

Breaking the Addiction to Busy, Pt. 3: Simplicity

Victory Life Church, Central — Sunday, February 23, 2025

Introduction

Finish the sentence:

When we feel **busy**, we think... if only I had more (time)

When we feel tight **financially**, we think... if only I had more (money)

When we feel tired, we think... if only I had more (coffee)

We live by the assumption that *more* is always *better*: more time, more money, more toys, more clothes, more houses, more followers, more likes, more muscles, more comfort, more luxury, more success, more vacations, more cars, more respect, more net worth.

Have you ever thought about how much of your life is spent chasing “more”?
What if the secret to a fulfilling life isn't about *more* but *less*?

The truth is, all this “more” we are chasing after often leaves us with less: less fulfillment, peace, and freedom. We have more access to healthcare, education, and food than anyone ever. All good things, right?

“Despite wheelbarrows full of statistics that prove that humans have never had it so good, we don't feel so good.”¹ ~ Dick Meyer

Why?

Luke 12:15 (ESV) “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's **life** does not consist in **the abundance of his possessions.**”

Life is *more* than more...more likes, comments, information, money, clothes...

Matthew 6:31–33 (NIV)³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’³² For **the pagans run** after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“The drive to possess is an engine for hurry.”² ~ Alan Fadling

We are in a series on breaking our addiction to busy. Hurry flies under the radar as a threat to our spiritual lives. It's not that we don't love God; we just no longer know how to sit still with him. Our lives are too **distracted, busy, and cluttered** for God.

Today, we'll be looking at Jesus' teachings on the practice of simplicity. Simplicity is the practice of pursuing more of what really matters and less of what doesn't.

Internal and External Simplicity

There is a never-ending cultural drift toward complexity. Without vigilant intentionality, our lives will get more and more cluttered and full of stuff. Taking on the “easy yoke and light burden” of Jesus is a resistance toward that complexity. The easy yoke and light burden of Jesus is simple. Following him will include a Spiritual Discipline of Simplicity.

“The Christian spiritual discipline of *simplicity* is the intentional practice of prioritizing God and His kingdom above material possessions, busyness, and distractions, leading to a life of freedom, contentment, and undivided devotion.”

“The Christian Discipline of simplicity is an *inward* reality that results in an *outward* lifestyle.”³ ~ Richard J. Foster

“Simplicity is not a discipline itself, but a way of being...”⁴ ~ Jan Johnson

Simplicity is an “inward reality of single-hearted focus upon God and [God’s] kingdom, which results in an outward lifestyle of modesty, openness, and unpretentiousness and which disciplines our hunger for status, glamour, and luxury.”⁵

We cannot address the complexity of our external lives without first addressing matters of the heart. We are transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2), so what must change in our minds so that we are able to resist complexity and live more simply.

Internal and External Simplicity

Internal Simplicity

Simplicity is possible when we are clear about what matters *most* as it is contrasted with what we often want *now*.

Simplicity is not possible without *clarity*. We are clear about what matters *most*.

Matthew 6:33 (NLT)³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Mark 12:29–31 (NLT)²⁹ Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. ³⁰ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

Jesus is pretty clear about what matters most. He says that everything is about loving God and loving others, and that our focused pursuit should be the kingdom of God. Is this what really matters most to us? We have to be clear about our purpose, what is most important and what we desire most, if we are to commit to simplicity.

Understanding God’s desires (as well as our own desires) allows us to prioritize what we desire *most* and not be tyrannized by what we desire *now*.

“The most important commandment of the Judeo-Christian tradition is to treasure God and his realm more than anything else... That is what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. It means to *treasure* him, to hold him ~~and his~~ dear, and to protect and aid him in his purposes. Our only wisdom, safety, and fulfillment lies in so treasuring God.”⁶ ~ Dallas Willard

“Seeking *first* God’s kingdom and the righteousness, both personal and social, of that kingdom is the only thing that can be central in the Spiritual Discipline of simplicity.”⁷ ~ Richard J. Foster

When we are clear on what matters most, saying “no” becomes much easier.

“If *life* is what you want, you must free yourself from trivial entanglements.”⁸ ~ Dallas Willard

“Things which matter *most* must never be at the mercy of things which matter *least*.”

Being clear about what matters most is central, but it can be further clarified by our values, what behaviors and virtues are essential to our lives, as well as boundaries and what we will not do. This clarity enables us to live with simplicity, enabling us to say no about what is non-essential to our lives in God’s kingdom.

External Simplicity

Let’s frame external simplicity through Jesus’ teaching on “the parable of the sower” to get a clearer picture of what simplicity is and why it’s important.

Less Distraction — Simplicity with Screens
Less Busyness — Simplicity with Schedules
Less Clutter — Simplicity with Stuff

The Parable of the Sower, Seed, and Ground: Mark 4:3-9, 14-20

Mark 4:3–9 (NLT)³ “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. ⁴ As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. ⁵ Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”⁹ Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

Mark 4:14–20 (NLT)¹⁴ The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others. ¹⁵ The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. ¹⁶ The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. ¹⁸ The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, ¹⁹ but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the

lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. ²⁰ And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

▶ **Simplicity with Screens — Less Distraction (The Hardened Ground)**

The ground was hardened because of constant traffic. Of the many ways that can be interpreted, our constant distraction with our technology, specifically our phones, is keeping our brains engaged, but not with depth of thought.

