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## The Discipline of Simplicity



**Part 17** (030525AM)

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- Has life become a blur?
- Have you reached the point that you wished there were more hours each day?
- Have the lists and piles of unfinished tasks started to bury you?
- Are your quiet moments often haunted by thoughts of unreturned calls, unanswered letters, unfixed problems, and undone deeds?
- Has the immensity of life started to make you feel helpless?

All of these may be indicators of the lack of Biblical Simplicity. Simplicity means something that is simple, easy to grasp and do, non-complex.

***Biblical Simplicity is reordering our priorities back to what God has asked us to do.***

Listen to what one gifted writer has written –

- *“When<sup>[1]</sup> we stop to evaluate, we realize that our dilemma goes deeper than shortage of time; it is basically the problem of priorities. Hard work does not hurt us. We all know what it is to go full speed for long hours, totally involved in an important task. The resulting weariness is matched by a sense of achievement and joy.*
- *Not hard work, but doubt and misgiving produce anxiety as we review a month or year and become oppressed by the pile of unfinished tasks. We sense uneasily that we may have failed to do the important.*
- *The winds of other people's demands have driven us onto a reef of frustration. We confess, quite apart from our sins, 'We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.'*
- *Over the years the greatest continuing struggle in the Christian life is the effort to make adequate time for daily waiting on God, weekly inventory, and monthly planning. Since this time for receiving marching orders is so important, Satan will do everything he can to squeeze it out. Yet we know from experience that only by this means can we escape the tyranny of the urgent. This is how Jesus succeeded.*
- *Jesus did not finish all the urgent tasks in Israel or all the things He would have liked to do, but He did finish the work which God gave Him to do.*
- *The only alternative to frustration is to be sure that we are doing what God wants. Nothing substitutes for knowing that this day, this hour, in this place we are doing the will of the Father.”*

What is the answer to the anxiety of the unfinished life? The answer is the Discipline of Simplicity.

***Biblical Simplicity is reordering our priorities back to what God has asked us to do.***

The place to start as always is to listen to God's Word. Turn with me to Matthew 6.33.

Please stand as we read this and then pray.

We have been traveling through the Scriptures learning about the Disciplines or choices godly believers make to maximize their spiritual lives. This morning we come to the Discipline of Simplicity.

Jesus summarizes this Biblical discipline of Simplicity in the Sermon on the Mount when He commanded us to “seek FIRST the Kingdom of God.” With simple words, as clear as possible, Jesus says this is what I want you to do – and uses a present active imperative command when He says – “seek”. That sounds simple and clear to me, doesn't it?

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Part: 1	The Discipline of Scripture Reading

To the New Testament era reader it sounded like this:

- ZETEO: to seek in order to find; to seek a thing; to seek [in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to enquire into; to seek after, seek for, aim at, strive after; to seek by requiring or demanding; to crave, demand something from someone.
- PROTON: first in time or place in any succession of things or persons; first in rank, influence, honor; chief; principal; first, at the first.

Jesus calls to us, commanding us to order our lives with Him FIRST in order, with Him FIRST in time, with Him FIRST in rank, and with Him FIRST in place. Can you say that is how things are in your life this morning? Or do you need to reorder your priorities?

Turn back to Psalm 27.4. This is how David obeyed the Lord:

**Psalm 27:4** One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple.

Paul also clearly simplified his life. Listen to **Philippians 3:13-14**:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; **but one thing I do**, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward **the goal** for **the prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Again in **2 Timothy 4:7** I have fought **the good fight**, I have finished **the race**, I have kept **the faith**.

**THE DISCIPLINE OF BIBLICAL Simplicity is to reorder my priorities for my life to become God's Priorities for my life. This is the pathway of detachment from a worldly lifestyle and back to a godly lifestyle.**

So, how do we do this? Where does the Discipline of Biblical Simplicity start?

The best track to follow that I have found is in Jeremiah 15.16. If you turn there with me we can find three steps that cultivate the powerful discipline in our lives.

