

Life Group Leader Guide #20

August 6, 2017

Simplicity

Richard Foster, Quaker and author of *Celebration of Discipline*, writes, "Simplicity is freedom." It is no small irony that in today's fast-paced world filled with advanced technologies that fit into the palm of our hands and make so many tasks of life easier our lives seem more complicated than ever. The technologies and "stuff" which promise to give our lives status, comfort or convenience wind up, in the end, enslaving us to the fads of the fickle masses, the whims of the economy or the shiny allure of riches. No practice, then, could be more "counter-cultural" today than the practice of simplicity. Simplicity is the counter-balance towards our tendencies to clutter and over-complicate our lives with unnecessary tasks, thoughts and "stuff." In essence, "less is more." Simplicity is both an inward reality, properly practiced, AND an outward way of life. Inwardly, it is an intentional decision to focus one's mind and attitude on the things which are most important and minimizing the rest. That inward focus ought, in theory, to work itself outward towards a lifestyle where excess is shed and joy is found in the simple things. It could be said that it is as much about an attitude of the mind as it is an outward practice, but we want to emphasize that it is both!

Jesus demonstrated the simple life both in his example AND in his teachings, particularly as it related to wealth and excess. The Bible includes numerous commands against the accumulation of wealth and challenged just about every economic value of today's culture. Jesus lived the simple life of an itinerant rabbi. As far as we can tell, he owned no land and often had no place to lay his head at night. He relied on the meager support of others and upon his death the only thing of value which was desired by others was his tunic. Jesus countered the deadly threat of materialism in just about every way and warned that one cannot serve two masters- i.e. God or the materialism of the world (cf. Luke 16:13). In fact, Jesus speaks to the question of wealth more than any other single social issue. If Jesus makes such a big deal of it then, in a comparatively much simpler society than today... how much more do you suppose he would make of it today?

Of course “stuff” is not the only thing we clutter our lives with. We also clutter our lives with more things to do than we could ever get done. We over commit and over obligate ourselves in a way that takes time away from the things that really matter to us and sucks the life right out of us. Do you feel the need to simplify? Below you’ll find several ideas (from Foster) that might help you combat this temptation in your life. Honestly, its about simplifying your life so you can devote more of it to God and the things that really matter in life.

- Buy things for usefulness rather than status.
- Reject anything that produces an addiction in you- something you absolutely have to have!
- Develop a habit of giving things away.
- Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry. No, you don’t have to have the latest greatest gizmo. (ouch)
- Learn to enjoy things without owning them. (ahem... go to the library instead of Barnes & Noble)
- Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes. Do not let yourselves become slave to a lender.
- Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

Discuss:

Which of these ideas above do you find most helpful to you? Most challenging?

Read **Psalm 62:10, Prov. 11:28, 1 Tim. 6:9**

1. Constantly the Bible deals with the inner spirit of slavery that an idolatrous attachment to wealth brings. What is the allure of riches and how does it ‘enslave’?
2. How did Jesus combat the temptation towards materialism in his day?
3. How can the church combat it today?

Read **Matt. 5:33-37**

1. In addition to money or “stuff” what other things clutter your life? Tasks? Responsibilities?
2. How might Jesus’ command in Matt. 5:37 speak to simplifying one’s commitments?

Read **Matt. 6:19-21**

1. Jesus teaches that freedom is not found in having or doing but in keeping God and His will first & foremost in our heart. Where are you most tempted to clutter your life?

Practice: a few weeks ago our challenge was to “clean out your barns” so that you could be more generous in giving. This week our challenge is to find another area of your life to “simplify.” You might cut out an event, a task or turn down making another commitment. In doing this, think about what you are saying YES to as you say NO to something else.