

LESSON 8: THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH (Part 2)

In-Depth Study

Outward Spiritual Discipline: Simplicity

Matthew 6:19- 33 (New International Version)

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

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.

a) What is simplicity?

- The discipline of simplicity differs from the disciplines of meditation and prayer in that those disciplines are much like physical exercise whereas the discipline of simplicity is a lifestyle change.

- The discipline of simplicity is the conscious act of not being tied to the things of this world.
- Simplicity does not mean swearing to do away with possessions and purchasing things.
- Simplicity does not mean that you hate money and those people who have an abundance of it.
- Simplicity is not the desire to be poor and to remain that way.
- “Living simply means adopting a lifestyle that avoids unnecessary accumulation of material items. It helps us seek outward detachment from the things of this world in order to focus our lives on the leadings of the Spirit. Living simply entails clearing our lives and our houses of spiritual and material clutter so as to create more space for faithful living.” – Catherine Whitmire
- “Simplicity does not mean getting rid of all your possessions, but rather integrating them into your life’s purpose”- Mary Gregory “Plain Living: a Quaker path to simplicity”
- The central point of the discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God first, and then everything necessary will come in its proper order. Everything hinges on us maintaining God first. Nothing must come before the kingdom of God.
- A life of simplicity is to not have anxiety about material things.
- A life of simplicity is to use what wealth you have for God first.
- A life of simplicity then is to keep the potentially sinful drive of wanting things in proper perspective.
- A life of simplicity accepts that everything you have is a gift from God.
- A life of simplicity accepts God’s care over what we have.
- A life of simplicity admits that everything they own should be available for others.

b) *Inner Simplicity*

- The discipline of simplicity begins with inner simplicity – simplicity of mind and heart.
- Jesus tells us not to worry about the outer material things in our life, but to seek one thing – to seek God’s kingdom, His reign, His rule.
- Inner simplicity comes from keeping first things first.
- Jesus makes the promise that if we put first things first, all the other things will come, but they will not have the hold on us that they would if we sought them first.
- Richard Foster says, “As Jesus made so clear in (Matthew 6:25–33), freedom from anxiety is one of the inward evidences of

seeking the kingdom of God first. The inward reality of simplicity involves a life of joyful unconcern for possession. Neither the greedy nor the miserly know that liberty. It has nothing to do with abundance of possessions or their lack. It is an inward spirit of trust. The sheer fact that a person is living without things is no guarantee that he or she is living in simplicity. Paul taught us that the love of money is the root of all evil, and often those who have the least that love it the most. It is possible for a person to be developing an outward life-style of simplicity and to be filled with anxiety. Conversely, wealth does not bring freedom from anxiety.”

- Our inner experience of simplicity is evidenced in our contentment and gratitude.

c) Outward Simplicity

- Foster says “to describe simplicity only as an inner reality is to say something false. The inner reality is not a reality until there is an outward expression. To experience the liberating spirit of simplicity will affect how we live.
- Simplicity is not so much about what we own, but about what owns us.
- Our outer expression of simplicity is seen in our generosity and service.
- “If we need lots of possessions to maintain our self-esteem and create our self-image and to look good to our neighbors, then we have forgotten or neglected that which is real and inward. If our time, money, and energy are consumed in selecting, acquiring, maintaining, cleaning, moving, improving, replacing, dusting, storing, using, showing off, and talking about our possessions, then there is little time, money, and energy left for other pursuits such as the work we do to further the Community of God.” – Christian Hadley Snyder, quoted in ‘Plain Living: a Quaker Path to Simplicity’.

d) Cultural need for simplicity

- Our world is complicated. One of the basic needs we have in this world is security. Our culture tells us that we should trust in things to provide us with security. It tells us that we should trust in money and influence for security. It tells us that only the newest and best will provide the comfort and security we need. In our quest for security, we lose touch with reality:

- We crave things we neither need nor enjoy.
- We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like.
- Covetousness and greed is called ambition.

- Our culture tells us that people are important based on how much they produce or how much they earn.
- We need to realize that we are commanded not to be conformed to this world for a reason! We as Christians are called to be different. We are called to think different and act different. We are called to live differently from this complicated material-driven world.
- Simplicity is a way of life for the Christian that keeps them different from the world.
- Simplicity is a perspective about money and finances and material things.

e) The scriptural need for simplicity

- The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward life-style. Simplicity is a way to order your outward life, specifically your opinions and attitudes about money and finances.
- Many people think that the Bible is silent when it comes to economic issues and our attitudes. This is not true. The Bible wants us to have a simple way of life and a simple attitude about money.
- The Bible has many passages that deal with wealth and our attitudes about it:
 - Leviticus 25:23 speaks about land ownership and that God owns the earth.
 - Psalm 62:10 warns against setting our hearts on wealth if we become rich.
 - Commandment #10 commands us against covetousness and the lust to have.
 - Proverbs 11:28 says that he who trusts in riches will wither.
 - Luke 16:13 points out that you cannot serve both God and money at the same time.
 - Matthew 6:21 asks us not to store up treasures for ourselves on earth.
 - 1 Timothy 6:9 warns that wealth may snare men into hurtful desires and sin.

