



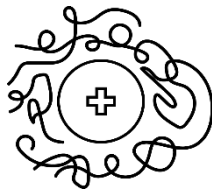
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

SIMPLE LIVING: DECLUTTERING LIFE FOR GOD



MASON GOOD

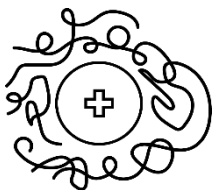
**SIMPLE LIVING:
DECLUTTERING LIFE
FOR GOD**



MASON GOOD

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INTRODUCTION: YOUR NOISY AND CLUTTERED LIFE

I recently sat down after church on a Sunday afternoon, turned on the TV, and discovered that I had the option of watching eight football games on one screen at the same time. (As the chaos theorist from Jurassic Park said: “Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn’t stop to think if they should!”)

I tuned in out of sheer curiosity and was immediately overwhelmed by the experience. Though I had a massive amount of information suddenly available, as I watched eight games happening all at the same time, I quickly realized that I was unable to focus on any of them. There was so much happening that I was numb to it all and unable to focus on any single game in particular. Add to the scene two curious young children asking questions over one another, a toddler playing with a battery-operated toy that seemed to be designed solely to flash bright lights and make as much noise as possible, and a dog barking to go outside... quite the day of rest, indeed!

Ours is a fast-paced and loud culture. We trend towards bigger, better, and quicker. But is it always actually better? I think not, and most know it. Today, we are witnessing corresponding increases in burnout, hopelessness, loneliness, as well as decreasing attention spans, shallower friendships, and a growing sense that we can’t stay on top of it all.

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Simple living offers a way to escape this constant noise and distraction. When we step back and consider how to focus on the truly important things, we begin to see that living a simple life isn't about doing less for the sake of it, but about finding what matters most and giving that our full attention.

Consider all the things in life vying for your time, effort, and energy. Notice how quickly your calendar fills up. How often do you wake up with a to-do list in mind for the day, and yet when you lay your head down, you've barely made a dent in the tasks to be completed? Recently, someone asked me how they could pray for me, and my initial instinct was to reply, "Pray for there to be 28 hours in a day!" Our gut reactions often reveal our hearts, don't they?

Every day you will say "yes" and "no" to certain things that range from the very important to the less important, and even from good, godly things to perhaps sinful temptations. Our lives quickly fill up with stuff. Like water moving and morphing into the shape of whatever container it is in, our time, energy, and efforts are quickly given over to a wide range of suitors, all jockeying for our attention. Like that forgotten closet in the basement that slowly but surely has collected all sorts of items, boxes, and spare knick-knacks... our lives fill up with the clutter of appointments, practices, personal disciplines, dinners, hobbies, and the surprises of life. We clean our homes to make room for the good things that we want and need. In the same way, embracing simple living allows us to create space for the things that truly matter. Living simply is not just about physical decluttering, but also about mentally clearing out distractions that keep us from focusing on what's most important.

The Bible is instructive for us in this matter. God's Word shows us how simple obedience to Jesus as our aim helps us make decisions about what deserves our time, talent, and treasure. It shows us how we can work hard as a response to God's grace while also resting from our labors in anticipation of eternal Sabbath rest in Christ.

This life skill guide aims to offer practical considerations as you seek to navigate everyday questions of what you will spend your life doing. It will help you to narrow your priorities and simplify your life so that you can better serve, worship, and follow your Savior. Minimalist living is about

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more than just getting rid of physical possessions; it's about focusing on the spiritual simplicity that comes when we place God's Kingdom first. By embracing a simple lifestyle, we can create a life that honors God, focused on His will rather than the distractions of this world.

At its root, this call to simple living is not about a cultural response or even a means to greater personal happiness. This isn't life advice to better achieve your goals through a streamlined life. It's about following Christ as Savior. He calls us to Himself and then enlists us in His service. He wants all our affections and devotion.

