



# Spiritual Disciplines:

## SIMPLICITY AND UNHURRIEDNESS: THE BENEFITS OF A SIMPLE LIFE

### THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

*Most of us have heard a grandparent say, “Things were much simpler back in the day.” Life’s pace was slower, neighbors took time to be neighbors, and front porches were a place to gather after a day’s work. There was no constant bombardment of talking heads on the 24-hour news channels or infomercials. We live in a time where information is available at our fingertips, and one-click shopping will have a package on our doorstep the next day.*

*Today’s lesson focuses on the Spiritual Disciplines of simplicity and unhurriedness. It considers how the distractions of worry and preoccupation compete with being fully present as we spend time with God and others.*

### TODAY’S SCRIPTURES

MATTHEW 6:25-34 • LUKE 10:38-42 • LUKE 19:1-10

*(All Scripture CSB unless otherwise noted)*

### THE MAIN IDEA

Misplaced priorities crowd out the practices of kingdom living. The spiritual disciplines of simplicity and unhurriedness establish valuable margins within our lives so we can be faithfully invested in our relationship with Jesus and others.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

*How do busyness and consumerism compete with seeking first the kingdom of God?*

### SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

**Matthew 6:25-34** Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount give important instructions on how to live a life unconsumed by the worries of the day by trusting in God’s provision. Jesus stresses the Father’s concern for His children and His promise to meet their needs. He urges His followers to turn their thoughts from being consumed by worldly concerns to living with a kingdom focus, knowing of God’s concern for their daily lives. Twice in this passage, Jesus says, “Don’t worry” (6:25, 34). In other words, don’t be consumed by fretting over the needs your Heavenly Father has already promised to provide.

**Luke 10:38-42** Like a life consumed by worry draws our focus away from God’s kingdom purposes, so does a life that is characterized by a frantic, hurried pace consumed by busyness. Jesus contrasts the priorities of Martha and Mary in this passage. Martha, consumed by making everything right in the household for her guest (Jesus), fails to experience the blessing of sitting at His feet, experiencing the riches of listening to his teaching, and enjoying His presence. Contrasting the two women’s priorities, Jesus indicates that Mary has “made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her” (v.42).

**Luke 19:1-10** Jesus did not waiver from His mission “to seek and save the lost.” Even His impending Passion Week and crucifixion did not keep Him from practicing presence with others. He was not dissuaded by the crowds or public opinion. Journeying to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Jericho, where he would meet Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. Zacchaeus was despised for how he had extorted money from the Jewish people. Like many other times, Jesus paused to fully focus on one person. Unconsumed and unhurried, yet focused on His mission, Jesus paused to pour into the life of one man, Zacchaeus.

## START HERE

In Alice in Wonderland, the White Rabbit frantically cries out, “I’m late, I’m late for a very important date. No time to say hello, goodbye, I’m late, I’m late, I’m late.”<sup>1</sup>

### DISCUSS

*Though we will all run late at times, how is living with such a “tyranny of the urgent” reflected in our lives and culture? (Possible answers: failure to slow down enough to be with others, crowding out God, etc.)*

*What dangers does this present? (Possible answers: health problems, isolation, lost opportunities to build relationships, etc.)*

## ADDING CLARITY

- *Simplicity and unhurriedness are biblical lifestyle choices.*
- *For the purpose of this lesson, simplicity focuses on our security being found in the worth that God attributes to our lives and is not based upon the quantity and quality of our possessions.*
- *The Bible does not say that money is the root of all evil but rather the “love of money” (1 Timothy 6:10).*
- *Richard Foster writes, “God intends that we should have adequate material provision. There is misery today for a simple lack of provision just as there is misery when people try to make a life out of provision.”<sup>2</sup>*

The spiritual disciplines of simplicity and unhurriedness stand in sharp contrast to the preoccupations of the culture in which we live. Putting such disciplines into practice requires great intentionality but comes with the blessings of a Christ-filled life and a kingdom-living mindset. It is reflected in discovering the bandwidth to love others (John 13:34-35), serve others (Galatians 5:13), and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

Today’s lesson prepares us to operate out of the overflow of the Spiritual Disciplines we have been studying by changing our priorities and lifestyle patterns.

## REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

### 1. THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF SIMPLICITY LEADS US TO TRUST IN GOD’S PROVISION AND FOCUS ON HIS PURPOSES.

#### MATTHEW 6:25-34

*“Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? <sup>28</sup> And*

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<sup>1</sup> Walt Disney, Alice in Wonderland (1951; Burbank: Disney), Film.

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 2018), 84.



*why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. <sup>29</sup>Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. <sup>30</sup>If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you—you of little faith?*

*<sup>31</sup>So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and **your heavenly Father knows that you need them.** <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. <sup>34</sup>Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

### Unpacking Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus speaks these words as part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Having instructed His followers to store up their treasures in heaven (6:20), not on earth where moth and rust destroy (19), He next focuses their attention on trading in worry by trusting in the faithfulness of God's provision. Jesus draws their attention to God's provision for the birds of the air, the wildflowers (lilies), and even the grass, which is here today and gone tomorrow.

Sharing these truths, He asks three questions "Aren't you worth more than them? Can you add one moment to your lifespan by worrying? Won't he (God) do much more for you?" (26, 27, 30). Worry comes as a result of living in a fallen world and is a symptom of a lack of faith (30) in God's care and power to provide. Jesus doesn't say you have no faith but that in worrying about such things, you demonstrate "little faith." He doesn't beat around the bush, saying that when it comes to worrying, "don't do it" or "stop it," not just once but twice in this passage.

Jesus reminds His disciples that worrying about material things accomplishes nothing, as God has already promised to provide for our needs. All too quickly, we can trade in today's joys and purposes for tomorrow's uncertainties. Worry is borrowed trouble and represents disbelief in God's promise of provision. The discipline of simplicity calls us to let go of worry by trusting in God to meet our needs. It is not a call to asceticism, a self-denial of life's pleasures, but a call to properly prioritize such things.

Furthermore, consumption characterized by chasing after material provisions serves as a distraction to living with a kingdom focus. The Apostle Paul says, "I have learned to be content, whether well fed or hungry, in abundance or in need" (Philippians 4:12). Paul realized that a contented life was not based upon what you have but rather whose you are. Are our lives characterized by a "keeping up with the Joneses" mentality or a hunger for status and position? Have we taken the advertiser's bait, believing we can't live without the latest and greatest gadgets and gizmos? Or do we find joy and contentment with that which God has entrusted to us? Jesus warned against chasing after worldly riches stating, "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Jesus' words are not a call to live impoverished. When Jesus speaks of God's clothing the grass of the field, he says, "Won't he do much more for you?" (v.30). In verse 32, we are reminded that God knows and cares for our needs.



Richard Foster writes:

Asceticism and simplicity are mutually incompatible. Asceticism renounces possessions. Simplicity sets possessions in proper perspective. Asceticism finds no place for a “land filled with milk and honey.” Simplicity rejoices in this gracious provision from the hand of God.<sup>3</sup>

Putting earthly worries aside, seeking after the righteousness of God, and trusting in the promise of God’s provision frees us up to place our highest priority on God’s kingdom purposes (v.33). Seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness above all else is a conscious choice and daily commitment.

## DISCUSS

*How would you define worry? (Possible answers: anxiety about needs met, being overwhelmed about things that might happen, fears about world events, etc.)*

*In what ways does living in a culture of consumerism and materialism further exasperate the problem of worry?*

*What could you eliminate to help you seek God’s kingdom first?*

*How is the simplicity of trusting in God’s provision an effective antidote for worry?*

Warren Wiersbe writes:

Worrying about tomorrow does not help either tomorrow or today. If anything, it robs us of our effectiveness today, which means we will be even less effective tomorrow. It is right to plan for the future and even to save (2 Cor 12:14; 1 Tim 5:8). But it is a sin to worry about the future and permit tomorrow to rob today of its blessings.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. **THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF UNHURRIEDNESS HELPS US TRADE IN THE CULTURAL PRESSURE COOKER OF PERFORMANCE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES.**

LUKE 10:38-42

*While they were traveling, he entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup>She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord’s feet and was listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup>But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand.” <sup>41</sup>The Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup>but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.”*

Unpacking Luke 10:38-42

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1980), 62.