"There are only two industries that call their customers 'users': illegal drugs and software."⁹
~ Edward Tufte (a statistician and data visualization expert)

The works of Tristan Harris¹⁰ (and similar voices) call this the "**attention economy**", which is built on understanding and exploiting human vulnerabilities (like our desire for social validation and instant gratification), which leads to our addiction to the device. This is not only stealing our time but also shaping our behavior subtly, nudging us toward actions or decisions that serve the platform's interests, not our own. This manipulation isn't just a design flaw—it's a **deliberate strategy** for profit.

We become more shallow in our engagement, hurried in our souls, anxious in our minds, yet addicted to the source of our maladies. We are stuck in this cycle that is engineered by those who make a profit from it. We are losing ourselves, and these companies make more money from it.

How do we become less distracted? **Embrace Boundaries**

"We *can* outsmart our smartphones. Technology might run our world, but it needn't rule our lives."¹¹ ~ Courtney Ellis

Embrace boundaries around your screen by turning your phone from ***temptation*** to ***tool***.

Ideas: Delete entertainment and social media apps, grayscale the colors, put your phone to bed, no phones at meals, leave your phone in the car when out to dinner

Embrace boundaries around other screens by making entertainment a special occasion.

"It's not about giving up technology. It's about freeing our souls so we can wring the most out of this one life we are given. It's about entering into family and friends and neighborhood space unencumbered by having the entire human race buzzing about in our pockets. It's about fewer dings and pings and more talking and listening. It's about space and peace and rest and grace."¹² ~ Courtney Ellis

▶ **Simplicity in Schedule — Less Busyness (Rocky Ground)**

Mark 4:16–17 (NLT)¹⁶ The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since **they don't have deep roots**, they don't last

long. They fall away as soon **as they have problems** or are **persecuted** for believing God's word.

The soil cluttered with rocks makes the seed unable to develop a deep root system. This mirrors our lives and hearts when we are overloaded, overbooked, and over-scheduled. There may be seasons that are more full than others, but life cannot be lived well in the kingdom of God and be busy and over-booked in our schedules. A busy schedule eventually becomes a hurried soul.

“If the devil can't make you sin, he'll make you busy.” ~ Corrie ten Boom

Hebrews 12:1 (NLT)¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

How do we become less busy? **Embrace Margin**

Living with margin is profoundly counter-cultural. Everything in our culture moves us toward hurry and busy. So few people live with margin that we do not know what it looks like. We can't help but feel full in our schedule and overloaded in our souls.

“The conditions of modern day living devour margin. If you are homeless, we send you shelter. If you are penniless, we offer you food stamps. If you are breathless, we connect you to oxygen. But if you are marginless, we give you one more thing to do.”¹³ ~ Richard A. Swenson, M.D.

“Margin is the space between our load and our limits.”¹⁴

Margin is when we are not living at or above our limits. *Overload* is when our load exceeds our limits. When we are not clear about our limits, we easily exceed them. Living without margins eventually erodes our emotional well-being and our spiritual depth. Our schedules and calendars show what kind of “soil” our lives are. Without margin, our calendar is rocky ground. It's not that we do not love God, we just don't know how to spend any time with him.

“For many people, the barrier to spiritual growth is not lack of commitment, but over-commitment to the wrong things.”¹⁵ ~ Rick Warren

The key is clarity. What matters most to you? Does the love of God and His Kingdom matter the most to you? Does your family matter most to you? Do not let the tyranny of the immediate pressures to say yes make you clutter your schedule with things that matter *now* but do not matter *most*. A kind and gracious “no” is appropriate in many, if not most, situations.

“Balance cannot be achieved unless we are willing to say No.”¹⁶

► **Simplicity in Stuff – Less Clutter (Thorny Ground)**

We live in the most prosperous time in human history; more stuff is available to us, and there are more available options. We have more stuff in our possession than any point of human

history. Are we better off for it? Well, somewhat. I am grateful for the unprecedented prosperity of our time, but at some point, the balance tips.

Mark 4:18–19 (NLT) ¹⁸ The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, ¹⁹ but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced.

The thorny ground speaks of lives that are just too cluttered and overcrowded for the word of God to take root and bring transformation. The problem isn’t that we own nice and good things; the problem is the compulsive desire for more that plagues our consumerist culture. The problem is that the things we own begin to own us.

“...most of us simply have too much stuff to enjoy life at a healthy, unhurried pace.”¹⁷

John Rockefeller, when asked how much is “enough,” said, “Just a little bit more.”

The problem is that the things we own begin to own us.

“For a lot of people, things aren’t just *things*; they are identities. Shopping is now the number one leisure activity in America, usurping the place previously held by religion. Amazon.com is the new temple. The Visa statement is the new altar. Double-clicking is the new liturgy. Lifestyle bloggers are the priests and priestesses. Money is the new God. There’s a reason the only other god Jesus ever called out by name was Mammon—the god of money. Because it is a bad god and a lousy religion.”¹⁸ ~ John Mark Comer

Matthew 6:24 (NKJV)²⁴ “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

How do we become less cluttered? **Embrace Contentment**

Philippians 4:11 (NLT)¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.

