

“Simplicity is a natural response to loving God, rooted in purposefulness toward God and the practical day-to-day lived experience of requiring nothing more than we need”

Introduction to Simplicity

Simplicity has been a spiritual discipline throughout much of church history. Many have chosen to practice this discipline of living with less for Christ’s sake. Simplicity allows our souls to discipline our natural urges to be consumed by materialism and “stuff”. It is the intentional weeding out of things that unnecessarily add layers of stress and disillusionment to our lives.

Simplicity is a beautiful discipline of faith. It is also becoming increasingly attractive to those of us who feel a deep sense of over-consumption and cultural gluttony. There appears to be a revitalization of a movement of Christ followers who are choosing to live with less in hopes of staying closer to the things that resonate with Christ’s heart, and we want to be a part of this movement.

Simplicity is based upon the principle of making the “main thing the main thing.” In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us to, “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” To develop simplicity in our lives, we must put our priorities in the right order. We must be determined to put God first in our lives. Truth be known, the person who does not seek God’s Kingdom first, does not seek it at all. For as worthy as any other cause, concern, or person may be, the moment they take precedence over our efforts to “seek first His kingdom,” they become idolatry. Simplicity is a spiritual discipline to help us strive to keep God’s Kingdom first in our lives.

Introduction to This Study

This 8-week study about simplicity will be highlighting that simplicity is vitally important in our spiritual lives as we seek to follow Jesus. The study will focus on four main areas of our lives that deserve our attention when we discuss simplicity: our more-than-enough lifestyle, our commitments, our relationships, and our self. Throughout the readings, reflection, questions, conversation, and projects, the study will highlight the fact that simplicity is a natural response to loving God, rooted in purposefulness toward God and the practical day-to-day lived experience of requiring nothing more than we need. This study will show that simplicity is both a mindset *AND* a practice, and something that the Trinity endorses and commands. We will learn that simplicity is a spiritual discipline, not because it has intrinsic value or because It is a sign of piety *OR* righteousness. It is spiritual discipline because its intent is to keep us ever mindful of God and draw us closer to Him.

Recommendations for This Study

There is nothing within this study that is required to be completed. However, it is highly encouraged that one tries their best to complete what is assigned so that there is the greatest possibility for growth in the area of simplicity as a spiritual discipline in our lives as followers of Christ. With that being said, here is what will be asked of you throughout this study:

- **Daily Study** - Carve out for yourself a time of 20-30 minutes a day (perhaps start shorter and work toward longer) to do this study, and the more regular the time the better.
- **Readings** - Read and reread the assigned sections so that you allow God the time you need to grasp the spiritual significance of simplicity.
- **Reflection** – There will be two short papers focused on aiding in reflection on what is included in the study as where you are and what difference has occurred throughout the study of simplicity. Both papers are for your benefit, and do not have to be shared with anyone. The length of the paper is optional, but at least ½ of a page is recommended.
- **Prayer** - Pray the following prayer on a daily basis. The prayer is as follows:

Gracious and Loving God,
We confess that we have not loved you
with all
our heart, mind, and spirit.
Neither have we loved our neighbor as
ourselves.
We confess that we have not put your
kingdom
first.
We have been focused on our own
busyness:
working hard, doing more, and getting
lots done.
Forgive us for not keeping our sights set
on
you.
Have mercy on us, and teach us a better
way.
Teach us how to simplify our lives.
Teach us how to say yes to what matters
most,
and grant us the gifts of simplicity.
Teach us how to cultivate the gift of
mindfulness, that we might be
attentive to

the people and your good Creation all
around us.
Teach us how to cultivate the gift of
gratefulness,
that we might appreciate what we have
and become less concerned with what we
do
not have.
Teach us how to cultivate the gift of enough,
that as we come to understand the
difference
between want and need, we might be
satisfied with enough.
Teach us how to cultivate the gift of
streamlining,
that we might uncomplicate our lives and
clear
out old ways of thinking.
Teach us how to cultivate the gift of saying
no,
that we might refuse those activities,
people,
and possessions that do not fit our yes to
you.
We ask these things in Christ's name.
Amen.

- **Journaling** – Journaling or writing each week as a way to chronicle our new experiences with God is recommended. This doesn't have to be an everyday activity, but it is intended to help give you the necessary time to stretch and grow. You know yourself well enough to know how you need to go about this, whether it is writing for 10 minutes every day or spending a couple hours alone or whatever on the weekend. Feel free to share with each other insights and experiences from this journaling to help encourage and challenge each other throughout the study.

Advice and Counsel

As with any study, there are thoughts that will help guide us in the process of growing in wisdom. These ideas are meant to keep us focused on the goal as well as prepare as much as possible for the change that should result within our hearts, minds, and, consequently, our actions. Please read these and review them throughout the study.

The Purpose For Spiritual Disciplines – We should be continually humbled and frightened by how self-centered our hearts can be...even in our pursuits of godly activity. It is so important to remind ourselves and one another that the focus of any kind of spiritual discipline must be the One we seek to draw closer to. As great as our personal benefit may be, it is ultimately a pursuit of God himself. Whether it is the discipline of simplicity, prayer, fasting, or studying of Scripture, the goal is not personal betterment nor the appeasement of spiritual guilt, but rather, the actualization of one's longing to be close to Christ.

Legalism – As with any spiritual discipline, there is opportunity for the enemy to come in and corrupt. We must guard against allowing legalism to crowd out the spiritual intent of the disciplines. Our focus must be Christ and allowing Him to work these disciplines into our lives as inside changes that manifest outwardly. We must remember that Jesus does not say – “You must live in a shack, drive an old car and wear rags – or you are not living the life of simplicity I have called you to.” That is NOT the point. It begins with an ATTITUDE toward our belonging. A right attitude will certainly display itself in right actions, but the ATTITUDE is the heart of the problem.

Simplicity Isn't So Simple – More often than not, simplicity is complex. Clearing out clutter initially looks a lot like chaos. Reading to your child after dinner is more complicated than sitting him or her in front of the television to eat and be entertained. Reducing the amount of time we are dependent on electronics and “noise” to grow in more controlled and peaceful environments is much more difficult now in today's culture.

When we start saying no to materialism and commitments, while lowering our standard of living and rethinking our relationships, even well-intentioned friends and family members are sure to have negative reactions, ranging from gentle teasing to outright hostility. They will be upset and feel threatened that, if we can do it, so can they. And they may not be ready to practice simplicity.

To resist the temptation to return to old habits and make others happy, we need to remember that practicing simplicity opens up more time for God to work. It allows us to live more fulfilling, creative lives and do the work we have been called to do. With simplicity come freedom and relief—and the opportunity to give our best selves and focused attention to God and the people we love.