

JULY 2022

Practice of the Month

# SIMPLICITY

"A carefree unconcern  
for possessions is what  
marks life in the  
kingdom."

Richard Foster



# WHY PRACTICE IT?

We are members of the kingdom of God, but we're also people who live in a world that completely rejects the kingdom of God and certainly rejects the kingship of Jesus. Thus, the world we live in adheres to a wildly different outlook on life, with very different guiding principles. Individual freedoms, instant gratification, materialism, self-fulfillment, the absence of objective truth, etc.— these are the foundational principles that our society is built on, which shape the way people understand themselves, their purpose in life, and the decisions they make.

As disciples of Jesus, we sit in the middle. We are a part of the kingdom of God and we know that we are to seek his kingdom. But we also live in a world that says we should have a very different purpose and believes that human flourishing is achieved in a very different way. Its vision of the good life is one that is busy, action-packed, with no time for rest, and is one that's filled with a lot of wealth and possessions.

Fortunately, time is telling of the catastrophic damage that materialism and hustle culture is doing to the soul of our society. It is leading to a human condition that is more tired, burnt out, and mentally unhealthy than ever before. This way of life is leading to more of everything except human flourishing, the very thing it claims to provide.

So why should you practice simplicity? Because it's a practice based on the life and teaching of Jesus that helps us break free from the soul-draining habits of the West and live into the reality of how human flourishing is actually attained.



# WHERE DO WE SEE JESUS ENGAGE IN IT?

So much of Jesus' teaching revolved around practicing simplicity, not to mention the example he gave in how he lived his life.

## **First, in regard to simplifying spending...**

Jesus spent a lot of time teaching on money and possessions. Sometimes he would give instructions, but often he simply made statements about how the world works. How it is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35), how you can't serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24), how life does not consist in an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15). Again, these aren't commands, but simple statements of how God created humanity to flourish. It's these statements of truth that explain why he encouraged his followers to not worry about material possessions (Luke 6:25) and to seek first his Kingdom (Luke 6:33). Through this lens, practicing simplicity in effort to combat the pull of materialism on our heart is in complete alignment with how Jesus says humanity will flourish.



There's one important thing we should keep in mind however. Simplicity isn't a call to poverty or meant to shame us for enjoying good things. Just look at Jesus' life. Jesus wasn't necessarily poor. Before he was a rabbi, he made a living as a tradesman. His ministry was supported by wealthy donors (Luke 8:1-3). He had one of his disciples manage their budget. He ate meals with some pretty wealthy people; enough so that people accused him of being a glutton and drunkard (Matthew 11:19). Even at the cross, the Roman soldiers cast lots for his garments, meaning they were worth something. In his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer has this to say in regards to Jesus' lifestyle decisions...

"In Jesus' life and teaching we see the very same tension that runs all the way through the library of Scripture: on the one hand, the world and everything in it are 'very good' and meant to be enjoyed and shared with those in need. On the other hand, too much wealth is dangerous. It has the potential to turn our hearts away from God. When that happens, our greedy, off-kilter hearts wreak havoc not only on our own lives, sabotaging our happiness, but more importantly on others', widening the gap between rich and poor and doing damage to the earth itself. We see Jesus happily living in that tension. Enjoying a good meal in a friend's home one minute and warning about what money can do to your heart the next. To be fair, in that tension Jesus clearly sided with minimalism over materialism. No question. As Richard Foster noted, "a carefree unconcern for possessions" is what "marks life in the kingdom." And Jesus put on display this "carefree unconcern" so

To follow Jesus, especially in the Western world, is to live in that same tension between grateful, happy enjoyment of nice, beautiful things, and simplicity. And when in doubt, to err on the side of generous, simple living."

## **Second, in regard to simplifying schedules...**

Jesus lived his life at a certain pace. He had things to do, but he didn't have too much to do. In living life at this pace, it afforded him the opportunity to respond to unforeseen interruptions in his day, and to seek first the kingdom of God in each and every one. Think about the sermons that he gave or the people that he healed; most of them happened when someone interrupted something he was doing. But because he lived his life at the pace he did, he not only had the time to respond, he also had the patience and kindness to respond well!

That's what simplifying our schedules does. It affords us more time to seek first the kingdom of God, especially in moments of interruption. But it also equips us to respond well— to respond with love, patience and compassion— because we are living from a place of rest, not hurry.



# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## Possessions

- How has the “more is better” gospel shaped you?
- How much of your identity is wrapped up in what you own?
- Who are you without all the acquisitions and opportunities?
- What is it like for you to give away things you still want and like?
- When have you downsized, if ever? What was it like for you?