As we look closely at this passage, we discover that Martha welcomes Jesus into her home, but her hurried pace and desire to make everything “right” results in her failing to slow down enough to spend time with Him. “Distracted by her many tasks,” she receives Jesus well but does not allow herself to rest in his presence. Serving Jesus was prioritized over seeking Jesus. In sharp contrast to the previous passage (Matthew 6:24-34), Martha’s worry was characterized not by unmet needs but by her misplaced priorities.

As Luke shares this account, we discover Jesus is inviting Martha to reorder her priorities. It is not a command to neglect her household or the practice of hospitality but to make Christ her first focus. Mary’s unhurried pace stands in sharp contrast. Warren Wiersbe addresses the significance of what has happened in this account by explaining that “Most Jewish rabbis would not accept a woman for a student, but Jesus delighted in teaching Mary the Word.”<sup>5</sup>

Mary’s response to Jesus reflects the heartbeat of the psalmist as he calls out to the Lord, “Make your ways known to me, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth” (Psalm 25:4-5). She thirsted for the living water Jesus offered. While Martha focused on the temporal, Mary sought after that which had eternal value. Martha struggled to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33).

Brandon Cook writes:

We live in a culture desperately rushed to find meaning, and sometimes through means that will never bear fruit. We must recognize that the gospel call to transformation will fly against the headwinds of the dominant cultural imperatives in which we live. And one of the strongest imperatives in our Western culture is the drive to a hurried, frenetic, busy life, devoid of margin. We seem to be addicted to hurry, living at a “normal” speed that may actually do great danger to our souls.<sup>6</sup>

The hurried pace of life in which we often live crowds out the transformative spaces where Jesus is encountered. We must take time to sit and soak in the truths of God’s Word. Without creating margin in our lives, this will not happen. In his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer speaks of organizing his life around three simple goals: slowing down, simplifying life around the practices of Jesus, and living from a center of abiding.<sup>7</sup> Do we live in the overload of our schedules or out of the overflow of our relationship with Jesus?

## DISCUSS

*With what can you become easily preoccupied? (Possible answers: “binge-watching a tv show, a game, a friend’s needs, household chores, a stressful situation, etc.”)*

*What dangers do such preoccupations create for our relationship with Jesus? (Possible answers: “become the affections of our heart, crowd out attention to the Word, etc.”)*

*What are some priorities you could reorder to practice unhurriedness and create margin for the transformative space of being with Jesus? (Possible answers: “Welcome Jesus into your day, set aside 15 minutes each day to meditate on God’s promises, put aside perfection, etc.”)*

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<sup>5</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines of the New Testament* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books/SP Publications, 1992), 174.

<sup>6</sup> Brandon Cook, *Learning to Live and Love Like Jesus* (Long Beach: Brandon Cook, 2018), 163.

<sup>7</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2019), 247.



### 3. LIVING UNCONSUMED BY POSSESSIONS AND BUSYNESS BUILDS BANDWIDTH FOR PRACTICING PRESENCE WITH OTHERS.

LUKE 19:1-10

*He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup>There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. <sup>3</sup>He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. <sup>4</sup>So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since he was about to pass that way. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because **today it is necessary for me to stay at your house.**”*

*<sup>6</sup>So he quickly came down and welcomed him joyfully. <sup>7</sup>All who saw it began to complain, “He’s gone to stay with a sinful man.”*

*<sup>8</sup>But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, I’ll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I’ll pay back four times as much.”*

*<sup>9</sup>“Today salvation has come to this house,” Jesus told him, “because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”*

