shall be given unto you,  
seek and ye shall find,  
knock and the door shall be opened up to you;  
allelu-, alleluia.  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia!

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,  
he shall direct thy path,  
in all thy ways acknowledge him;  
allelu-, alleluia.  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia!

Praise to the Father, praise to the Son,  
praise to the Spirit too,  
and to the Godhead, three in one;  
allelu-, alleluia.  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia!

*KAREN LAFFERTY (b. 1948) Copyright © 1972 Maranatha! Music USA/Word Music (UK) / CCL Licence Number: 1763*

## **Children leave for their classes**

### **Prayer**

**Bible Readings** – Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 12:13-21

**Hymn** (Tune: Finlandia)

Be still, my soul: the lord is on your side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
Leave to your God to order and provide;  
In every change He faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: your best, heav'nly friend,  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: your God will undertake  
To guide the future as He has the past.  
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake,  
All now mysterious shall be clear at last.  
Be still, my soul: the tempests still obey  
His voice, who ruled them once on Galilee.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on  
When we shall be for ever with the Lord,  
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone,  
Sorrow forgotten, love's pure joy restored.  
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,  
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

*Katharina Von Schlegel (1697 – 1777) translated by Jane Laurie Borthwick (1813 – 1897)*

## **SERMON**

**Learning to be content – Simplicity**

This is a series about Holy Habits, like reading the Bible, regular prayer, fasting, meditation, service and submission. They are like water, light, nutrients, and warmth, which a plant needs to grow to maturity; becoming fruitful and strong. The promise for us is, as we consistently apply these habits, we will become fruitful, stable and have the strength to face the storms of life.

When I was young, we used to play games on *cardboard* boards (not keyboards!) and used to throw dice to move. One game was called the Game of Life, and it really summed the world's view of life. As players journey through life to retirement, they make choices about college, career, marriage, and children. The winner is the one with the most money at the end. Attitudes are changing and newer versions of the game include rewards for contentment, helping the homeless, etc. So **what are you looking for in life?** What do you think are Jesus' goals for your life?

From our readings you see that Jesus said some very challenging things about aims in life. 'Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.' (Luke 12:15) 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (34). Also see 21, 22, 29 and 31.

You may remember, when I spoke about solitude, I said we have a God-shaped hole in us – we are only truly complete when God fills this. One way of describing sin is that we try to meet our needs outside of God: we try to fill this hole with other things, which become idols. What sorts of things do we seek? How do we try to fill this hole? Money and possessions (like the man in the parable from our reading)? What others think of us? Ambitions? Career? Status? What is behind those desires? Greed, as we see from this reading; pride, which is the opposite of submission we thought about last week; fear we will not have enough; fear of missing out (FOMO); anger, everyone blocks me; our right to live 'my way'?

We might not see we have these attitudes, but, as always, Jesus has a story (a parable) which helps us get the point. I will look first at the parable of the rich man. What does this tell us about having wealth as our goal? Then I will look at some wider lessons about simplicity in life.

Jesus gives a strong warning against greed and the consequences of setting our hearts on riches (15). He plainly tells us life is not supposed to be about this.

The story starts with someone who is already rich and has a big harvest (16-19). So he decides to store it all. He plans his retirement and 'the good life.' He is using human wisdom. 'He thinks to himself' (he was reasoning within himself) His thinking was without reference to God or others.

**Firstly**, he neglects God and his promise to provide. Later in the chapter Jesus talks about not worrying. 'Consider the birds...they have no storeroom, yet God feeds them' (24). He did not need to worry and store things.

**Secondly**, he neglects those around him. He should have been generous with his surplus. Giving to the poor results in treasures in heaven (33). Remember the story of Boaz in the lovely book of Ruth. He was a rich man too, but he followed God's law of not harvesting right to the edge of the field (Lv 19:9), and leaving some for the poor to glean. The result was he was blessed in finding Ruth as his wife.

Then we have God's view of this man. 'You fool!' (20) The man's logic and wisdom crumbles. He dies that night. He loses it all. Worse of all, he hears God's judgment on his life. This is a reminder that God is watching the decisions we make. We will all have to give an account of our lives (2 Cor 5:10).

What does this say about our attitude to money and possessions? Do take the time to look through the rest of the chapter and check your heart. Are you worrying about life? (22) Do you trust God will look after you? (30) Are you using your wealth and possessions to get treasure in heaven? (34)

This parable was about the danger of setting our hearts on wealth; but it could equally apply to other things (possessions, ambition, career, and status), those things we use to try to fill the hole in our hearts. As before, what is Jesus' wisdom? Jesus has other ways of filling this hole. 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened... you will find rest for your souls' (Matt 11:28-30); as we heard last week, in a submissive attitude, we can 'cast all anxiety on him because he cares for you' (1 Pet 5:7); 'Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things (the things we worry and chase after) will be given as well.' (Matt 6:33, Luke 12:31); and 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matt 4:4).