What really matters? What is truly important? Gaining clarity on those questions allows us to declutter our mental closets and set our minds on things above. Living a more simple life is about aligning our focus with God's will, so we can live with purpose, clarity, and peace. This guide will help you to focus your life as you consider these questions yourself and work through this material with a friend

Reflection Questions:

1. What is "noisy" in your life right now? What seems to require much of your time, effort, and mental load? What do you think about when you lie down at night?
2. What is "cluttered" in your life right now? What relationships, responsibilities, or troubles seem to get in the way or have no specific "spot" in your life?

1

THE BALANCE OF FOCUS AND HARD WORK

This topic is more nuanced than merely “Do less!” or “Do more!” De-cluttering your own house is not only about getting rid of stuff you no longer need; It’s about making room for the good things that you do need. The picture we get in Scripture of those seeking to follow Jesus in their lives is one of hard work for the Kingdom with simultaneous contentment in the finished work of Christ on their behalf. The discipline of living simply is growing in our ability to say “no” to unhelpful things and say “yes” to the good things of God.

Living a simple life is not about retreating from responsibilities, but rather about simplifying what is important and focusing on what truly matters. This is the balance that we need in order to faithfully follow Christ.

Two helpful passages to hold together as we seek to grow in living simply are 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:10. Both passages were written by the Apostle Paul. Together, they give us a framework to aim for in our own lives.

Aspire To Live a Quiet Life

First, consider the exhortation from Paul for living as Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. While there is plenty of practical encouragement for us throughout the passage, for our purposes, we are interested particularly in verse 11: “...and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you...”

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In some ways, that sentence sounds like it belongs to a bygone age. Simpler times. And yet these are commands from God's Word for every Christian today. Let's consider each of the three commands briefly.

Second, we should aspire to live a simple life. What a fitting exhortation for our day and age! Consider all the ways that our social media era amplifies the "volume" of life. We are told that other people must know every "status" of our lives: where we've been, who we were with, what food we ate, what we did, etc. The unholy matrimony of smartphones with a 24-hour news cycle has meant that we are constantly plugged in and available for contact. This has placed a burden on face-to-face, one-on-one relationships (The next time you are getting coffee with a friend, take your phone off the table and see if you don't have a better conversation.) But further, we have access to every tragedy, every scandal, every breaking news story in real time. The phone in your pocket has given you the ability to hear the screams of the world. You were not meant to shoulder all that pain all at once.

Living simply doesn't mean you must stick your head in the sand and wall yourself off from the world. In fact, we should aim to be informed citizens who desire to know what is going on around us. After all, there is much to be praying about in such a troubled world. But if you were honest, you could admit that much of your mental clutter comes from the constant dopamine drip of your online life. Our relational "Fear of Missing Out" drives us to constantly remain online lest we miss the next juicy gossip about someone we may or may not even know in real life.

To live a simple lifestyle means we have our eyes on our own cares and concerns. It means we desire to put our own houses in good and proper order. We should be more concerned with the plank in our own eye than the speck in our brother's (Matt. 7:3-5).

The next command will apply similarly to us today: mind your own affairs. The reality is that we cannot solve all the world's problems. We cannot address every need. You are not the Savior of the world. By God's grace, we worship the true Savior. Simple living teaches us to focus on what is in our control and trust God with the rest. If we are to ask how to live a simple life, it begins with aligning our priorities to focus on God's will, rather than

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the overwhelming demands of the world. It means intentionally letting go of distractions that pull us away from our God-given responsibilities.

Faithfulness means every day we aim to make Christ-honoring decisions, both in big things and in small, and trust the Lord with the results. We all have specific responsibilities that the Lord has entrusted to us. One area where we accumulate mental clutter is by neglecting the good things God has before us to pursue wrong or sinful things instead. What would Jesus have you do today? Do that as the Holy Spirit leads you, then take the same aim tomorrow. You can't solve every problem, but you can aim for faithfulness in the things God has set before you.

Finally, we are instructed to work with our hands. As it pertains to our mental lives, this is a command to build up rather than tear down and destroy. As God's people, we follow Him and seek to build up, create, and unite. The Bible speaks into our cultural moment. In a world that loves to tear down, what better way to push back against the darkness than to build up. Simple faith allows us to focus on the task at hand and find joy in the work God has given us, without being overwhelmed by the pressures of worldly success. Be faithful in relationships and committed in marriage. Have kids, join a local church, start a business, or work to create beautiful things. Christians can enjoy and celebrate the beauty of God's creation and design. Such is life in the Kingdom of God, and it is a reflection of Biblical simplicity - living with a focus on God's priorities rather than worldly distractions.