1. First, we must cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity by COMING TO GOD THROUGH HIS WORD. **Jeremiah 15:16a** **Your words were found**, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.
2. Secondly, we must cultivate the Discipline of The Simplicity by MEMORIZING FROM GOD'S WORD. **Jeremiah 15:16b** Your words were found, **and I ate them**, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.
3. Thirdly, we must cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity by MEDITATING UPON GOD THROUGH HIS WORD. **Jeremiah 15:16c** Your words were found, and I ate them, **and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.**

Let me illustrate each of these, and as you listen – ask the Lord to bring these to pass in your life.

First, we must cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity by COMING TO GOD THROUGH HIS WORD. **Jeremiah 15:16a** **Your words were found**, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.

No one better illustrates reading God's Word than C. T. Studd (1860-1931) one of God's great servants. If anyone could have an excuse to not read the Bible – he would! His life was like his grass hut, there were no doors to shut out endless potential distractions and irritations. He lived with no floor, no doors, no cupboards, no closets, no windows, no attic, no electricity, no kitchen, no laundry room or machines, no shower, no faucet, no Starbucks, no Wal Mart - just constant humidity, rain, mud, naked cannibals, and super sized bugs. All he had to focus upon was God and his beloved pygmy tribes.

How did he prepare to teach as many as 5,000 at a time? How did he get ready to disciple the scores of church leaders who came to sit at the foot of his cot every morning? How did this man prepare to awake to a sea of black faces and white teeth waiting on the ground outside his hut, for him to open the Book of God to them? Simply. Listen to his own words, as I read from his diary<sup>[2]</sup> dated February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1886.

*"The Lord is so good to give me a large dose of spiritual champagne every morning which brace one up for the day and night. Of late I have had such glorious times. I generally awake about 3:30 AM and feel quite wide awake, so I have a good read, and then have an hour's sleep before I finally get up. I find then that what I read is then stamped indelibly upon my heart all through the day; and that it is the very quietest of times, not a foot astir, nor a sound to be heard, saving that of God. If I miss this time I feel like Samson shorn of his hair and so of all his strength. I see more and more how much I have to learn of the Lord. I want to be a workman approved of the Lord, not just with a pass degree as it were. Oh how I wish I had devoted my early life, my whole life to God and His Word. How much I have lost by those early years of self pleasing and running after this world's honors and pleasures."*

Studd's converts once described these times as –

*"A Bible is taken down from the shelf, and Bwana is alone with God. What passed between them in those silent hours was known a few hours later to all who had ears to hear."*

***Biblical Simplicity starts as we reorder our lives back to God's priority of daily inviting Him into our lives by listening to His voice in His Word. Is your life reordered to this priority? Was it that way each day this week? If not simplify life by returning to this discipline!***

Secondly, we must cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity by MEMORIZING FROM GOD'S WORD.

[Jeremiah 15:16b](#) Your words were found, **and I ate them**, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.

Memorizing is a life long discipline. The wife of one of America's greatest preachers, Mrs. Donald Gray Barnhouse, once said this of her husband:

*Someone<sup>[3]</sup> once asked him how long it had taken him to prepare a certain sermon. His answer was "Thirty years and thirty minutes!" He had immersed himself in the Bible from the time he was fifteen years old, when he memorized the Book of Philippians a verse a day until he knew the entire book by heart, then went on to other passages. He felt it was not enough to learn by rote — it had to be by heart; because you loved and believed it.*

If reading is listening to God, then Memorizing God's Word is recording the voice of God into the memory of our very own minds. Downloading audio files from God! Think of it, you can actually carry God's voice speaking softly through your mind any time you want to hear it – by memorizing God's Word! Lifting it off the pages of the Bible, writing it down upon the pages of our heart. It is so easy to start if you decide to do so today. Why not begin with a verse — perhaps a verse a week — fifty-two in one year!

Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936) a Canadian missionary to China. In his lifetime as a missionary to China, he resolved to try to memorize a verse each day. By the time he lost his eyesight at age 70 he had the entire New Testament written in his heart. Yet he never stopped in his daily labor to travel by foot across China, preaching all day long in towns and villages. He lived a simple, hard working life yet always spent enough time to read each verse aloud 7 times as he progressed through God's Word. All that to aid in memorization of the Word.