#### *Unpacking Luke 19:1-10*

Jesus’ life was more focused on God’s mission than the agendas of others. With the events of the Passion Week before Him, Jesus was concluding His earthly ministry. The journey to Jerusalem takes Him through Jericho, seventeen miles from His destination. There He meets Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector and a man despised by many. Consider how many accounts we find in the gospels of crowds pressing in on Him and Jesus taking time to pause to meet the need of a single person - a paralytic (Mark 2:1-12), the daughter of a synagogue official (Mark 5:21-24 & 35-43), a woman with an issue of bleeding (Mark 5:24-34), and a blind beggar (Luke 18:35-34) to name a few. Unconsumed and unhurried, yet clearly focused on His mission, Jesus paused to pour into the life of one man, Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus went to great lengths as he pressed through the crowd to climb up a tree to get a view of Jesus. Disregarding the public’s opinion of Zacchaeus, Jesus calls him by name and informs Zacchaeus that, “...today it is necessary for me to stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). Jesus allowed what many may have seen as a detour to become the destination of His day. Barker and Kohlenberger state, “Zacchaeus’s desire to see Jesus was surpassed by the fact that Jesus wanted to see him. The reciprocity of the divine sovereign call and the human response is striking.”<sup>8</sup> By faith, Zacchaeus experienced salvation. Motivated by the grace he’d experienced, Zacchaeus restored to others that which he had extorted. Unconsumed and unhurried, Jesus prioritized His mission of seeking and saving the lost until the very end.

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth L. Barker & John R. Kohlenberger III, *NIV Bible Commentary Volume 2: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 271.



## DISCUSS

*What do you find significant about Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus? (Possible answers: everyone hated Zacchaeus, but Jesus showed love, Jesus chose to stay with him while passing through town, Jesus remained steadfast to His mission, etc.)*

*Luke 19:9 states, "Today, salvation has come to this house." What do you think was the ripple effect of Zacchaeus' response? (Possible answers: others in his home came to know Christ, they shared this transformation, some may have been skeptical, etc.)*

*How do you typically respond when your plans are interrupted? (Possible answers: frustrated that schedule has been thrown off, welcome the encounter, miss the opportunity, etc.)*

*What are some practical ways you can practice presence with others? (Possible answers: look for a family with a need and begin to meet it, listen to the needs of those in your workplace and commit to praying for them, regularly invite a neighbor to join you for dinner, etc.)*

## GOSPEL FOCUS

**MISSION.** According to Baker's Evangelical Dictionary on Biblical Theology, "the biblical concept of 'mission' comprehends the authority of the one who sends; the obedience of the one sent; a task to be accomplished; the power to accomplish the task; and a purpose within the moral framework of God's covenantal working of judgment or redemption."<sup>9</sup> Jesus lived a sent life, entrusted with a mission to seek and save the lost, a work He would completely fulfill upon the cross. In turn, He entrusts the mission to His followers with a call to be His witnesses, who in turn invite the lost to come and follow.

## REFLECT ON THE TEXT

### DISCUSS

*What challenged you the most in today's study?*

*What freedoms might you experience through the disciplines of simplicity and unhurriedness?*

*What might you have to lay aside to experience these benefits?*

*What adjustments might you need to make to practice presence with others? (Possible answers: pay close attention to the spiritual needs of others, live life at more of an unhurried pace, etc.)*

## RESPOND TO THE TEXT

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<sup>9</sup> William J. Larkin, Jr., *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary on Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/mission/>.



Take some time to think about how you view and practice the Spiritual Disciplines. Commit to taking on the personal challenge in the “APPLY” section below.

## **APPLY**

*Evaluate your week’s priorities. Are there areas where worrying about needs being met or stressing out about your schedule prevents you from enjoying the presence of Jesus?*

*What is one practical step you can take to build the disciplines of simplicity and unhurriedness into your life?*

*Invite a trusted friend to pray with you as you take steps to practice the disciplines of simplicity and unhurriedness. Be honest about your challenges.*

*Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see the needs of others and the heart to practice presence.*

