

Spiritual Disciplines Series - Spring 2006 - King's Centre Church

Simplicity (19.03.06)

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This is a topic which has the potential to drive fear into our hearts!

- Arg! Will Nick tell me I have to sell my possessions and give to the poor?
- What about that nice foreign holiday I had lined up?

It's a topic which is close to my heart & Marjorie's. We are in the Order of Mission (TOM) and try to live by their vows – modern-day versions of the monk's vows (simplicity, purity, accountability)

- Last 2 years tried to operate with Simplicity as a 'grid' through which we make decisions
- Its been hard & challenging at times, and it certainly is a discipline!

It's simple

As I prepared and thought about this topic this week, I really felt that the sermon itself should also be *simple* today. I'm not going to give you lots of definitions, lots of 10-point principles of how to live a life of simplicity! As you think about the discipline of simplicity today and this week and into the future, we need to see it in the context of the life in the **kingdom of God**, into which we are invited by Jesus – to be radical disciples. In addition to the kingdom principles, I suggest that one of the routes to living with simplicity is also the **practice of the range of spiritual disciplines**. So it's a circular situation – as we aim to live out the calling to be radical disciples in the kingdom, and engage with the disciplines of the spiritual life – the training programme – then it is likely that things will simplify anyway, as a result.

QUOTE FROM KC MEN BLOG:

"Its seems so difficult to keep it simple. Especially when you're leading stuff. What with Church, small group, relationships with people in Church and out of Church + keeping your family life in balance + spending time with God (just remembered to mention that!) How do we keep it simple.

Putting this to one side - the more we spend time with God and the more we put him at the centre, the more simple it seems to become."

Today, the majority of us probably do not lead simple lives.

But Jesus gave us 2 simple commands: (Mark 12:29-31 - "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.")

1. Love God with all your heart
2. Love your neighbour as yourself

Really, the discipline of simplicity is focussed around these two aspects. The driving force, the motivation, the inner attitudes of this discipline of the spiritual life all come out of what it means to put God first, and to value other relationships with other people as highly as you value your individuality. As far as I understand it, that's what simplicity is about, and that's what will help you to achieve a measure of simplicity in your heart and actions.

Other more specific definitions of simplicity

- Essentially the discipline is to **cut out those elements** of life **which complicate us**, to the extent that they detract from our ability to seek first God's kingdom and to love people well.
 - This could include looking at our possessions, the way we spend or hold money, the way we order the time in our weeks and days, our relationships with others, etc
 - Its living by a few key foundational principles, and excluding the 'stuff' which is not necessary and key to good functioning lives
- **NOT Poverty** (the rejection of all possessions).
- Simplicity is the discipline of **stripping away the man-made 'crutches' in our lives** and forcing ourselves to be **more reliant on God**
 - It helps us to get to grips with certain ways we behave. Gives us perspective
- A discipline of abstinence (but again – you gain things too, like greater faith and reliance on God)

Here's how to do it:

Matt 6:28-34

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

The key learning from this morning is those final sentences of Jesus. "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." That's what simplicity means, and that's what will bring about simplicity in our lives. That's the starting point on the road to a life of simplicity.

Jesus made it quite simple! He invites us to live lives as radical disciples in his kingdom (not ours, his!) and he simply says – 'Live for my kingdom first, put the principles and practices of the God, his priorities and spending quality time with God (Father, Son & HS) first.'" And as you do, you'll find that God puts in place all of the other 'stuff' that we need to get by in life, and to live the fullness of life which he promises us. Note – He says 'Seek first the kingdom' (not simplicity, or evangelism, or green issues, or a quiet life..)

- It's the **inner life** – of relationship with God, which in turn relates to the **outer life of radical disciplinship**
- Centering on the Kdom is the simple act – and out of it, will inevitably come the other stuff like a concern for justice, help poor by your lifestyle, green issues etc

But what about all the things I have to do in life?

"But", I hear you say... "its not as simple as it sounds! My life is messy, its busy, its full of responsibilities, and things that I worry about."

Yes I know – and that's why we need to practice the discipline of simplicity.

Without a doubt, our lives today are complicated.

STORIES (& pictures on powerpoint)

Bob the businessman

- Pressured job and working hours
- Loves his family
- Wants to provide for them – nice holidays, pensions etc
- Struggles in managing his time & quality time

Tessa the teacher

- Works hard in the week, honourable at her work
- and then needs to work at the weekend
- juggling time, family, friends, leisure time
- Money worries – bills to pay, mortgage to maintain,

Maria the mum

- does a fantastic job building the home
- loves her family
- her wider Family is bit messed up - fragmented and damaged
- wants to be more involved in church life, but is never sure how long in 1 place

Paddy the pastor

- knows lots of people – keeping up links with them, lots of social settings
- His ministry is great but he feels really pushed for time alone with God
- So many Options in life – paralysis of choice
 - Money, courses, marry, miss out, burn bridges

The lies of our society

All the time, society is telling us that the answer to our complicated lives is not to down-size, but to improve and go one-better. **It's a consumerist society.**

- **'more, better, faster' mantra**
- you *need* new car, the old one simply won't do anymore. You *need* the latest model of this/that/the other. A classic example is the Phones 4U advert 'Ashamed of your mobile...?'
- Old saying - **"We buy things we do not want, to impress people we do not like"**
- Progress is defined as consuming more
- Status and happiness are defined as
 - **What you consume** (the size of your car, or how fashionable and up-to-date your clothes are)
 - **How much you produce** (the size of your pay packet)