Taken together, these commands give us a picture of quiet faithfulness as a disciple of Christ. We are not the all-knowing, all-powerful Savior of the world... Jesus is! Though we certainly can have concern for brokenness, we should seek to help as we are able and pray for the situations we see and hear about around us. How to live a simple Christian life is a question we must ask ourselves each day. It's about surrendering the overwhelming complexity of the world and choosing to focus on the simple yet profound teachings of Christ. We ought also to trust that God is sovereign. He has done something about our great need. This leads us to be faithful in the things the Lord has put in our hands, trusting Him with the results. He is the one who bids all who labor and are heavy-laden to come to Him for Rest.

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Work Hard, By God's Grace

Now, consider the message of 1 Corinthians 15. The context is that Paul was writing to defend his work and ministry against those who were seeking to discredit him. In verse 3, he reminds us of what is most important to our faith: that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and was raised in accordance with the Scriptures. The Risen Christ then appeared to several of his followers. He appeared to Paul “last of all”, as Paul was not an original follower of Christ but was instead “untimely born.” Paul says he is the least of the apostles because he persecuted the church of God before his conversion. Now look at verse 10. Despite the apparent weakness and deficiency of Paul’s spiritual resume, he holds up the grace of God upon his life that spurred him on in life and ministry: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Paul is obviously a huge proponent of God’s free grace and mercy. And yet it is that very notion of grace that drives him on to “work harder” than any of the other apostles for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom. Consider what this teaches us about work and productivity. Living simply does not mean that we retire to a cabin by the lake and await our Lord’s Second Coming. Rather, grace spurs us on to work hard for Christ and his Kingdom. It urges us to narrow our priorities and simplify our mission to align with the commands of Christ rather than our own personal desires.

Paul is working as hard as he possibly can, by the Spirit’s power, because his singular desire is the name and fame of Jesus Christ, his Savior. Perhaps we feel like we have too much on our plates because we are divided in our devotion to Christ on the one hand, and our own kingdoms on the other. That certainly brings many more concerns to the mix. Simple living helps us to focus on what matters most—our relationship with Christ—so we can free ourselves from the unnecessary burdens of worldly distractions.

Paul’s example is instructive on this point. Because he had been so deeply impacted and changed by God’s grace, he was able to fearlessly face the life God had for him. He had such freedom, peace, and confidence, come what may, because he was secure in Christ. Simple living enables us to

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embrace that same peace, focusing on the eternal rather than the temporary, trusting that God will guide us through each challenge.

Take a few moments and consider what your life would be like if you believed that everything God has promised you is true. If you were safe and secure in Christ forever, how would that give you the boldness to face tomorrow's challenges? If you believed that the moment you closed your eyes for the last time on earth, you would wake up in the New Heavens and the New Earth, how would that impact your values? Your decisions? Your relationships?

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you tend to be lazy or an overachiever? What would God's Word say to someone struggling in either direction?
2. How does the combination of 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:10 help us understand the value of focused, simple living as Christians? How does God's Truth lead you to "narrow" your focus in your own life?
3. What other scripture passages and promises come to mind to inform our thinking on this topic?

2

THE ROOT OF SIMPLICITY

At this point, we should pause and take stock of our own lives. What are the things that are vying for your time, effort, and mental energy? If you said “yes” to every request made of you or all the things you yourself wanted to pursue, how much extra time in your day would that require?

Further, what do you spend most of your time thinking about? When your mind wanders, what does it focus on? Those things are part of this equation as well. There are times when small problems or concerns consume disproportionately large amounts of our mental capacity. That puts strain on the other concerns we are carrying.

We experience this in a time and culture that repeatedly tells us we need to do more, be better, and produce more. We are judged and evaluated based on what we can do and how much we can achieve. Simple living offers us a different approach: it helps us declutter our minds by focusing on the essentials, freeing us from the pressure to constantly do more and be more.

