

Spiritual Exercises

Simplicity

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION1

INNER SIMPLICITY

STUDY AND MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE..... 3

LECTIO DIVINA..... 5

MEDITATION ON THE WRITINGS OF CHURCH HISTORY 7

OUTER SIMPLICITY

POSSESSIONS.....12

MONEY.....15

TIME.....17

RELATIONSHIPS.....18

END OF WEEK REFLECTION

NOTES21

INTRODUCTION

This week's exercises are all designed to challenge us to lives of simplicity, which reject the need for status, glamour and luxury because our lives are singularly focused on Christ and his kingdom. When Christ becomes everything in our lives there is no room for anything else to compete for priority or attention. That's simplicity.

There are two kinds of simplicity that we need to cultivate: inner simplicity (simplicity of the heart) and outer simplicity (simplicity lived out in the real world). One always goes with the other. Inner simplicity without real world lifestyle changes is simply hypocrisy. Outer simplicity without an inner attitude of caring first and only about Christ and his kingdom is legalism. We need to cultivate both together.

That is why the challenge for this week is to spend some time each day doing a brief exercise of inner simplicity and then choosing to challenge yourself to an action of outer simplicity as an application. You will try to pick one from each category.

Some of the applications of outer simplicity may take more than one day. That's fine. Keep working at the lifestyle changes you've identified as being relevant to you one day at a time. These are massive shifts in our mentality and our lifestyles so don't feel rushed. Simply work to cultivate both inner and outer simplicity as God leads.

Inner Simplicity

Simplicity is something that begins with an attitude of heart towards life, an inner singularity of focus on Christ and his Kingdom, in a way that allows everything else in our lives to fade into the background of importance. These exercises are intended to provide an inner focus on simplicity.

STUDY AND MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

One way to foster that attitude of inner simplicity is to meditate on Scriptures that teach these inner habits. Reflect on one of the following Scriptures and allow God to speak into our potential to be distracted and diverted from the simplicity of focusing on Christ.

1. 2 Timothy 2:4 - the life of a soldier

- i. A soldier's possessions are limited to personal effects and (not exactly fashionable) clothes. They are required to travel light, since all of their energies must be focused on their job. How easy or hard would it be to imagine a life pared down to such bare essentials?
- ii. What would be the hardest things to give up? Why?
- iii. How does ridding ourselves of possessions make it easier to seek first God's kingdom and its righteousness?

2. 2 Timothy 1:5 – What we're passing down

- i. Consider the following definitions: Heritage: property that is or may be inherited; an inheritance; valued objects and qualities such as cultural tradition.
- ii. Legacy: an amount of money or property left to someone in a will; a thing handed down by a predecessor.
- iii. When you think about the heritage or legacy that you plan to or would like to leave to your children, what does it include? List as many things as apply to you.
- iv. Read 2 Timothy 1:5. What heritage does Paul state that Timothy received? How might you incorporate this type of heritage in your life and the lives of your children?
- v. Does this type of heritage alter or affect your perspective on any of the other items you may have listed in the second step? Why or why not?

3. *Matthew 22:34-40 – Loving God and others*

- i. The goal of inner simplicity is simplicity of focus on Christ and his kingdom. How are these verses a decent summary of that kind of focus?
- ii. In what other ways do we measure “spirituality”?
- iii. What in our life distracts us from focussing on this definition as our goal in life?
- iv. How does this definition affect the way we view the status, glamour and luxury of our lives?

4. *1 Corinthians 4:7; 10:26 – Our stuff*

- i. Reflect on what you have in life, on the status, glamour and luxury that you’ve been blessed to experience. Where do these verses say that all of that comes from?
- ii. How does the fact that everything we have comes from God affect the way we strive after possessions and positions? How does it affect that we way use them?
- iii. How does the fact that everything we own still belongs to God affect the way we strive after stuff? How does it affect the way we use things?

