

Session #12: Simplicity of Life (Part 2)

Watch!

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/rqSCOzw4P3A>

Review!

In the previous lesson, we learnt that an inward reality (of singleness of heart) results in an outward lifestyle (of simplicity). We simplify our outward living because we have singleness of heart on the inside. Our priorities become clear, our values change and our decisions align to His will. This is the spirit of simplicity.

The first sphere of simplicity we learnt about was our **pace**. Instead of slowing down, we should centre down. Centring down is about being aligned to God and His purposes for our lives. It is about bringing focus back to Him and decluttering unnecessary things from our lives. This allows us to experience true rest and not just temporary relief.

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 Spheres of Simplicity

Sphere #2: Simplify Your Priorities

Besides simplifying our pace, we must simplify our priorities. Are we busy with things that are urgent or are we focusing on things that are of priority?

Think about these truths:

- Things that are important are not necessarily urgent.
- Things that are urgent are not necessarily important.
- Things that are priorities are often important and not urgent.

The reason priorities do not always get the attention they deserve is because they are never urgent. We know that priorities are important but since they are never urgent, they often don't receive our attention.

Can you think of some examples of things that are important in life, but are never urgent?

Some examples of priorities that are important but not urgent include keeping your quiet time, spending time alone with your spouse and working on your marriage. These should be high priorities but are not seen as being urgent. Therefore, we neglect our priorities. Sometimes, until it's too late.

As mentioned in an earlier lesson, Mark 1:16–34 and Luke 6:12–13 record the busiest day in Jesus' life. He prayed all night and the next day, He chose His first disciples. He taught in the temple, cast out demons, healed a seriously ill woman and ministered at a citywide meeting.

Jesus knew what it was like to be busy but Jesus was never dictated by the tyranny of urgency. Instead, He lived with a clear sense of priorities.

Matthew 6:33 says:

But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

The original meaning of the term “seek first” does not mean “priority” but rather, “pre-occupation”. Seeking the Kingdom of God is not only important in our lives, it should be everything in our lives. God doesn't just want to be number one. He wants to be the only one. He wants to be our all-consuming passion, our one great obsession. It is Him and nothing else.

Not only does the term “seek first” refer to pre-occupation, it also carries a sense of urgency. The word “seek” is also used to describe what Jesus' parents were doing when they left Him at the temple as a child. What would you do if you lost your child? You would forget everything else and search for your child with the utmost urgency. All non-essentials would be put aside; nothing else would matter. This is how God desires us to serve the Kingdom of God.

If we think God comes first on a priority list, we don't understand discipleship. We shouldn't have a list at all. He is not just first, He is everything. He is at the centre of our lives and we need to let Him dictate everything we do. If we live like this, our priorities become simplified. We will only prioritise what truly matters. Like Jesus, we will live with a clear sense of priorities.

The Art of Planned Neglect

Learn to practise planned neglect. This is the art of learning what to defer for later. It is to intentionally set aside certain things for a period of time to make space for things that are more important. Let's illustrate with a story.

A famous concert violinist was asked about the secret of her success. She revealed that in school, she used to live in a hostel. Each morning she would make her bed, dust her room, wash the dishes and then rush to practice. She found that she was not progressing. She reversed the order. She decided to go for practice first and ignore the chores until later. She practised “planned neglect” and success followed.

What did she do? She put first things first. She lived by priorities. This is planned neglect.

Managing time versus managing energy

The common advice we receive is to “manage our time”. But it is more important to “manage our energy”. We only have a limited amount of energy to use each day; we can’t do everything and anything that comes our way. We must save our energy for things of true importance so we can fulfil God’s purposes in our lives. Time management misses the point. We need to look at life management, which is managing our life for the Kingdom of God.

Five Practices to Help Us Grow Spiritually

Living life with God-centred priorities will make us grow spiritually. There are five things we should prioritise to grow our faith.

1. Private Disciplines practised daily at home

These include the daily disciplines of reading Scripture, prayer, and times of silence and solitude with God.

2. Personal Involvement in our local church

Be involved in a local church. Attend Sunday church services on a regular basis, join a discipleship group, serve in a ministry. These all help us grow deeper in God.

3. Practical Teachings received through active listening

The key word is “active”. Don’t passively listen. Be engaged. Think. Take notes. Process. Commit to application.

4. Pivotal Events to reflect upon to gain wisdom

Reflect and learn from pivotal events. Even if those events are negative, you can still learn from them. Record those reflections in your journal and process pivotal events theocentrically. Ask God to help you apply changes for the future.

5. Providential Relationships that must be valued and nurtured

There are relationships God has placed in our lives that must be valued, nurtured and prioritised. Providential relationships include our families, relatives, communities and friends. Don’t take relationships for granted, especially those with your spiritual family. Appreciate, value and invest in those relationships.

Develop these five practices as our lifestyle choice. It will help us focus and simplify our lives.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
(Romans 8:14)

“Do you live a saturated, overloaded, and fragmented life? Are you pulled around by the nose through appeals to need? Are you frustrated at yourself over the times the best in your life is diverted by the good? Do you long to know the overriding passion and purity of heart of willing one thing? Listen to Jesus of Nazareth; answer His call.”

- Os Guinness

Reflect!

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

Which of the five practices of spiritual growth do you currently practise in your own life?

Which of those do you struggle with the most and why?

If you only had one month left to live, what are some things you'll prioritise?

Discuss!

German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe grasped the importance of priorities. He said, "Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least."

Peter Drucker said, "Do first things first, and second things not at all."

The bible says to number our days:

10 The years of our life are seventy,
or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span is but toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.
11 Who considers the power of your anger,
and your wrath according to the fear of you?
12 So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:10-12)

Since our time on earth is limited, we must learn to live with a greater sense of purpose.

Q1: Read Psalm 90:10-12. What does it mean to "number our days"? Why are our days and time not to be wasted?

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,
16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.
(Ephesians 5:15-16)

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into
such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make
a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.
What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little
time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the
Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

Q2: How does Ephesians 5:15-16 and James 4:13-15 help us understand what it means to make the most of our time?

4 "O LORD, make me know my end
and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!
5 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,

and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah
(Psalm 39:4-5)

Q3: Calculate how many days you have already lived. If God gave you a lifespan of at least 85 years (31,025 days), how many days remaining would you have? If you could re-live your past days, what would be your priorities? What would you change or do differently?

Q4: Who or what is distracting you from making God the first priority in life?

Q5: Explain your understanding of the “art of planned neglect”. Why is it an art?

Q6: Why are we sometimes hesitant to strategically neglect things that aren’t really important? Why do we end up neglecting things that are important?

Q7: How can you practise planned neglect in your life? List some things you’d like to be accountable for over the next two weeks and share with your group.

Q8: Regarding the new commitments you’ve made, is there anything you’d like your group to pray with you about? Share any prayer requests you may have.

Between Sessions

Challenge!

Your time is a precious resource. Once it’s used, it’s gone. Not only do we need to assess how we spend our time, but why we spend our time the way we do. Spending time wisely is important because we will need to give an account to God at the end of our lives for all He has given us.

Take some time over the next two weeks to list out all your priorities. Assess your goals and the things most important to you. Break them down into the following categories:

- Essentials—important but not urgent.
- Emergencies—important and urgent.
- Escapades—not important and not urgent.
- Expectations—not important but urgent.

Then ask yourself:

1. How can I do more of the things that are essential?
2. How can I reduce time spent on escapades?

Memorise!

So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)