- [Psalm 119:9-11](#) How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! 11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.
- [Ephesians 6:17](#) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

***Biblical Simplicity flows from a heart filled with God's Word. When was the last time you memorized a verse from God's Word? What was the verse? Can you say it right now? We must discipline ourselves to the simple task of recording God's Word upon the tablet of our heart and mind. Is your life reordered to this priority? Was it that way each day this week? If not simplify life by returning to this discipline!***

Thirdly, we must cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity by MEDITATING UPON GOD THROUGH HIS WORD.

[Jeremiah 15:16c](#) Your words were found, and I ate them, **and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.**

Meditation upon God's Word is the secret of all of God's great warriors. Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, conquered immense hardships by daily meditation on God's Word. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor record this in his biography:

*It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life<sup>[4]</sup>, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.*

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of

the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:1-3).

Meditation for the believer may be beautifully illustrated by the term Jesus used most often for us – we are His sheep. Sheep are classic pictures of what Biblical meditation can accomplish in our lives.

Generally<sup>[5]</sup> speaking, water for the sheep came from three main sources...dew on the grass...deep wells...or springs and streams. Most people are not aware that sheep can go for months on end, especially if the weather is not too hot, without actually drinking, if there is heavy dew on the grass each morning.

Sheep, by habit, rise just before dawn and start to feed. Or if there is bright moonlight they will graze at night. The early hours are when the vegetation is drenched with dew, and sheep can keep fit on the amount of water taken in with their forage when they graze just before and after dawn. Of course, dew is a clear, clean, pure source of water. And there is no more resplendent picture of still waters than the silver droplets of the dew-hanging heavy on leaves and grass at break of day. The good shepherd, the diligent manager, makes sure that his sheep can be out and grazing on this dew drenched vegetation. If necessary it will mean he himself has to rise early to be out with his flock.

In the Christian life it is of more than passing significance to observe that those who are often the most serene, most confident and able to cope with life's complexities are those who rise early each day to feed on God's Word. It is in the quiet, early hours of the morning that they are led beside the quiet, still waters where they imbibe the very life of Christ for the day.

This is much more than mere figure of speech. It is practical reality. The biographies of the great men and women of God repeatedly point out how the secret of the success in their spiritual life was attributed to the "quiet time" of each morning. There, alone, still, waiting for the Master's voice one is led gently to the place where God's way is clear.

One comes away from these hours of meditation, reflection and communion with Christ refreshed in mind and spirit. The thirst is slaked and the heart is quietly satisfied. In my mind's eye I can see my Flock again. The gentleness, stillness and softness of early morning always found my sheep knee deep in dew drenched grass. There they fed heavily and contentedly. As the sun rose and its heat bummed the dewdrops from the leaves, the flock would retire to find shade. There, fully satisfied and happily refreshed, they would lie down to rest and ruminate through the day. Nothing pleased me more. I am confident this is precisely the same reaction in My Master's heart and mind when I meet the day in the same way. He loves to see me contented, quiet, at rest and relaxed. He delights to know my soul and spirit have been refreshed and satisfied.

Biblical Simplicity frees us to God's order for our lives. It is doing what Jesus asked us to do.

- **Matthew 11:28-30** **Come to Me**, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest**. 29 **Take My yoke** upon you and **learn from Me**, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls**. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."
- **Colossians 3:16** **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly** in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Jesus says

1. COME TO ME THROUGH READING MY WORD. **Jeremiah 15:16a** **Your words were found**, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.
2. RECORD MY VOICE BY MEMORIZING MY WORD. **Jeremiah 15:16b** Your words were found, **and I ate them**, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.
3. OBEY ME BY MEDITATING MY WORD. **Jeremiah 15:16c** Your words were found, and I ate them, **and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts**.

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[1] **THE TYRANNY OF THE URGENT!** A booklet by Charles E. Hummel.

[2] C. T. Studd, *Cricketeer and Pioneer*, p. 57, 206.

[3] Quoted from Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

[4] Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 235.

[5] Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd looks at PSALM 23*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zonderavan Publishing House, 1970, p. 51-53.