5. *2 Corinthians 8:13-15 - Equality*

- i. Go to www.globalrichlist.com and see where you rank in global comparison?
- ii. What does it mean for our generosity to create “equality”? What does it not mean?
- iii. What do we receive in return from those to whom we are generous? How do they “supply what we need”?
- iv. In what ways can you begin to use what you have to create some economic and relational equality in our community and in our world?

6. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 - Equality

- i. What are you seeking in life? What do you expend your time, money, effort and energy to attain or accomplish?
- ii. Where does God's kingdom rank? How would your life change if you sought God's kingdom first?
- iii. What does "his righteousness" mean? How does it relate to his kingdom?
- iv. Simplicity is about being focused only on Christ and his kingdom. How would "everything else" change in value/priority if we sought first God's kingdom?

> LECTIO DIVINA

One way to foster that attitude of inner simplicity is to allow God's Spirit to speak to your spirit through the practice of Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina is a prayerful listening to scripture. There is an intentional balance between silence and the Word of God. The scripture passage is read four times (either by an individual or by a person facilitating a group experience) and then there is a period of silence (5-7 minutes) after each reading. Lectio divina is a sacred time, and as a group you should covenant that what is shared in a lectio experience stays within the group and is not discussed outside of that group context. It needs to be a safe place.

What follows are two different ways to facilitate a lectio divina experience alone, with your life group or another group.

1. Basic Lectio Divina

- i. Sit in silence before God after the first reading, noticing what captures your attention or your inner experience.
- ii. In the silence following the second reading, again notice what captures your attention. At the end of the silence identify a single word or phrase that stands out (to the group, if this is a group experience. There is no discussion.) Allow silence before continuing to read.
- iii. In the silence after the third reading, ponder how this passage seems to touch your life. At the end of the silence reflect and journal (or invite the participants to share with each other) how the passage connects with your/their life or experience. (Again no discussion in group.)
- iv. None of the above

- iv. This time in the silence after the fourth reading, invite the Holy Spirit to guide you as you listen for the invitation in this passage. At the end of the silence, journal about (or invite the participants to share) what you/they feel the passage might be inviting them to do.

2. Lectio Divina – adapted by Corinne Ware

- i. **First Reading** – Listen with your senses. Attend your imagination, noting the smells, sounds and images that arise as you hear the passage. Allow yourself to enter into the action of the passage using your imagination.
- ii **Second Reading** – Follow along in the Bible as the word are being read. Use your thinking to reflect on the meaning and significance of the passage. Consider why the passage is included in scripture. How does this passage affect your understanding of God?
- iii. **Third Reading** – This time as you listen, attend to your feelings. Note your feelings and silently offer them back to God as a prayer of the heart. Comment in your prayer on anything in the passage to which you particularly respond.
- iv. **Fourth Reading** - Listen with your intuition, with your heart. Quieten yourself, close your eyes, breathe deeply and regularly, and prepare to receive God’s word. If something impresses you, notice it and sit with it in the silence. Simply remain open to the passage and to the Spirit. After expressing gratitude to God for your experience, open your eyes.

Use either of the Lectio Divina methods listed below to reflect on one of the following passages.

1. Luke 10:38-43

- i. Are you Mary or Martha?
- ii. What distracts you?
- iii. How is your focus on God and his kingdom?

2. 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19

- i. Paul is writing here? Are we rich?
- ii. Go to www.globalrichlist.com and see where you rank in global comparison.
- iii. What does it mean to be rich towards God? Are you growing your riches towards God? Why or why not?

3. Matthew 6:19-24

- i. Where does our trust and security lie? Why have we located them there?
 - ii. What do we treasure? Why?
- How does one store up heavenly treasure?

4. Matthew 6:25-34

- i. Do you worry? Why or why not?
- ii. If so, what do you worry about? How does this passage speak into your worry?
- iii. How are our worries tied to our desire for status, glamour and/or luxury?
- iv. How does a focus on God's kingdom affect the level of our worry?

