

WORKSHEET: CHAPTER 15

ANGER **DISCIPLINE OF SIMPLICITY**

Simplicity is not about the lack of things in our life, but rather it is about a focus on the main thing in our life, Jesus Christ. The discipline of simplicity is not about clearing out the clutter in our homes, but rather, it is about making room for the throne of Jesus in our hearts. It is an internal heart motivation that leads to the external order of our lives. It is a discipline that is sorely lacking in our 24/7, Madison Avenue, “must have” lives. Even in our churches, the push is to have and not to be. Simplicity, however, challenges that notion with a straight-forward promise - “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4) The truth of that statement is, when you delight yourself in God, your heart’s desire is for more of God.

Simplicity recognizes that we are eternal. We are not about the temporal but the eternal and our eyes are on the things above. Therefore, the practice of simplicity is about learning to live in the temporal with an eternal view and lifestyle. Our time spent studying God’s Word is not just about learning how to live on this earth with Him as our Lord and King, but also about learning with Whom you and I will spend our eternity. Simplicity is about grasping the need for a Kingdom focus here and now.

DO YOU OWN YOUR THINGS OR DO THEY OWN YOU?

The Bible has a lot to say on the subject of simplicity, even as it teaches on the discipline of faithful stewardship. God gives. God takes away. If we, in an attempt to be a god in our lives, pursue comfort and security above all else, we will have neither. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus lays it on the line, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

Covetousness we call ambition.
Hoarding we call prudence.
Greed we call industry.
Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

Crown Ministry is a ministry devoted to teaching this truth. They assign their small group members the task of writing a *Quick Claim Deed* (www.crown.org). The task is to write out everything that you have or own. From your house, car, and possessions to relationships, list everything on paper. Then, take another look and list other intangibles (time, talents, opportunities, etc.). Once the list is complete, the assignment is to sign it all over to God. The exercise reinforces a simple truth - it all belongs to God and it is only on loan to you or me for a short period of time.

The focus is on the heart attitude. There is nothing wrong with having. What is wrong is wanting, then accumulating just to have and then, having that, not being satisfied and demanding more - wanting, lusting, desiring, fixating. The only thing we are to pursue in this life is God the Father, through Jesus the Son, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Everything else we are to receive as we receive, use as we need, give up when God requires it of us, and through it all be faithful to maintain a heart of affection for God alone.

ACKNOWLEDGE that everything you have comes from God. Spend some time writing out a list of God's abundance in your life. If it is easier, start with the tangibles - possessions, money/resources, then move into the intangibles - your time, talents / abilities, relationships, opportunities to serve, etc.

ALL THAT I OWN: TANGIBLES

ALL THAT I HAVE: INTANGIBLES

THEN PRAY, ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S OWNERSHIP OVER IT ALL

CLUTTER IS NOT A QUIRKY CHARACTER TRAIT; IT IS CHAOS

Yes, you say, but my issue with simplicity is not about accumulating stuff and things, but rather in the management of what I have. I am overwhelmed by the task of stewarding, in a way that glorifies God, what He has given me.

If that is your issue, management and order, then simplicity for you begins with the winnowing process. You have to bring order to your world, one corner at a time. Living in chaos will not produce simplicity, nor will it foster an attitude of quiet appreciation for what you do have. Chaos is chaos and order is order; there is just no other way around it.

Choices have to be made. As you prayerfully consider how best to de-clutter your life, practice giving over to God each of your possessions and ask God how you can best glorify Him with what you have left. That will be a good test of where your heart is in relation to your things.

- **CONFESS** areas in which you've lived apart from God for a while. If you have not lived as if it was God's home, confess that. If you have not expressed that your spouse or kids belong to God by worrying over them and not trusting God with them, confess that. If you've mishandled or mismanaged what God has given you - possessions, relationships, resources - confess that.
- **REPENT** of those sins by restating that all things belong to God and that you desire to use what He has given you to glorify Him. Then, study the Scriptures and see what the Bible has to say about those specific issues. For example, if you've mishandled the money God has given you, go to God's Word and begin to glean what the Word says about handling money in a godly way. If it is a relationship, do the same thing.

After you have done all of that, there are two exercises that will help you identify an area or two in your life in which you may be living in chaos and complexity instead of order and simplicity. Remember, the discipline of simplicity is about an attitude change that reflects your focus on the Author of Life, the God of eternity, the Creator of all things..

A pastor once said that he takes his weekly schedule and first blocks in his time with God. That is a non-negotiable. Then, he notes what time that week is devoted to his wife and then his children. Everything else, he fits around those non-negotiable blocks. He began to do that one day when he realized that he was trying to squeeze God in, in-between a church meeting, a counseling session and preparation for the sermon that week. The absurdity of giving God the leftovers convicted Him in a major way. Now, God gets first place and everything else, rightly, falls in after that.

You may have to cut something out. If your schedule does not honor God, then it does not please Him and something has to change. Take the time to seriously reassess your priorities. Remember, the discipline of simplicity is an internal attitude that impacts external behavior. The change happens inside first!

Finally, take some time to order your world. Tackle one project, one place in your house that defines chaos: a closet; a drawer; a section of the basement, etc. Spend two hours sorting and organizing. Donating and if necessary, trashing. Allow your external world to communicate a new heart desire to lead a simple life. Remember, “the main thing is that the main thing remain the main thing”.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

Show an accountability partner or close friend your first schedule and then your revised schedule. Ask him or her to pray with you about it and invite them to ask you about your schedule in the weeks and months to come. Remember, this is not just a paper exercise. This is about re-ordering your world in a way that honors God. If you don't put into practice what you have changed on the paper, then the point and the discipline have been lost on you.

Tell that same friend about what area of chaos you intend to tackle this week. Don't be ambitious. Begin small. Clear up one corner or pile or drawer this week. Then, choose another corner or pile for next week. Without being overwhelmed by the task, you'll find your life changing over the weeks and months to come. This assignment is only useful as a tangible reminder of what simplicity brings - surrender to the more excellent things of God without the disturbances of “stuff” and “things” to get in your way.