

Session #11: Simplicity of Life (Part 1)

Watch!

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/5pMggi8hEjc>

Study!

Scriptural Focus: Matthew 6:33

But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

Structural Framework: The Spirit of Simplicity

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem.”

- Richard Foster

Inward reality (of singleness of heart) results in an outward lifestyle (of simplicity)

In the past two lessons, we talked about having singleness of heart. Having singleness of heart is having a heart of focus. It's a heart that has no double loves or conflicting pursuits. It means we possess a “single eye”, serve a “single master” and store up a “single treasure”. Our heart is set aside for God and no one else, and our life now orients around Him. When we cultivate singleness of heart, it results in simplicity of lifestyle. Our priorities become clear, our values change and our decisions align to His will. Another way of saying this is that the inward reality (of singleness of heart) results in an outward lifestyle (of simplicity). This is the spirit of simplicity. We can simplify our outward living because we have singleness of heart on the inside.

Point #1: Simplicity begins with a singular inward focus.

But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

When we seek Him first, all other desires become secondary. We prioritise what's most important and remove unnecessary clutter from our lives.

Point #2: With divided allegiance, life becomes complicated.

This is all that I have learned: God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated.
(Ecclesiastes 7:29, GNT)

If our allegiance is divided, we end up chasing many things. We become indecisive and confused and unable to devote to God.

Point #3: The spirit of simplicity requires singleness of heart.

As mentioned above, we must remove the other loves from our hearts. Only when we deal with ourselves inwardly, can we live a life of simplicity outwardly.

Let's look at some passages that deal with simplicity. Notice that Jesus was very clear on His mission in life.

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (John 4:34)

Note that the inward reality (of singular focus) must go hand-in-hand with an outward lifestyle (of simplicity). Having an outward lifestyle without the inward reality will result in **legalism**. We perform for God but with no real heart for Him. Conversely, the inward reality without the outward lifestyle will lack **authenticity**. We carry good intentions, but have no follow through. When we cultivate singleness of heart authentically, it will lead into simplicity of life.

"When our life loses the beauty of simplicity it will take on the
tyranny of fragmentation."
- Pastor Benny Ho

When a Christian lives a life caught up with the system of this world and loses the art of simplicity, he becomes double-minded. His heart becomes **fractured** and his life becomes **fragmented**. It's a life filled with internal conflicts, where wholeness seems beyond reach and emotional cracks begin to show.

Therefore, we must intentionally cultivate a singular inward focus and singleness of heart.

Structural Framework: The Spheres of Simplicity

Sphere #1: Simplify Your Pace

We live in a society with people who are obsessive, hurried, stressed and overloaded. Our pace of life is far from slow and simple; it is an always-increasing, over-demanding life. Sometimes we don't have time to heal or space to breathe. Our pace of life has become too fast.

Five different types of workaholism

Dr Wayne Edward Oates, an American psychologist and religious educator, coined the word "workaholism" in an article for Pastoral Psychology. Workaholism is an unhealthy addiction to work, which forms our identity and worth.

- The **Identity Workaholic** defines their life through work.
- The **Perfectionist** is obsessed with performing all tasks flawlessly.
- The **Approval Seeker** is afraid to say "no".
- The **Escapist** runs away from problems of life and works long hours to avoid reality.
- The **Materialist** has an insatiable desire for possessions.

“Restedness is not about ceasing from work, but restedness is about working from rest.”

- Rev. Paul Jeyachandran

Slow Down Versus Centre Down

When we're busy, worldly conventional wisdom tells us to slow down, but God prescribes centring down. We centre down by being aligned to God and His purpose for our lives. Centring down begins by looking inside and dealing with our chronic busyness. It evaluates our personal capacity and assesses our focus on God versus our focus on the world, or ourselves. We must begin to declutter unnecessary activities, recapture our purpose, create margins and be intentionally Christ-centred in all areas of our lives. This will allow us to experience true rest and not just temporary relief.