Our time is filled up, sometimes weeks in advance, with lots of things to do. Our children now have multiple opportunities of things to do – is it ballet, football, cubs, homework club (not so popular!), library, piano lessons etc etc

- As a result – we seem to have less quality time with those people who matter the most to us
- Never mind 'love your neighbour as yourself', we've barely got time to nod hello to our neighbours as we rush off somewhere, and we've only got the butt-end of the day left to spend with our closest family or friends

There is a demonic dimension to over complicated lives with no depth. To some extent, it's a scheme of the devil. The result is bondage – **spiritual bondage** to things which are not important to God's eternal scheme of things (and take our eye off the vital things). **Practical bondage** to the world's ties (like debt), which tie our hands so that we are not free to drop everything and go for the kingdom as the spirit leads. Our lives are not calm but frantic. Its **distraction and procrastination** – the key things which stop us from being radical disciples.

This is exactly why simplicity is a discipline – because it doesn't come naturally. This is exactly why simplicity is an important goal – because it redresses the balance in our life, it tackles head-on those lovely distractions, which lead us away from a life of radical discipleship, not towards one.

Another Discipline that brings Freedom

Not only does it bring us balance, it brings us freedom too. **Simplicity frees us** from so many concerns & involvements that make it very hard for us to live the kingdom life to the full.

Jesus – ‘Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes?... your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”

R Foster - “Simplicity is the only thing that can sufficiently reorient our lives so that *possessions* can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us.”

When you are forced to, you find it is really quite easy to live life without masses of things! (eg. backpacking and living from the contents of a rucksack for months.)

Remember the good news

These disciplines are worth it, because of what Jesus Christ achieved for us on the Cross. He made a way for us to be in relationship.

We need a Framework

We need a framework from which to operate. A grid through which to filter our options. A Framework = Inner attitudes, which affect outer behaviour.

Perhaps that is why the **majority of Christians have never seriously wrestled with the issue of simplicity** and tend to ignore Jesus' many words on the subject. Why? Because it directly challenges our vested interests, our affluent lifestyle. We've got lots of 'stuff' and lots of balls in the air, and we don't want to have to lay anything down.

What does this relate to? The issue of the kingdom – how much of **our** spheres, **our** realms of influence (**our** mini-kingdoms) we are really willing to allow God to rule?

A few key issues:

I promised not to give you 10-point specifics today, because simplicity is something which we have to work out for ourselves (with God's guidance), as we all live different lives.

But I think there are several issues which could be key. If you can get the right approach – the Godly approach (which the bible teaches us) to these issues in your head, then you should be on the path to greater simplicity. So I'll ask you a few questions:

- **money & possessions (outward).**
 - Don't want this sermon to be just about money & possessions (perhaps the natural thought, when you approach the issue of simplicity). The Discipline of Simplicity is much more than this, but its still a big issue within it
 - Jesus = Can't serve 2 masters – God vs money. **Who is your master?**
 - [Hear my money sermon last term for more]
 - Simplicity is freedom from anxiety (brought either by wealth, or lack of necessary possessions) - **Its holding all possessions lightly**

- **Self-image (inward)**
 - Do you judge yourself & fear what others think?
 - Or do you accept that you are a child of God, precious in his sight, made in the image of God
 - **Who are you trying to please?**
 - Who do you get your security from – other people, or heavenly father?

- **The Danger for us is that we separate 'good spiritual world' from 'bad material world'**
 - and become legalistic & detached
 - no – its simplicity *within* the material world – getting the balance right

- **MOST IMPORTANT - Who do you trust?**
 - **Where is your security?** Do you really trust God enough, even to do without 'stuff' sometimes?
 - If its *your* problem. *Your* responsibility – then yes, it will be a heavy burden. Make it God's problem! "Cast your burdens onto Jesus, he cares for you!"

Example of sand & rocks

Get the foundations in first (ROCKS) – then the other 'stuff' (SAND) can follow. Not the other way around, or you won't be able to find the foundational things in.

SAND = **What people will think of me** (new flared jeans, new iPOD Mini)
 ROCK = **What God thinks of me**

SAND = **What the world can offer me** (lots of friends so that I am not lonely)
 ROCK = **Finding security in God**

SAND = **better, faster, bigger.** (latest upgrade of mobile phone)
 ROCK = **good stewardship of your money and resources** (they are God's anyway)

SAND = **Opportunities** - So many things to do or choose
 ROCK = **Quality time – for your kids**, the ROCK is time with **YOU**.
 = **For you**, the rock is quality time **with GOD** (make the space)

SAND = **Must have more money.** Living beyond your **means or needs** (credit cards).
 ROCK = **Coming to God** with your financial needs, being a **generous and cheerful giver** of what you have, **trusting God** to guide and help

SAND = **Friendship** with mates down the pub
 ROCK = **Relationship with God** – F,S,HS

SAND = **All the people** we know, to say hello to

ROCK = Intimate relationships (not just being acquaintances) with a few people.

SAND = My ministry

ROCK = God's call to me at this time

Summary

Simplicity needs to be about our attitudes, as well as our 'things'.

If you want to take something up, you've got to give something up.

Jesus put it very simply, yet very profoundly:

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

(Matt 6:31-34)