> MEDITATION ON THE WRITINGS OF CHURCH HISTORY

Writers from throughout church history have reflected on the attitudes and practices of simplicity in ways that may be helpful to us in fostering inner simplicity. Reflect on one of the following quotes from church leaders throughout history and allow God to speak into our potential to be distracted and diverted from the simplicity of focusing on Christ.

1. The Renovare Bible

- i. Read the following quote:
"Simplicity is the inward reality of single-hearted focus upon God and his kingdom, which results in an outward lifestyle of modesty, openness, and unpretentiousness and which disciplines our hunger for status, glamour, and luxury."
- ii. If simplicity is a single-hearted focus upon God and his kingdom, where does our focus land?
- iii. Look at the words modesty, openness and unpretentiousness. What do they mean? Do they describe us?

- iv. Reflect on the “hunger for status, glamour and luxury.” Are these what motivate us? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?
- v. How much do you own or buy things for status, glamour, or luxury? How much do you own or buy things for their bare usefulness?

2. Hudson Taylor – missionary to China

- i. Read the following quote:
“I soon found that I could live upon very much less than I had previously thought possible. Butter, milk and other luxuries I ceased to use, and found that by living mainly on oatmeal and rice, with occasional variations, a very small sum was sufficient for my needs.”
- ii. How do you respond emotionally to Taylor’s words? Why?
- iii. Do you imagine yourself able to make similar choices in your life? Why or why not?
- iv. Why do we tend to live off of more than what is “sufficient for [our] needs”?
- v. What can you live without? What can you NOT live without?

3. Hudson Taylor – missionary to China

- i. Read the following quote:
“My experience was that the less I spent on myself and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my soul become.”
- ii. How do you respond emotionally to Taylor’s words? Why?
- iii. Do we intrinsically believe this to be true? Why or why not?
- iv. Have you ever had this experience? When?

4. St. Francis of Assisi

- i. Read the following quote:
“Where there is love and wisdom,
There is neither fear nor ignorance.
Where there is patience and humility,
There is neither anger nor annoyance.
Where there is poverty and joy,
There is neither cupidity nor avarice.
Where there is peace and contemplation,
There is neither care nor restlessness.
Where there is mercy and prudence,
There is neither excess nor harshness.”
- ii. How do you respond to St. Francis’ words? Why is this your response?
- iii. How much have you struggled with the presence of some of the items in the second line of each couplet? Which ones? Why?
- iv. Do you believe that the virtues in the first lines eliminate the struggles of the second lines? Why or why not?

5. St. Francis of Assisi

- i. Read the following quote:
“Lord make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy

O Master grant that I should never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love
For it is in giving that we receive
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”
- ii. How do you respond to this prayer? Why is this your response?
- iii. How does this prayer embody the life of simplicity, a life of singular focus on Christ and his kingdom until nothing else matters?
- iv. How do the sentiments of this prayer compete with the values with which we live every day?

6. A Shaker Hymn

- i. Read the following quote:
“Tis a gift to be simple
‘Tis a gift to be free
‘Tis a gift to come down
Where we ought to be...”
- ii. What does this simple chorus mean? What does it mean to be “simple”? How does this relate to being “free”?
- iii. What does it mean to “come down where we ought to be”?
- iv. What are you striving for in life? Has it complicated your life? Has it trapped you? Why or why not?

7. A Contemporary Hymn

- i. Read the following quote:
“Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace?”
- ii. What does this chorus mean? What does it mean for “the things of earth [to] grow strangely dim”?
- iii. What does the chorus mean by “his glory and grace”? How do these things cause “the things of earth [to] grow strangely dim”?
- iv. Do we live as though this hymn is true? Why or why not?