## Time

- Are you addicted to hurry? Do you move from one check-out line to another because it looks shorter/faster? When you pull up to a stop-light, do you switch to the lane that has the fewest cars? Do you ever find yourself multitasking to the point of forgetting one of the tasks? What is your response to children who dawdle?
- Do you identify with any of the following symptoms of hurry sickness? Irritability, hypersensitivity, restlessness, workaholism (or just nonstop activity), emotional numbness, out-of-order priorities, lack of care for your body, escapist behaviors (ie. overeating, overdrinking, Netflix binging, browsing social media, looking at porn, etc.), slippage of the practices of Jesus (spiritual disciplines), and isolation.
- What is it like for you to do things slowly?
- How much time is your phone or television taking from you everyday? You don't have to guess, your phone can actually tell you....

# SIMPLIFYING OUR SPENDING HABITS

## Spiritual Exercises

- Develop spending principles that you hold to, such as...
  - Before buying something, ask yourself, what is the cost of this item beyond money? Will this item demand time that you don't have to give?
  - Before buying something, ask yourself, am I oppressing the poor or harming the earth by buying this?
  - Never buy impulsively, but instead practice patience. Designate 1-day per week (or if you're up for it... per month) where you're allowed to buy 'non-essentials'. Define for yourself what is considered essential and what isn't.
  - When you do buy, opt for fewer, better things
- When you can, share. Sharing our possessions loosens their grip on our heart.
- Identify things in your house that you don't need or have too much of, and give it/them away. That doesn't mean sell them on Marketplace or Kijiji... give them away!
- Live by a budget. Budgets do more than just keep you out of debt. It's a helpful tool that helps us make sure our "treasure" is being stored up in the right place and that we are seeking first the kingdom of God with our finances.
- Learn to enjoy things without owning them. Is there anything that you use regularly that can be accessed without purchasing it? Then do it!
- Cultivate an appreciation for creation. If materialism de-spiritualizes us, then creation respiritualizes us! What is something you enjoy doing outside that you could add into your daily/weekly/monthly schedule?
- When you see an advertisement, reflect on what it's trying to communicate about happiness and human flourishing, and call out it's lies!



# SIMPLIFYING OUR SCHEDULES

## Spiritual Exercises

- Consider creating everyday habits that counteract hurry
  - Drive the speed limit, don't use the left lane, come to a full stop at stop signs, get into the longest checkout line at the grocery store (and don't use your phone), intentionally sit longer over your meal, turn your smartphone into a dumbphone (take email and social media off, remove notifications, delete any app that doesn't make your life easier), parent your phone (put it to bed before you and make it sleep in), set a time and time limit for social media (or just get off of it), designate certain hours for checking email, limit television screen time, walk slower, practice a sabbath, etc.
- Do a schedule assessment (see next page). Seriously... DO IT!
- Insert margins of rest and relaxation into your day. Remembering that it is better to be unavailable than inattentive, build some buffer times into your life:
  - Shorter appointments
  - No back-to-back appointments/meetings without a break
  - Take some deep breaths before you pick up the phone
- People who are rushed often feel anxious about their lives. So when you wake up, before your head leaves the pillow, offer God three central concerns of the day. Ask him to care for these things as you go about your daily tasks. When your worry creeps in, return to the moment when you handed God your concern.
- Practice a Sabbath. No work and ideally no technology. Just simple living—enjoying family time, alone time, eating well, engaging in community, sleeping, and anything else that provides rest for your soul.

# SCHEDULE ASSESSMENT

## Step 1 – Pray

- Ask for the Spirit's discernment as you spend time assessing your schedule.

## Step 2 – Write out a list of everything you do in a typical day or week.

- This list should include anything that takes at least 1 hour of your time per week, such as: work, school, extracurriculars for your children, small group, church, prayer, reading, grocery shopping, screen time, eating meals with people, hobbies, chores around the house, sabbath, exercise, etc.

## Step 3 – Reflect on this list/discuss it with your spouse.

- Does this schedule resemble the schedule of someone seeking first the kingdom of God? If you are seeking first His kingdom, you should be able to see it in your schedule.
- Does this schedule provide daily margin that would allow you to make small adjustments as the day unfolds and as God leads?
- When you get to the end of a typical week, how do you feel emotionally, spiritually and physically?
- What items on your list are causing you to hurry and not helping you seek first the kingdom? What is pushing you beyond your limit? What doesn't provide rest for your soul that isn't 100% required to be in your schedule?

## Step 4 – Plan for September 2022

- If you feel that your schedule could use an adjustment to help you better seek first the kingdom of God, then go through each item on your list and identify what should stay, what should go, and what is missing.

### What Should Stay?

Things that you don't have a choice over, things that provide you joy and rest, things that help you seek first the kingdom

### What Should Go?

Things that don't fit the criteria of something that should stay.

### What is Missing?

This is going to differ based on the person, but here are some questions to help you figure that out...

1. How often are you engaging in the teachings of Jesus?
2. How often/well are you engaging in the practices of Jesus
3. How intentional are you at engaging in formative community?