- The Old Testament and New Testament both tell us to be aware of the dangers of money and building up wealth, but so much of our world is geared toward that end. What is to be our attitude? How are we to be different? One way we are to be different is that we are to have an attitude of simplicity.

f) Practices of Simplicity

- Simplicity of possessions and wealth
- Feasting and fasting
- Simplicity of schedule
 - Even if we don't try to pack as much worldly possessions into our house as possible, it is easy to try to pack as much as we can into our schedule. The discipline of simplicity is not just buying less; it is doing less as well.
 - Practice simplicity of Schedule is to take a Sabbath once a week. This is one of the big Ten Commandments: "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy". Taking a Sabbath is a step of faith that says to God and ourselves – God has given me enough time in six days to get what I need done. I will not miss what He has for me by keeping one day separate. In fact, I may miss what He has for me by not keeping it holy!
- Simplicity should breed the spiritual fruit of joy, not take it away. Like any discipline, simplicity can become a law unto itself and suck joy and life out of us.
- Pride can easily creep in and we can even think we are better than others because we are poorer and forced into simple living. Don't become proud over what you have, or over what you have given up.

Application

A) 10 basic guidelines in practicing Everyday Simplicity:

- Buy things to meet your basic needs, not your whims and fancies. Buy things for their usefulness, not their status. (*less expensive functional items versus expensive brand names*)
- Practice giving away things. (*for those in need, hand-me-down children's clothes/toys exchange system for mothers at church etc*)
- Turn away (*give up or monitored/accountable usage*) from things/activities that have a hold (*dependency*) on you or can produce an addiction (*insatiable craving that deters functioning in other areas of life like relationships, spiritual growth, completing responsibilities*) in you.
- Focus on enjoying the things available around you that you do not own. (*e.g. books in public libraries*)
- Let your thoughts, speech and actions be simple and straightforward. (*inner motives should match outward expression –no hidden agendas, manipulation etc*)
- Look for the Holy Spirit to be at work when you experience what you consider 'interruptions' in your busy and preoccupied life. View these interruptions (*e.g. internet server being down, unexpected guests, flu*) with a welcoming rather than grudging attitude.

- Develop a deeper appreciation for creation. (*relax outdoors in nature, rather than by constant stimulation like music, movies, books etc*)
- Reject anything that will breed the oppression of others. (*items manufactured by dehumanizing child labor, overburdening others with responsibilities/chores that benefit/ meet your needs but you are too lazy/proud to help with*)
- Don't believe the hype. (*e.g. commercials, sales at malls, store credit cards for lower prices, 'buy now, pay later' deals*)
- Turn away from anything that seeks to replace God as your first love. (*things/activities/people, even spiritual ones, that crowd out your time to talk to and listen from God or meditate on His Word*)

B) Reflection and Action tasks to develop simplicity in your life:

- *Take some time to reflect on your life. Ask yourself:*
 - In what ways are you rich?
 - Do you have enough, too much?
 - What controls you? What do you serve the most?
 - What can I give up or give away?Then ask the Holy Spirit for freedom from being a slave to your possessions and be obedient as He shows you the way to walk in this new freedom.
- *Take a week to explore the area of giving.*
 - Where are you now in your practice of giving?
 - If you do not already tithe, explore tithing for a month and see what happens to your heart and spirit.
 - Look for ways to curb unnecessary spending.
 - Ask God how much of your money you should keep.
- *Unclutter your life –de-accumulate.*
 - Clean out your closet and give away clothes you have not worn for a year.
 - Put on a garage sale of items that you do not use or need. Give away the money you get and give away what you cannot sell to those who need it.
- *Simplify your life.*

- Give up TV/computer time/phone time for a while to rest, quiet your heart and mind in order to re-organize your priorities.
- Evaluate why you work so much and your motive for earning more.
- Take long walks and talk to God about the real meaning of your life.

- *Take time to serve someone in need.*
- Spend an afternoon/weekend at a ministry center that serves the homeless, sick etc. Consider that these people are made in God's image, just as you are. Ask God to give you His point of view about them and His heart of compassion for them.