The gospel antidote to our market-driven culture is the truth that we are loved, forgiven, accepted, and saved by the finished work of Jesus Christ alone. When Jesus said, “It is finished,” he meant it! Consider what that amazing truth means for your life (and not only for your eternal destiny but even your present life right now). Apart from Christ, we are aimless in life. It’s easy to accumulate loads of mental “stuff” if you aren’t secure in your future, let alone the present. Like the father who keeps a garage full of random items just in case he might need that perfect piece of wood someday... if you are not secure in Christ, you will try to hold on to more than you can handle. Simple living teaches us that we can let go of the

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excess, finding peace in what truly matters. Apart from Jesus, we cannot have confidence in this life.

So what is a simple life? It is not about removing everything, but about focusing on the things that bring us closer to God. By embracing simple living, we align ourselves with the heart of the gospel: freeing ourselves from unnecessary distractions and focusing on the eternal promises of Christ.

Compare that problematic situation to the rock-solid trust a Christian can have in their daily life. Because our future is secure in Christ, and we no longer seek to earn our acceptance before God or pay Him back for what He's given us, we can focus on the things in life that matter. That's certainly easier said than done. But when we think about living simply for God, it means we have thrown out the low-value, high-energy-cost features of our lives, and can instead invest more heavily in the eternal, spiritual things that God has for us.

Satisfaction

One of the gifts God gives to His people is a settled confidence in who we are before Him. Instead of being tossed every direction by the winds of culture and circumstance, we can have rooted confidence in what Jesus has done for us. That's what we mean by being satisfied in Christ. Simple living is a key to finding that settled confidence, as it helps us focus on the eternal truths that bring peace and clarity to our lives.

Consider all the ways you've been dissatisfied in your life: frustrations with work, family, or relationships. The essence of the "mid-life crisis" is that people reach a certain point in their lives and realize it hasn't gone the way that they imagined. When our hopes are stored up in the fragile things of this world, it's easy to become frustrated when those people and things invariably let us down and disappoint us.

Trusting in Christ calls us out from the rat-races of the world. Before Jesus, we all need certain things from the people around us: acceptance, security, love, etc. In Christ, we gain all those things that our souls long for. That, in turn, brings great freedom to our lives. Previously, you might have been approaching relationships with a subconscious need to be accepted. Once you accept Christ, you will begin to approach friendships in a much

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freer way. Instead of needing love and security from your spouse, you can find that in Jesus, your Savior. And then any love and security your spouse can give you is a blessing on top of what you already have in Jesus. Simple living helps us let go of the unnecessary pressures of seeking validation and acceptance from others, allowing us to live in the freedom of Christ's love.

Another word for this reality is the word contentment. It means we are at ease. We are put together. Settled. It's an amazing gift that Christ gives to his people.

Grab a Bible and take a few minutes to read and consider Isaiah 7. Israel was at war, and their enemies had joined forces against it. In verse 2, we read that, "the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." Fear. Confusion. Worry about an unknown future. God speaks to reassure and remind His people that it does not matter who is on the other side of the battle lines. What makes the difference is whether or not we have trusted in God. He is what makes the difference. At the end of God's speech in verse 9, He reminds His people, "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all."

Consider the contrast. When we are not content in God, our souls shake like trees in the wind, being tossed to and fro by the strong winds of change. But for the one in Christ, you can be firm in Him. Simple living encourages us to rest in that firm foundation, free from the chaos and confusion that the world throws at us.

Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs wrote a classic treatise on the topic called "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment." He writes, "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposition in every condition." A Christian can stand firm in Christ, through faith, come what may, because we have a settled contentment and satisfaction in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.

If our cluttered minds come about in part because of a general discontentment with our lives, how amazing it is that we can be firm because of Jesus. The Lord, in His wisdom and kindness, gives and takes

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away, and for those in Christ, we can trust that God's fatherly disposition towards us has not changed despite our present circumstances.

This is where "Christian minimalism" truly shines. By simplifying life and focusing on Christ, we can eliminate distractions and experience the fullness of contentment in Him. Simplifying life in this way leads us to focus on what is eternal, not the temporary things that can overwhelm us.