Outer Simplicity

The inner attitude of simplicity ultimately dictates our outer attitudes towards the rest of our lives. Flowing out of our focus on Christ and his kingdom, we view our money, possessions, time and relationships through new (and renewed) lenses. We learn to de-prioritize the status, glamour and luxury these things can contribute to our lives and instead prioritize the ways in which we can invest them in the kingdom, living simply. For more ideas, visit: <http://www.thesimpleway.org/practicalideas.html>

> POSSESSIONS

Consider the following challenges to simplify our lives as it pertains to our possessions.

1. Spring Cleaning – Many people take advantage of the spring or fall season to clear out unused and unwanted items from their home.

- i. This is an ideal exercise for families.
- ii. Assemble the items in your household that have not been used in the last three months/six months/year (pick the time frame you feel is most appropriate for you). If these items are still wearable or usable, donate them to a worthy cause.
- iii. Are there any items that have never been used or rarely used? If so, how might you avoid a similar scenario the next time you go through this process?
- iv. If you have small children, consider watching and discussing Veggie Tales: Madame Blueberry or The Toy That Saved Christmas.

2. Being generous with what we love – Many of us have particular possessions that we especially love, often for all the wrong reasons. This exercise is about breaking the hold of those items over our lives.

- i. Think about your favourite possession. Why is it that you treasure it the way that you do? Does its hold over you have to do with the status, glamour or luxury it affords you?
- ii. How much of your life does it dominate? How much time, money and energy does it consume in a regular way?

- iii. What would your life look like if you were to remove that item from your life? How could that time, money and energy be spend more productively for Christ and his kingdom?
- iv. Consider giving away a possession that matters very deeply to you for all the wrong reasons.

3. Read Acts 4:32-35 – Learn to Share

- i. Identify the items that you use regularly that you feel comfortable, and the items you would NOT feel comfortable, borrowing, sharing or renting. What creates the different emotions associated with borrowing, sharing or renting various items?
- ii. What major and minor purchases are you considering right now? Consider choosing to not purchase these items but to borrow, share or rent them on an as-needed basis. How could you purchase them communally, as a group of friends or family instead of each buying their own?
- iii. What do you currently own that could be shared with others in order to help them simplify by not needing to buy them themselves?
- iv. How would this impact the simplicity of your lifestyle?

4. Assessing your Influences – Thinking about the influence of advertising

- i. Think about your daily commute to work or school. How many billboards do you pass? If you listen to a radio station, how much of it is commercials?
- ii. If you watch television in your spare time, do the television characters, their lifestyles or occupations influence you in any way? What about the commercials on tv?
- iii. Perhaps you are influenced by the magazines you read. How do the images make you feel about yourself or the environment that you find yourself in?
- iv. How do the lifestyles of your friends, classmates, coworkers or family members influence you?
- v. Visit the following website: http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/marketing/marketers_target_kids.cfm
- vi. Read the following passages: Psalm 90:14, 101:3a; Proverbs 30:7-9

- vii. What would it look like for you to choose to fast from the media. Pick a time period you feel is attainable and abstain from all entertainment media that propagandizes our lives, urging us towards lifestyles of status, glamour and luxury. Discuss with your friends, family or Life Team how this fast has affected you.

5. Breaking addictions – Though there are no 12-step programs for many of them, most of us live with minor addictions to everyday things in our lives: chocolate, coffee, the lottery, texting, the Internet, a television program, the newspaper. It could be anything.

- i. Why has this object attracted so much attention in your life? Why does it have the hold over you the way that it does? Does it have to do with some status, glamour or luxury in your life?
- ii. How is this obsessive connection affecting your life? What would happen if it suddenly disappeared? What does that do to you emotionally?
- iii. Consider eliminating something from your life that you “can’t live without” precisely because it has become an idol for you. Eliminate anything that exerts an emotional control over your life.

6. Rejecting Oppression – Eliminating consumer products that disadvantage others, whether based on gender, culture, race or age. This is a difficult issue to navigate, but something we need to try to embrace. Here are a few steps that you can take to avoid supporting products, companies and services that breed oppression.