Here is a list of differences between slowing down and centring down.

Cutting Down	Centring Down
Deals with our Busyness	Deals with our Lostness
Questions our Capacity	Questions our Confusion
Offers us a Consolation	Offers us a Compass
Focuses on Relief	Focuses on Restedness
Outward Life	Inner Life
Helps us catch our Breath	Helps us recapture our Vision
Blames the External Environment	Examines the Inner Roots
Is all about Creating Margins	Is all about Cultivating Anchors
Adds Jesus to our Crowded Schedule	Anchors Jesus as Lord of All our Schedule

Reflect!

What are some key insights that I can take away from today's session?

Go through the **five different types of workaholism** previously listed in this Session. Which type relates most to you and why? Write down one strategy you could employ to simplify your pace in this area.

Discuss!

Read **Psalm 27** together as a group.

This psalm is ascribed to David, evidently written in a time of danger. It may have been prompted by the help provided by Ahimelech the priest and the opposition of Doeg the

Edomite, who saw David at the tabernacle and later reported him to Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 21:1–10; 22:9). As always, David found the Lord to be his “light and salvation” in dark times (Psalm 27:1). The first part of the psalm expresses his confident trust in the Lord for blessings received in the past. He also desires to dwell in the house of the Lord, who will protect him in the future (verses 1–6). In the second part, David offers an anxious plea for God's mercy and deliverance from his enemies (verses 7–12). It ends with a confession that he would have lost heart without faith in God's goodness, and an exhortation to wait on the Lord for strength and courage of heart (verses 13–14).

Q1: What key things have you learnt from Psalm 27?

Q2: What solution to fear does David offer in this psalm?

Let's now focus on Psalm 27:4. Note that in the NIV translation below, verse 4 adds the word “only”.

One thing I ask from the LORD, this *only* do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

(Psalm 27:4, NIV, emphasis mine)

In times of danger and great need, David declares that he desires nothing else except to be in the house of the Lord. He seeks one thing and one thing only, to the exclusion of all else.

Q3: Describe the theological implications when adding the word “only” to verse 4. How was it relevant to David's situation? How is it relevant for us today?

Q4: As mentioned earlier in the Session, an inward reality (of singleness of heart) results in an outward lifestyle (of simplicity). What is your understanding of this principle, and what are some of the pitfalls of not applying it?

Q5: How can a lifestyle of simplicity become legalistic? How can it become inauthentic? (See **Point #3: The spirit of simplicity requires singleness of heart** in the Session notes.)

Q6: Give some personal examples of how your pace of life can get unsustainable. Are they situations that fall within your control, and why?

Q7: Looking at the verses below, why is it important to keep a singular focus? And what is at stake if we don't?

Deut 6:5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Phil 3:13–14 (NIV) Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Luke 10:42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Q8: What changes to your lifestyle would you be willing to make to simplify your pace and centre down before God? How would you like to be held accountable for it?

Between Sessions

Challenge!

And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. (Mark 6:31)

In Sessions 5 and 6, we talked about the importance of silence and solitude. One of the best ways to simplify our pace is to set aside chunks of time to spend with God. Ideas would include taking a prayer walk, or a prayer retreat, or simply being alone in a quiet room in your house. Over the next two weeks, set aside at least 3 hours to be alone with God. Put that into your calendar first, so that other appointments are scheduled around it. Assess how your pace of life changes as a result and come to the next session prepared to share your experience with the rest of the group.

Memorise!

One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.
(Psalm 27:4, NIV).

Before next session!

In the next lesson, we will look at simplifying our priorities. Please take some time beforehand to reflect on the questions below, and come prepared to share your answers.

1. What occupies most of your time?
2. What are your routine activities?
3. What are you usually busy with?
4. What things tend to distract you?
5. How do you spend your time when you have nothing specific to do?
6. What methods do you use to best manage your time?