Rest, Anxiety, and Human Limits

Psychological studies are beginning to show what we all instinctively know and what the Bible has told us for thousands of years-the human body needs rest. When we press on and continue to work without stopping, it not only wears us out, but the quality of our work also begins to diminish. Much of the complexity in our lives stems from sheer exhaustion due to being over-extended. We are finite creatures, and our Creator has told us that we should rest from our labors. Notice again the balance here. We ought to work diligently at the tasks God has for us. We must also take time, specifically one day a week, to rest from that work. The Lord's Day is meant to remind us of the greatness of our Savior. That's why we worship Him as His people.

Another overlooked but deeply practical tool that the Lord has given us towards this end is sleep. When you are troubled in life, one of the first questions you should consider is whether you are sleeping enough. Hebrews 4 promises us that there yet remains an eternal Sabbath Rest for the people of God, to be ushered in by Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. We can rest today, in Christ, as a foretaste of that Heavenly Rest that is yet to come. The more we keep our eyes on Jesus and focus on the things of God, the less we will turn to the troubles and concerns of the world that we are powerless to fix.

God commands His people to pursue the rest they were created for, not merely because our work is done. We see that even in Jesus' own life and earthly ministry. In Mark 6:31, we read, "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." That's a picture of Jesus prioritizing rest and focus to more effectively pursue His mission. Being too busy to rest and honor the Lord's Day is a big clue that your life is too

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noisy and cluttered to be effective in ministry. Though we worship a God that never tires or sleeps, we do need those things.

In Matthew 6:25-34, in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches His people not to be anxious. That's the first time we've used that word in this life skill guide, but what a good word for the clutter in our minds. We become anxious when our concerns grow beyond the immediate and concrete to extend to the realm of hypothetical possibilities. Jesus tells His people, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Consider what Paul writes in Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

How refreshing that the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, can guard our hearts and minds against the noise of our lives. When we rest in Jesus, it causes us to focus on Him. It reminds us that though we have trials and troubles in this world, not every problem is an emergency. Some problems require our immediate attention today, but many of the things that take up space in our minds are problems "for tomorrow." That isn't mere procrastination. It's the truth that many conversations, emails, phone calls, or household chores can wait until you can give them their due attention.

If decluttering that closet in the basement is about making room and organizing so that you have a better handle on the space, simplifying your life for God means having a clear understanding of what is urgent and important now, versus what can be just as easily dealt with down the road. It means being content in Christ, so that we can rest in Him.

Reflection Questions:

1. What areas of your life are unsettled/restless? Does contentment in Christ seem like a foreign concept to you? What would it be like if you were satisfied in the finished work of Christ?

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2. What do you “need” from various relationships in your life? What do you do when those people aren’t able to deliver in those areas?
3. What does rest look like in your life? Is Sunday a day of chaos or rest? What practical changes could you make to honor the command of Christ while also taking real rest from your labors?
4. What are you anxious about right now? Which of those things need immediate attention, and which ones can wait? What disciplines could you employ to spread out your workload in a more organized way rather than having everything on your desk at once?

3

THE FRUIT OF SIMPLICITY

Much of our work up to this point has been about clearing out space and spreading out our workloads. One keyword for this skill guide is the word “focus.” We make room in our minds and our lives for the good things of God. In this section, we’ll return to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 to focus on what we should be seeking in life. Simplicity brings clarity.

Seek First the Kingdom of God

Look again at Matthew 6:25-33. This is Jesus teaching his disciples not to be anxious. We previously discussed the negative side of the command, “Don’t be anxious...” There is a positive element as well. In verses 31-33, Jesus says, “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

“Gentiles” is the stand-in term for unbelievers here. They were seeking solutions to their physical problems in the present world. They were concerned only with immediate needs. It’s a cluttered life. It’s not that questions of what we’ll eat or what we’ll wear don’t matter. Your Heavenly Father knows that you need these things already, and He provides for His people. Those questions are going to get sorted out. Instead, Jesus calls us to seek FIRST the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The result is that “all these things will be added to you.” That is, the lower-tier concerns will take care of themselves when our focus is on more important things.

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What is a simple life? A life focused on seeking God's Kingdom first, rather than the endless demands of the world. Living simply allows us to prioritize what truly matters, avoiding unnecessary distractions.