- i. Purchase fair trade coffee, chocolate, sugar, bananas or other products. Many of these can be found, if not in your local grocery store, than at Ten Thousand Villages outlets.
- ii. Look at the companies that you spend your money at and then research their business practices. If you find they are not worthy of your dollars, write them a letter letting them know why you are no longer doing business with them.
- iii. Choose a country and get really informed about it’s political environment, what multinational corporations are doing business there, the standard of living for the local residents, and what organizations are involved in helping relieve oppression there. Then choose some personal action step to aid this country. Don’t forget to share what you are learning with others.

- iv. Choose a product (shoes, rugs, clothing) and spend the time to get really informed about the companies that make the product, where they are produced, what they pay their workers, and where are there innovations of fairness and equality. Then make a decision on what company you will support to buy that particular product. Share what you find out and your decision with your friends and neighbours.

> MONEY

Consider the following challenges to simplify our lives as it pertains to our money.

1. Financial Autobiography – In order to understand your current attitudes towards money and spending habits, write a personal autobiography of your family of origin.

- i. What was the financial status of your family growing up? Compare that with your parents' or grandparents' generation.
- ii. What were the stated or implied financial messages that you grew up learning? How have these affected your own current attitudes?
- iii. Did money represent a source of freedom or conflict for your family when you were growing up? In what way?
- iv. How has your financial past influenced your current situation? What attitudes/practices have you adopted/rejected?
- v. Based on your reflections, what financial attitudes or practices would you like to incorporate, delete or keep?

2 . Get spending under control

- i. Do you operate on a budget? Why or why not? How faithful are you to your budget?
- ii. If you do not operate on a budget, estimate where your dollars go every single month. How much do you spend, on average, on cable and Internet, groceries and heat? Figure out where your money goes.
- iii. Go one step further. Commit to tracking your spending (every penny!) for a three month period in order to get an idea for where your money is going month after month.

- iv. Re-evaluate your spending. What are you spending on needlessly? What do you spend money on motivated by status, glamour and luxury?
- v. Realign your spending around a simpler lifestyle, eliminating things that are motivated by status, glamour and luxury. Invest more heavily in the singular focus of a life of simplicity: Christ and his kingdom.
- vi. How will your spending change? How will you be more generous?

3 . Get out of Debt

- i. Read Proverbs 22:7 and Romans 13:8. What does the teach about debt?
- ii. If this is the Bible's perspective, why have we accumulated so much consumer debt? Why are we so comfortable "spending money we don't have to buy things we don't need to impress people we don't like"?
- iii. Go to the following website:
<http://www.daveramsey.com/etc/cms/index.cfm?intContentID=4055>
- iv. Plan to eliminate debt from your life. This is not a quick fix but a long term plan for financial freedom. Do it!

4 . Teach your children to manage money

- i. What money lessons have you deliberately sat down to teach your children? Do they know how to budget? Reconcile a bank account? Give generously? Spend wisely (act their wage)? Get out of, and stay out of, debt?
- ii. What could you do to intentionally raise your children's financial IQ?
- iii. Consider exploring the following website to tips on teaching children about money: <http://life.familyeducation.com/money-and-kids/personal-finance/34481.html>

5 . Challenge yourself in generosity

- i. What money lessons have you deliberately sat down to teach your children? Do they know how to budget? Reconcile a bank account? Give generously? Spend wisely (act their wage)? Get out of, and stay out of, debt?
- ii. If you live in a two income household, can you discipline yourselves to live off of one income and give the other away?
- iii. Can you simplify your lifestyle so that you can give half of your income away?

- iv. Can you set up investments or companies that can generate revenue for giving?
- v. Can you once or twice a year give an entire paycheck away?

> TIME

Consider the following challenges to simplify our lives as it pertains to our time.

