

Week 2 | Part 1: Pursuing Simplicity in Our More Than Enough Life Style

Overview

It's troubling to think how much we as a people group have defined our life by stuff that, in so many ways, we have lost touch with the rhythm of God. We are obsessed with comfort and indulgence, pampering and pleasure, luxury, and leisure. Like Richard Foster says "we crave things we neither need nor enjoy". He also says "covetousness we call ambition, hoarding we call prudence, greed we call industry." We are living in the pursuit of more, driven by our desire and ability to purchase and consume increased quantities of goods. We are destroying the world and depleting it of its natural resources. We are externalizing the real cost of our consumption so that we don't have to worry about it. We live in a culture of waste, with little to no thought of where that waste goes.

Evelyn Underhill stated something that I think summarizes our contemporary culture. She said "we mostly spend [our] lives conjugating three verbs: to want, to have, and to do. Craving clutching and fussing...we are kept in perpetual unrest." This unrest she talks about is the major symptom of our lives not lived in simplicity. Unrest is the product of indulgence. Unrest is sign of how far we have strayed from not seeking first the Kingdom of God.

And this unrest, this desire to want, to have, to do, is destroying our lives and the world as well.

The list continues of examples of how we as a people, a community, as professed followers of God have lives that are out of whack and we are consumed by stuff. As Will Samson put it, "our view of God and our understanding of the way we participate in God's work in the world have become distorted, and we have transformed ourselves into unthinking, consumers of products, ideas, and cultural narratives about what will bring us happiness."

We have to change.

The spiritual discipline of simplicity is part of the antidote for this destructive problem summarized above. That's because simplicity is about letting go of our self-importance and the idolatry of more. It's about identifying and then tending to what is essential and releasing what is not. It's about seeking balance and simply enjoying the life we have been given. Simplicity is about training us away from those cravings and teaching us to trust that God has given us enough.

This week we will focus on finding areas within our lives that cause this problem, and how we can start taking steps to finding redemption, fulfillment, rest, and reconciliation in God through simplifying our lives.

Weekly Readings

It is highly recommended that you read the attached chapter from Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*. It is also provided in Czech. Foster's work is and will continue to be a tremendous resource when discussing spiritual disciplines, including simplicity. This text is going to be one of the foundational readings over the course of this study, and we will dig deeper into the instruction provided and pray that God uses it to change us. This week we are only going to read it and allow it soak in for the time being. Next week we will start

Throughout the week, read the following text, at least a couple of times but as often as you want, from Mathew 6:19-21, which are words from Jesus taken from the Bible titled The Message.

"Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and

burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

Throughout the week, also re-read the following scripture from last week, Mathew 6:25-33, which is taken from The Message. Let it sink in. Let it read you. And listen.

"If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. "Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. "If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met."

Assignments

This week's assignments center on reflection, evaluation, and prayer as we contemplate our lives in light of simplicity. It is highly encouraged that you attempt all of the assignments.

- Reflect on the chapter from Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*.
- Respond to the following quotes from Marjorie Thompson and Evelyn Underhill.

"The fallen human now lives as if there were no legitimate limits. It is considered a God-given right to use every resource and creature on earth for personal enjoyment or gain. The goal of human life is to acquire more, to experience more, to stimulate every sense to capacity and beyond." Marjorie Thompson

"We mostly spend [our] lives conjugating three verbs: to want, to have, and to do. Craving, clutching, and fussing...we are kept in perpetual unrest." Evelyn Underhill

- In what ways did you react to these quotes when reflecting on your life?
 - Focusing on the words of Thompson and Underhill, what are the ramifications of this life for you and for others?
 - How could setting limits on what you acquire, what you experience, what you gain simplify your life and provide the rest of our souls that we need?
- Respond to the following quotes from Dallas Willard and Will Samson.

"The spiritually wise person has always known that frivolous consumption corrupts the soul away from trust in, worship of, and service to God and injures our neighbors as well." Dallas Willard

"Our view of God and our understanding of the way we participate in God's work in the world have become distorted, and we have transformed ourselves into unthinking, consumers of products, ideas, and cultural narratives about what will bring us happiness." Will Samson

Assignments (cont.)

- When thinking about Willard's words, what areas of frivolous consumption corrupt your soul from the trust in, worship of, and service to God?
- What areas of frivolous consumption have injured your neighbors (others in the world) as well?
- In what ways has your view of God become distorted by your more than enough life style?
- How has what brings you happiness often replaced the need for God in your life?

- Reflection on Matthew 6:19-21
 - What reasons does Jesus give for not storing up treasures?
 - What objects or goals often become your "treasures on earth" that you "store up"?
 - How do they complicate your lives (v.19)?
 - How do these treasures get destroyed or stolen, much to our despair?
 - What would it look like to live with God as one's "treasure"?

- Reflection on Matthew 6:25-33
 - What reasons did Jesus give for not worrying about food, drink, or clothes?
 - Why does Jesus say that worry is an issue for "pagans" but not for Christians?
 - How are worry and anxiety natural results of lack of simplicity or singleness of purpose?
 - Jesus used the examples of food, water, and clothing to talk about not being preoccupied and consumed with certain things. If Jesus were speaking to our present cultures, what other examples might he have used?
 - If you were to let go of things you're consumed or preoccupied with, what worthwhile activities might you have more time for?
 - Which word or phrase is most meaningful for you from this passage? Why? Write this phrase down and allow God to work through it to reveal what He wants you to do as a result of it.

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