

## Week 8 | Commitment to the Spiritual Discipline of Simplicity

### Overview

Despite the possibly strong incentive within us to pursue a life of simplicity, both for physical, mental, and spiritual reasons, many will not continue. Yes, usually people will tolerate a brief dabbling in the “inward journey”, such as this focus of the spiritual discipline of simplicity, but then it is time to get on with *real* business in the *real* world.

Why is this true, even though the benefits of living a life of simplicity are so readily apparent?

One reason is that we have been conditioned, materialistically at least, to live and to think a certain way based on history and culture, and changing that mentality oftentimes proves to be a difficult dilemma. Richard Foster sums this idea up by stating that “the materialistic base of our age has become so pervasive that it has given people grave doubts about their ability to reach beyond the physical world”. When an addiction like this is the cultural norm, it is hard to move past it, as well as gaining perspective on our condition is a real challenge when our society depends on our staying this way to continue its economic growth.

Another obstacle is the opinion that today, in our generation, there is an abysmal ignorance of the most simple and practical aspects of discipline and we simply do not know how to continue towards with discipline towards a goal. As a result of this, it is extremely difficult to continue to change from within what we want to be outwardly. Adding to this, we rarely have clear purpose that coincides with our ideals, and even if we have a legitimate purpose, we lack the deliberateness we need to continue with determination what we have set out to achieve.

However, arguably the biggest hindrance in our lives is that a life intent on the spiritual discipline of simplicity necessitates sacrifice (this could be true for any spiritual discipline pursued). We fear this idea - living sacrificially - because it affects us on two distinct levels. The obvious fear is in that we are affected personally when we choose to live a life given to others rather than a life of mindless consumption and personal gratification. But an equally strong fear is what we will experience from others when we live countercultural. When we are committed to practicing the spiritual discipline of simplicity, both internally and externally, we will be resisting the temptations to live status quo as those around us - friends, family, neighbors, co-workers - who continue to believe that more is better and that happiness is found by focusing on oneself. Living countercultural will produce negative reactions from others. Harsh comments, ridicule, hostility, and anger, even separation are all possible reactions from others we might have to deal with when pursuing simplicity, because few in the 21st Century want to hear about the problems we are causing as a result of our more than enough lifestyle, much less do anything about them. As a result of this, many people will resent our way of living and try to stop us. Both of these fears of living sacrificially negatively impact our ability to continue to live simply.

So, how do we carry on in our desire to pursue the spiritual discipline of simplicity in the face of so many difficulties?

This is the focus of this week’s study - to create momentum at this intersection in our lives that might allow for us to make the spiritual discipline of simplicity and lifelong endeavor. If we do indeed make the choice to continue with simplicity, may we come to understand that with it come freedom and relief. And, as a result of this, may we have the opportunity to give our best selves and focused attention to God and to the people we love while at the same time having the opportunity to live the best life possible - the life God intended us to live. Amen.

## **Weekly Readings and Media**

Read the attached chapter titled “Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberation” from Richard Foster’s book *Celebration of Discipline*. It is also provided in Czech.

Read the attached chapter titled “Spiritual Disciplines...For the Purpose of Godliness” from the book titled *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney.

Read the attached chapter titled “Why Simplicity” from Linda Breen Pierce’s book *Choosing Simplicity*.

Read the following scriptures:

*I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.*

*I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.*

*Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.*

*But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him.”*

***Phillipians 3:10-21 (The Message)***

*Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.*

***James 1:2-4 (The Message)***

*Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life.”*

***James 1:12 (The Message)***

*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

***2 Timothy 1:7 (New International Version)***

## **Assignments**

The last assignments for this study are broken down into two distinct projects. Recognizing the personal reflection, depth, decision, and commitment that are necessary for them, more time is definitely needed to complete these projects than just a week. In light of this, it is recommended that **at least** a month, or more if time allows, is granted. The recommended projects are as follows:

### **Project #1: The Simplicity Covenant**

Reflect on the weekly readings and try to allow these readings, as well as past readings, media, and assignments, to provide a framework for encouraging you to continue on the journey towards experiencing simplicity through spiritual discipline. To help allow this reflection to breed transformation, list some personal reasons for why continued practice in this spiritual discipline might enrich your life, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Feed this positive direction by taking some time to formulate for yourself a purpose statement – a commitment or covenant if you will – to continue in the spiritual discipline of simplicity. Take some time with this process of creating a simplicity covenant. Chew on it. Pray about it. Meditate on it. Make it real and authentic for yourself, and make it something that is sustainable. Above all, keep the goal of this study in mind, which is that simplicity is a spiritual discipline to help us strive to keep God’s Kingdom first in our lives.

When you have finished this, take some time to think about who can help you keep this covenant – to keep you accountable for what you are striving for. Now this might be easy when you have a spouse, family member, or close friend that shares a similar desire for simplicity in their lives as well. If this is the case for you, praise God and be thankful! However, for many, it can be difficult to find the level of accountability and encouragement that you will need to keep this covenant. If this is the case for you, do not lose hope but continue to wait and search for someone you can trust with this task.

Once you have found someone to help bind you to your covenant, share your covenant with them and ask them to hold you accountable. Ask for prayers, and routinely discuss with them how you are doing with the covenant. It might even be helpful, from time to time, to pray with them over the covenant.

### **Project #2: Sharing Simplicity**

Oftentimes we forget to share good news with others, and living a life of simplicity celebrated through spiritual discipline is indeed good news. This project encourages us to share what we have learned, in loving, humble, and genuine ways to those we love so that they too might reap the joy and happiness found in simplicity.

It is requested that you choose at least one person that you feel comfortable sharing what you have learned through this study on the spiritual discipline of simplicity, highlighting 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.

Included in this week is also the daily prayer.