It's like the story of Peter walking on the water in Matthew 14. When Peter's gaze is on his Savior, he walks on the water by the power of Jesus. It is only when he looks down and wonders about his own performance that he begins to sink. If our focus is so limited that we are constantly evaluating how we are doing (Are we enough? Have we done enough?), then we will be troubled. But if our eyes are fixed on Jesus, then we can lay aside every weight and actually run the race set before us (Heb. 12:2).

It's easy enough to say that we are seeking the Kingdom of God first in our lives. Actually doing it can be difficult in practice. But such is the life of faith. You can look at a chair and talk all you want about its ability to hold you up. You can cite its factory information about weight capacity or the metal it was made with. You haven't trusted it until you sit down and put your weight on the chair. Genuine belief must give way to action.

We should seek first the Kingdom of God, not just by way of our words, but with our actions, our thoughts, and our affections. That crucial mark of a simple Christian then allows us to properly order the other facets of our lives.

Ask What Is Most Important

The Biblical story of Mary and Martha is instructive for us as we seek to prioritize our lives. This comes from Luke 10:

Now, as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to Him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42).

Another picture of a cluttered life, "...you are anxious and troubled about many things." Martha's concerns may have been good. But she wasn't able

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to prioritize and focus on what was most important, which was being with Jesus. Martha was so busy with life's tasks that she was distracted from the person she desperately needed to hear from and be with.

This story resonates with us because we all want to be like Mary, but so often we feel like Martha.

- “The to-do list is just too long.”
- “The dishes aren’t going to wash themselves.”
- “How will my work get done?”
- “The weeds are overtaking the garden.”
- “What’s for dinner?”

The list goes on and on. We don’t know how the story would have played out if Martha had been like Mary from the start. She certainly would have been less distracted and anxious. I imagine the chores would have still gotten done. Perhaps Jesus would have even offered to help.

When we are so focused on the immediate, our time can be consumed, leaving us unable to consider longer-lasting things. Jesus is long-lasting. He is eternal. That means we must prioritize our relationship with Him. As Isaiah wrote, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on Him while He is near.” (Isa. 55:6)

Identify Idols

The Bible uses the term “idol” for anything besides God that we treat as a god. We don’t typically use that language ourselves, but our lives and our affections tell the story of what we functionally worship. Few would outright say that they worship their jobs or their children, but their lives say they do.

Many of the things that clutter our lives are “good” things. But when we give them undue weight and significance, they end up taking up more space than they deserve. Your job is a gift from God. Your family is a gift from God. Your children, your spouse, your friends, etc., are gifts from God. We should understand our responsibility to each of those areas of life. Part of that equation is understanding that our primary responsibility is to worship God Himself and not others.

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Consider the words of Jesus in Luke 8:19-21, “Then His mother and His brothers came to Him, but they could not reach Him because of the crowd. And He was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.’ But He answered them, ‘My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.’”

Jesus is not being cruel or uncaring towards His earthly family. He is showing us that His primary devotion is to God, followed by “those who hear the word of God and do it,” and finally to His earthly family members. If He had given priority to His brothers in this situation, it would have mixed up God’s design. Jesus certainly cared for them, but He had a higher connection to those who would be united to Him by faith. (No doubt these early interactions with His brothers became part of their testimonies as they later understood what it meant to trust in Jesus as Lord and follow Him as eternal, spiritual brothers.)

When we treat the good things in our lives as gods, it confuses us, clutters our minds, and puts a burden on the people around us that they cannot fulfill. We honor God and can better love and serve the people around us when we prioritize God first.

Decluttering your life will mean clearing the idols off the shelves so that you can worship and follow the One True God. Spiritual simplicity calls us to place God above all else and live in a way that is uncluttered by unnecessary distractions.

Reflection Questions:

1. How are you seeking first the Kingdom of God in your life? Are there areas of your life that are unaffected by the Gospel of Jesus? What would it look like to submit that area of your life to Jesus?
2. In what ways are you focused on your own performance instead of living in response to God’s grace? What could you change to worry less about “how you are doing” and instead rest in the finished work of Christ? What difference would that make?
3. What “idols” or counterfeit gods are vying for your affections and worship? How do those things clutter your life? What would it look like for you to throw them out?