This is why clarity around what matters most, what is most important, is so vital to living simply. We all have desires and they can easily be stoked. The entire culture is currently being driven by stoking your desires so that you buy more.

“4,000 ads a day” are intentionally designed to stoke our desires.¹⁹ Bryce Sanders, *The Business Journals*, 2017

It will take a firm decision of faith and discipline to swim upstream and be content. Practicing simplicity around our stuff is not just about getting rid of our stuff, but changing the way we think about our things.

“We have to choose between our stuff and our serenity because physical clutter creates mental clutter.”²⁰ ~ Jan Johnson

Physical clutter eventually results in mental and emotional clutter. It can be difficult and therapeutic to get rid of stuff. You don't have to become an Instagram worthy minimalist to begin the process of decluttering your stuff. What is most important is that you are clear about what you really want, what you desire most, and if it is the Kingdom, then we have to be honest about the clutter in our life that is getting in the way of that treasure and love.

"The intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts us from them."²¹ ~ Joshua Becker

"Practicing frugality involves two changes: limiting what we already own (continually clearing out our possessions and giving them away), and limiting what we acquire (buying more possessions, hours spent shopping)."²² ~ Jan Johnson

Practicing simplicity in our stuff creates more room for the word of God to take root in our lives and bring transformation. Understand this clearer: what is at stake we when we are addicted to things? The word of God being choked out of our lives. Living with contentment has implications beyond our budget, but our soul, our transformation. The word of God has power which manifests in our life when there is enough space and room to grow deep roots.

Conclusion

This is the question: do we actually take Jesus' words seriously? Do we take them seriously enough to change the way we think and change the way we live? Do we actually love God enough to fight against the cultural tide for *more* by striving for *less*? Are we willing to set values and boundaries that enable our lives to be aligned with love for God and love for others?

Matthew 6:33 (NLT)³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Either we take Jesus at his word here or we don't. If we call ourselves followers of Jesus, then this word has to work its way into the fabric of our everyday lives: our screens, our schedules, and our stuff.

Recommended Reading

Abundant Simplicity, by Jan Johnson
Freedom of Simplicity, by Richard Foster
Margin, by Richard A. Swenson MD
Uncluttered, by Courtney Ellis
The More of Less, by Joshua Becker
A Simplified Life, by Emily Ley

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- ¹ Dick Meyer. "The Prosperity Paradox: We Have It Good, but We Feel Terrible." *Savannah Morning News*, 26 Nov. 2016, [savannahnow.com](<https://www.savannahnow.com/story/opinion/columns/2016/11/26/dick-meyer-prosperity-paradox-we-have-it-good-we-feel-terrible/13908277007/>).
- ² Alan Fadling. *An Unhurried Life*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013. p. 48
- ³ Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline*. 3rd ed., HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. p. 79
- ⁴ Jan Johnson. *Abundant Simplicity: Discovering the Unhurried Rhythms of Grace*. InterVarsity Press, 2011. p. 8
- ⁵ *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005. p. 2313
- ⁶ Dallas Willard. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. HarperOne, 1998. p. 203
- ⁷ Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline*. 3rd ed., HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. p. 87
- ⁸ Cited in Jan Johnson. *Abundant Simplicity: Discovering the Unhurried Rhythms of Grace*. InterVarsity Press, 2011. Back Cover.
- ⁹ Edward R. Tufte. *Envisioning Information*. Graphics Press, 1990. (*The Social Dilemma*)
- ¹⁰ Tristan Harris. TED talk: *How a handful of tech companies control billions of minds every day*. TED, 2017. https://www.ted.com/talks/tristan_harris_how_a_handful_of_tech_companies_control_billions_of_minds_every_day
- ¹¹ Courtney Ellis. *Uncluttered: Free Your Space, Free Your Schedule, Free Your Soul*. Rose Publishing, 2019. p. 70
- ¹² Courtney Ellis. *Uncluttered*. p. 73
- ¹³ Richard A. Swenson. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. NavPress, 2004. p. 13
- ¹⁴ Richard A. Swenson. *Margin*. p. 69
- ¹⁵ Rick Warren. "Quote". *Current Thoughts & Trends*. August 2003. p. 24
- ¹⁶ Richard A. Swenson. *Margin*. p. 189
- ¹⁷ John Mark Comer. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. p. 191
- ¹⁸ John Mark Comer. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. p. 180
- ¹⁹ Bryce Sanders. *The Business Journals*. September 1, 2017. <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/how-to/marketing/2017/09/do-we-really-see-4-000-ads-a-day.html>
- ²⁰ Jan Johnson. *Abundant Simplicity: Discovering the Unhurried Rhythms of Grace*. InterVarsity Press, 2011. p. 79
- ²¹ Joshua Becker. *Clutterfree with Kids*. (2014). p. 31
- ²² Jan Johnson. *Abundant Simplicity*. p. 88