1. Take an Intentional Vacation – Significant travel has a purpose and identifies with the common people of a country.

- i. Self-indulgent travel can be a status symbol. Plan an intentional vacation that gets to the places of anguish and pain and human need. Sign up for one of the outreach trips offered through Southridge, or find another responsible organization that offers opportunities for service trips.
- ii. Alternately, when you arrange your own travel, take time to learn the language, meet the local residents, and stay in places connected to the common people of the country and contribute to the local economy, rather than multinational corporations.

2. Prioritize gadget-free recreation

- i. Does your recreation rely on media, batteries, computers or gas-guzzling vehicles? Experiment with some simpler ways to enjoy time together. Go for walks, hikes, or bike rides.
- ii. Attend an art gallery, or museum or a park.
- iii. Play music together or create arts and crafts together.
- iv. Play co-operative games rather than competitive ones.

3. Prioritize service

- i. How much of your time is spoken for? How much negotiable time/margin do you have in a week?
- ii. Why do you engage in the commitments that you do? What is it that you get out of the time commitments you've made?
- iii. How reasonable would it be for you to devote a half day (or a whole day)

4. *Time together*

- i. What do your family time commitments look like on a calendar? How much time do you spend as a family apart versus together? Why?
- ii. What is it that you accomplish in your time apart? What do those activities, which divide your family, contribute to your life? What is their purpose?
- iii. What would it look like for your family to spend more time together than it does apart? What would you have to give up? What would you do in that time together?
- iv. Make a commitment to be a family that plays TOGETHER, that coordinates family time deliberately. Make a commitment to a weekly family night, without electronic entertainment, interacting and playing with each other.

> RELATIONSHIPS

Consider the following challenges to simplify our lives as it pertains to our relationships.

1. *Gift-giving*

- i. What feelings do you associate with getting or giving gifts? Why do we feel these ways? Do these feelings relate in some way to a desire for status, glamour or luxury?
- ii. Try alternative gift-giving practices: set a dollar figure limit on the gifts you purchase; make a gift rather than purchasing one; give the gift of time; donate money in honour of a person rather than buying them a gift.

2. *Make a habit of honest, simple, loving speech*

- i. So much of what we say is motivated by a desire to impress others, to gain status in their eyes. It undermines our ability to speak the truth in love. Do you tend to speak with more truth or love? Why?
- ii. How much do you exaggerate in order to enhance your stories? How much do you use words to entertain and, ultimately, to increase your reputation? What are you most afraid of when you speak to others?

- iv. Who are you most trying to impress? Why? Is it working? What are you getting from that?
- v. Make the choice to speak only in simple terms, honestly and lovingly, without trying to impress. Seek to impress only God and to let your reputation sort itself out on its own.

3. Intentional Friendships

- i. Take a moment to re-evaluate who you spent your time with. What relationships are we investing all of our energy into? Are these relationships Jesus would have chosen?
- ii. Simplicity takes outward shape through consciously identifying with the poor and forgotten, as Jesus did so often. In order to identify with the poor we need to become informed and involved. Find out about the needs in your local community.
- iii. Visit a prison, a hospital, a mental institution, a seniors home, a homeless shelter, or a boys and girls club with the intention of forming long term, sustainable friendships with the people you meet there.

4. Communal Living (anything beyond a nuclear family)

- i. Are you comfortable with the concept of communal living? Why or why not?
- ii. What cultural values make it harder for us (generally) to imagine living in the same place as non-relatives?
- iii. Foster states that “communalism is nothing more than the renunciation of private ownership for the sake of a wider community.” Where do you see the heart of Jesus in living communally? How does it promote a lifestyle of simplicity?
- iv. Is there someone that you can invite into your household? Is there a situation where you and another family can reside together? Why would, or wouldn't, you choose to take advantage of such a situation?

5. Simple entertaining

- i. Invite your neighbours over for a simple, yet nourishing meal.
- ii. Do not entertain extravagantly, to impress, elicit compliments, or to produce a return invitation.

End of Week Reflection