4

PRACTICING SIMPLICITY

What are the kinds of things we seek to remove as we declutter our lives to live for God? This final section seeks to start you down several practical paths to think upon in order to give various elements of your life their proper weight and attention. The call to simple living is not just about removing clutter; it's about creating space for what truly matters in life and faith.

Consider What You Are Specifically Responsible For

Certain tasks in life are general and anyone can do them. There are other things in your life that only you can accomplish. They are your unique responsibility. You are your child's parent. You are your spouse's only spouse. If you have a job, that job comes with certain responsibilities that you personally are expected to perform.

Consider again the helpful metaphor of how household chores illustrate decluttering our very lives. There are a number of things that must be regularly taken care of around your home or apartment. Who is responsible for each of those things? Very rarely can one person do everything that is required to maintain their home. Instead, there is a delegation of labor, with different people each responsible for their area, and if everyone does their job, it all gets done.

Now apply that to your life. What are the things that you specifically are being asked to do by your spouse, by your employer, or by God? You should seek to do those things faithfully. Then you can look around to see where else you may be able to help. If you try to take on more than you are able, likely, you will not be able to complete the tasks at all, or if you can, the quality of your work will suffer because you are overextended.

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This is where simplifying life becomes key. By focusing on your primary responsibilities, you make space for living a simple Christian life that aligns with God's priorities.

Living simply means being mindful of what we truly need versus what the world says we need. Minimalist living encourages us to prioritize and focus on what adds value to our lives.

Pull out your Bible and consider Jesus' parable of the talents from Matthew 25:14-30. The men with five and two talents used what they had been given and were responsible for them. They produced more based on what they received. The man who only received one talent hid it away and produced nothing. He was fearful, not only of his master, but also at the prospect of losing what little he had been entrusted with. The master says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" to the first two men who stewarded their gifts well. But the master calls the third man wicked and slothful and takes away his single talent anyway.

God has entrusted each of us with various gifts and responsibilities. Our job is not to question Him, challenge Him, or even to ask for more... but to be faithful with what we've been given. Knowing that we are where God desires us to be, doing what God desires us to do, brings great comfort and peace to our lives. This is the essence of Christian simplicity-finding peace in doing the tasks God has assigned to us, without unnecessary distractions or worry.

You are not responsible before the Lord for the choices of the people around you. You are responsible for what God has given specifically to you. Therefore, it's important to assess what those specific responsibilities are, and then to ask how you might honor Christ in those various callings. Simplicity as a spiritual discipline means making space for what truly matters, both in work and in worship.

The Productivity Matrix

One tool we can use to help bring focus to our lives is to consider whether something is urgent or not, or important or not. That creates a 2x2 grid, and we can approach each quadrant with different strategies.

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- **Urgent + Important:** These are the most important tasks in your life. You should do them and do them well. These are the items that require the most of your attention and mental energy. Make a plan to complete or honor these responsibilities.
- **Not Urgent + Important:** These also require your attention, but they can be “back-burner” items. You don’t want to forget about them, but you complete them down the road. Important to note: if these issues aren’t taken care of, they could shift into urgent after some time.
- **Urgent + Not Important:** This is the type of thing you could ask for help with or even delegate to someone else. It’s something that requires immediate attention, but you don’t specifically need to be involved. These are often the items that create clutter in our minds. We are worried about something right in front of us that doesn’t ultimately matter.
- **Not Urgent + Not Important:** This is the category of things we want to throw out. They aren’t important. You won’t even think about them or remember them next year. We should treat these things as such. They do not require or deserve much of your time, effort, or stress. And yet these are the items that take up so much space on our mental shelves.

Take some time, get a piece of paper and a pen, and work out this matrix for yourself. You can fill it with specific tasks and even general responsibilities. The goal is to arrange your calendar and thought life to spend less time on the Not Urgent/Not Important category, allowing most of your effort to focus on the Urgent/Important stuff.

The biblical definition of simplicity emphasizes the importance of seeking God’s will in the everyday tasks of life. In fact, minimalism and Christianity go hand in hand when we clear away distractions and focus on God’s priorities. By simplifying our lives, we align ourselves more closely with His purpose, shedding unnecessary burdens and allowing our hearts and minds to be fully devoted to what truly matters in His Kingdom.