Taking the focus off false goals – even idols or false gods - brings a rest, a singleness of aim, and a simplicity of life. Giving Jesus control of our lives (submitting to him as Lord) gives us rest. This works out both in our inner and outer worlds, and each affect each other. But just having a simple outer life, for example

deciding to give to the poor, is good and helps, but ultimately is a form of legalism. We do not earn inner peace with God, we need to invite him in first, then we have peace and that will flow to our outer world. Then, the simple life helps the inner world to flourish, by removing distractions and waste of time and energy.

I just give a few suggestions on how to simplify our lives, starting with wealth and possessions. Here I have been influenced by two great books: Richard Foster's 'Celebration of Discipline' and Ron Sider's 'Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger.'

Reduce possessions; do not buy the latest gadget or be addicted to fashion; buy second-hand; use charity shops and make ethical choices in what you buy (e.g. Fairtrade). Do not save more than you need for retirement but be generous with your possessions and money.

A lovely suggestion from Richard Foster is to spend time appreciating creation. This is Jesus' cure for materialism and worry (24). It takes our mind off possessions and our own little worlds.

You will see that living simply is a good way of putting into practice two aspects of our part in God's mission in the world, alongside proclamation of the Gospel. Our stewarding of God's creation and bringing God's justice.

Above all these, most important, is to follow Jesus' advice, 'Seek first the Kingdom of God.' (Matt 6:33) 'Set your hearts on things above' (Col 3:1) for 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Lk 12:34).

Come to Jesus, give your heart to him, let him be Lord of your life. Renounce the idols of wealth, status, people's opinions. Let him take control and you will find rest in following him. **What are you looking for in life?**

### **Hymn BPW 384**

Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,  
for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made.

Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it.  
Sun, moon and stars in heaven cry Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!  
Praise him with alleluias for Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Yet from his throne eternal  
in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.

Jesus is Lord! From him all life proceeding,  
yet gave his life a ransom thus setting us free.

Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,  
from death he rose and all his foes shall own his name.

Jesus is Lord! God sends his Holy Spirit  
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

*DAVID J. MANSELL (b. 1936) based on Mark 10: 45, Romans 10: 9, and 1 Corinthians 12: 3 / Copyright © 1979 Springtide/Word Music (UK) / CCL Licence Number: 1763*

### **Prayers of intercession**

Almighty God,

Trusting in your steadfast love, we hold before you the people of the Middle East, those known to us and unknown, in communities that are already stretched beyond endurance. We pray for all those living with fear and uncertainty in Iran, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and the Gulf States. People whose hearts are filled with dread today. Be a fortress and a shield for those who cannot flee. Protect, we pray, the vulnerable, the elderly, and the children whose lives are disrupted by conflict.

Lord, we pray that you will open paths for wisdom, restraint, and justice where none seem possible. We cry out for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the fighting. We pray that the cycle of vengeance and violence will be broken. We pray for world leaders and those in power, that they may choose diplomacy

over destruction and pursue a just peace that saves lives and restores hope. Give courage to the peacemakers and to all volunteers and medical staff bringing relief to the injured, that they may be kept safe. We pray for the Christian communities in Gaza and Iran. Strengthen their faith, courage, and hope as they act as beacons of peace and compassion.

Today is International Women's Day. In a world where many women and girls still face challenges to take an equal place in their societies, communities and homes, we pray for change. We give thanks for all the women in our lives who have nurtured and inspired us. We pray that women everywhere are given a voice and that they may gain access to quality healthcare, education, and support.

Finally, we pray for those who are ill in mind, body, or spirit, and those who feel lonely or anxious, that they may find comfort in God's presence. We take a moment now in silence to each pray for those we know of that need your healing

### **Silence is kept**

Lord, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

### **Hymn MP 1072**

In Christ alone my hope is found,  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My Comforter, my All in All,  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save;  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied -  
For every sin on Him was laid;  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain;  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am His and He is mine -  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
Till He returns or calls me home,  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

*Stuart Townend and Keith Getty*

## Blessing

The Lord walk with you through the week. May he guide you as you face daily challenges, and may his peace rest upon each of you. Amen.

## The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, **Amen**.

## Notices

**After the service today there is a church meeting to discuss the results of the questionnaire.**

**Tonight at 7pm at Lower Earley Baptist Church – Youth Night.**

Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup>	10:30 12:00 2:00 7.45pm	Renew Café Bible study iCaf English lesson and First Steps course Lower Earley Baptist Church - Prayer meeting for a possible new church plant on Loddon Garden village development <a href="#">About Loddon Garden Village</a>
Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup>	10:30 10:30	Toddlers Bible Study
Friday 13 <sup>th</sup>	5:00pm	Table Tennis
Saturday 14 <sup>th</sup>	9am	Men's Breakfast
Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup>	10.30	Sunday Worship with Communion - Mothering Sunday Enjoying the company of each other: Fellowship (Psalm 133; 1 John 1:5-7)

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