

# SIMPLICITY

Simplicity - The inward reality of single-hearted focus upon God and his kingdom, which results in an outward lifestyle of modesty, openness, and unpretentiousness and which disciplines our hunger for status, glamour, and luxury.

*For we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it (1 Timothy 6:7).*

Simplicity for spiritual formation is putting our love and energies into God rather than into material goods and the pursuit of social status. An inward focus on God will lead to simplicity in our outward lifestyle — in the way we speak, spend money, dress, and share what we have.

Throughout the Bible we see warnings about the accumulation of wealth and the oppression of the poor. Proverbs 11:28 warns us that the person who trusts in riches will wither. In the New Testament, Jesus spoke more about economics than any other issue. He announced that the poor were blessed and that the rich had already received their consolation (Luke 6:20, 24). He told his listeners that no servant could serve both God and mammon (Luke 16:13).

The message is clear and consistent: wealth does not bring security or happiness. Only God can do that. Instead of seeking to amass wealth and social status we should be aware that our treasure, the only lasting thing about this life, is our relationship with God and life in community.

So how do we practice simplicity? First and most important, we seek the kingdom of God. All other priorities will fall into place when we deliberately place herself under God's reign. Simplicity is the result.

\*These devotionals were taken from *A Year with God: Living Out the Spiritual Disciplines*, edited by Richard Foster and Julia Roller, Harper Collins Publisher, 2009. Used with permission.

DAY 1 / MARCH 24

# THE LOVER OF MONEY

*The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 5:10).*

Many people today try to find their satisfaction in life by making a lot of money. The Teacher, the narrator of Ecclesiastes, has gone before us and tells us that wealth in itself does not bring contentment. Money is not the source of ultimate contentment — or ultimate meaning. Those who love money will never have enough, and they will wear themselves out before they ever come close to being satisfied.

The Teacher wrote that we will not be satisfied if we love money, and Paul advised Timothy that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Yet most of us tend to agree with the American tycoon John D. Rockefeller, who when reportedly asked how much money was enough, replied, “Just a little more.”

Perhaps we feel because we do not spend a great deal of money that we live in simplicity. But hoarding money can be just as challenging a problem spiritually. Simplicity is about breaking the hold money has on us, not necessarily saving more or spending less. In what direction — spending her hoarding — does money hold allure for you? What can you do to change the pattern?

## STORING UP TREASURES

*And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:15-21)*

*We often consider this story in the light of material possessions — too many cars, too many TVs, too many clothes, too big a house, too much in the bank — since that was certainly the rich man’s problem. But Jesus’ comment at the end does not specify money or possessions: “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”*

*We might consider friendships or children or physical health to be our greatest possessions. You might even store up experiences and live for them, rather than for God. We can hoard what we have learned and never share with others who are struggling. Our richness should be in God himself, not in the ways we enjoy worshiping him.*

*Simplicity is not only about our attitude toward material goods. It is easy to become too insular in our focus on a particular Spiritual Discipline or to feel secretly superior about some spiritual practice we have done successfully. What is your greatest possession? Is there a spiritual treasure in your life that you are hoarding or becoming prideful about?*

DAY 3 / MARCH 26

## BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS

*As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life (1 Timothy 6:17-19).*

Not all of the earliest Christians were poor. Note that the rich are instructed last, after more pressing concerns for the most vulnerable are addressed — the first to be last (Matthew 20:16). From those to whom much is been given much will be required (Luke 12:48).

Our full, affluent churches must admit that riches are not spiritually neutral. Scripture is clear that those with riches are in a vulnerable position as far as their souls are concerned (Matthew 19:24). Money is a spiritual issue. Spiritual formation and renovation for those who have material goods means quite specific responsibilities — “They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share.”

Most of us qualify as rich by biblical standards. We have enough to eat and clothe ourselves; we have a roof over our head. Jesus tells us in Luke 12:48, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.” If you are “rich” in the present age, how well are you meeting the guidelines set out in the last verse above? How has your practices during Lent affected your attitude? How could you do better?

DAY 4 / MARCH 27

## GIVING TO EVERYONE

*From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again (Luke 6:29-30).*

Part of living a lifestyle simplicity is recognizing when possessions become too important in our lives. If we find ourselves becoming too attached to something, the best course is to give it away. In other words, consider whether there is a material possession in your life that is starting to assume too prominent a place in your heart. Give it to a thrift organization or to someone you know who could use it.

If you cannot think of one thing in particular, sort through some of your possessions — clothes, books, toys, kitchen appliances, and challenge yourself to give some away. Focusing on the needs of others will help focus your heart upon God and his kingdom. Jesus said, *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these were members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).*

DAY 5 / MARCH 28

## DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever (1 John 2:15-17).*

There is no place for complacency. It is easy to become self-centered and drawn away from God by the glamorous sensuality, status, and riches, even though these things will not last. In contrast, those who remain on a pilgrimage with God will live forever. The author reminds us we must choose; we can have only one master.

A.W. Tozer, in his book, *The Pursuit of God*, shares the following prayer:

*Father, I want to know Thee, but my cowardly heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I've cherish so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival. Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus' name. Amen. (Page 115).*

DAY 6 / MARCH 29

## TREASURES ON EARTH

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

*“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6:19-21, 24).*

Jesus urges the disciples not to store up resources on earth, but rather in heaven. His point relates to what we place our trust in and where our security lies. Jesus stresses that two masters, God and money, cannot both be served. In light of this passage, it is ironic that U. S. currency says, “In God we trust.”

Remind yourself of the finite nature of your possessions.

*Father God, help me to break my addiction to material things. Help me to identify and rid myself of those things that are keeping me from fully serving you — not only the goods, but my vanity, my pride, my selfish ambition. Teach me what true simplicity is. In your name I pray. Amen.*

DAY 7 / MARCH 30

## CONTENT WITH WHATEVER I HAVE

*I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress (Philippians 4:10-14).*

One of the lessons of spiritual maturity is the secret of living well, whatever our means. Paul shares this lesson as he thanks the Philippians for their financial support. Although he is grateful for their generosity, Paul wants the Church to know that in Christ he can be satisfied with any standard of living, even in prison.

In defining simplicity, Richard Foster writes that it is “an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.” According to Paul, what is the outward reality? After your Lenten experience of practicing simplicity, how close are you to experiencing it in your life? What can you do to encourage it?

*Lord, please continue to teach me to be content with whatever I have. Help me to experience a true simplicity that comes from placing my trust only in you. In your name I pray. Amen.*