Generous Living as a Response to God’s Grace

Remember the point of cleaning out that closet in the basement? The impetus for the work often lies in the fact that you are creating space for other things. Decluttering our lives is about making space for God and

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godly living. When we focus our priorities on the things that truly matter, it creates space to love, serve, and give like never before. Consider how everything we've talked about up to this point gives way to generous living as a response to God's grace.

If you are satisfied in Christ, you are no longer compelled to "take" from the people around you. Instead, you are free to ask, "What do you need?" or "How can I help?" It allows you to be thankful for everything you have from your Heavenly Father's hand, which creates a giving spirit within you. You can be open-handed with your time, your talent, and your treasure. All of that is a gift from God, by His grace. It gives you the space to faithfully give your best effort when you can say "Yes." It also allows you to know your limits in time and ability, such that you don't feel guilty when you say "No."

When our lives are cluttered, we might be unsure of what is truly important. Perhaps you should hold onto everything equally because you are unsure of what is valuable. When you trust in Christ and give Him the priority in your life, it allows you to view everything else as secondary. That loosens your grip on the fading things of the world. They might be good things. You might enjoy them as the gifts they are. But if the Lord would take them away or give them to someone else, you will be untroubled with that because you are content in Christ.

This is what Jesus says in Luke 6:32-36 during His "Sermon on the Plain"- "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

This is the generous way of Christ. God is simple. He will repay everyone for their deeds. When we are free in Christ, it opens us up to love and to give out of the abundance of what Christ has given to us. It is a deeply Christian simplicity to love your enemies and do good to them; to lend,

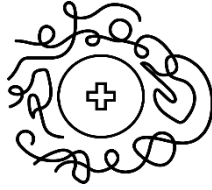
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expecting nothing in return. The words of Jesus make no sense to an unbelieving world that is out for itself first and foremost. For those who know Jesus' love and grace, they now stand on a firm foundation forever accepted by God and welcomed into His family forever.

A decluttered life gives you space and freedom in which you can give to others the time, talent, and treasures that you no longer need to serve yourself. That generosity shines the light of the Gospel throughout the darkness of our world.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are the most important things in your life that you are specifically responsible for? Do you give enough time and thought to faithfully carry out those responsibilities? What are you neglecting and why?
2. Having spent some time with the Productivity Matrix, what surprised you about the exercise? What are some things you can delegate or remove from your weekly schedule and responsibilities?
3. Are you able to live generously not only with your money, but even with your time and the gifts God has given you? What worries or hindrances keep you from being generous in your daily life?



CONCLUSION

If you have ever helped your grandparents or an elderly church member move, you know that we can acquire so much over the course of time. We are often surprised by that box in the closet that hasn't been opened in decades, and we're unsure of what is even in it anymore.

The same is true in our lives. We naturally acquire tasks, burdens, stressors, and cares just by virtue of living our lives. We have a web of relationships, responsibilities, and dreams we hope to accomplish. We might be trying to do too much, trying to accomplish more than we are able, or trying to spin too many plates at once. We have referred to this as "clutter." If we desire to honor God, to know him and make him known, then we must be focused on him. This life skill guide certainly has practical help and life advice. But its purpose has not been merely to increase your personal happiness, or even because "simplicity" is all the rage in our culture. We should do this because we want to worship and follow Jesus. Like Mary, we should desire what is best, to know and be known by Jesus our Lord, and to follow Him in our lives.

Jeremiah Burroughs wrote, "If you would get a contented life, do not grasp too much of the world, do not take in more of the business of the world than God calls you to." That's certainly easier said than done! But by God's grace, he calls us into a life of peace, contentment, and satisfaction with Him. When you work to simplify your life for the sake of Christ, it frees you up to faithfully do all that he has called you to do.



Mason and Valerie Good have two children, Judah and Eliza. Mason is a graduate of Waverly High School and The Ohio State University. He has a Master of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary in pastoral ministry. Mason is passionate about discipleship and the local church and looks forward to a lifetime of ministry.

