

Simple Life

A Daily Devotional



Devoting myself to God
Developing Christ-likeness
Doing ministry
Discipling others

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SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK ONE: MONDAY

Staying Simple In A Complex World

Fools ignore complexity. Pragmatists suffer it. Some can avoid it. Geniuses remove it. - Alan Perlis

No one would deny that life today is more complex & busy than it was just a few years ago & it's getting more so with every passing hour.

We are busier at work & home than at anytime in the history of the world. Today American workers are more productive than ever. "One reason that there are 6 million fewer U.S. manufacturing jobs today than in 1979... is that American workers have become 4% more productive each & every year.."

What that means is that you are doing more work in less time than you used to. Forty years ago it might take a secretary hours to type up 40 letters for her boss on her typewriter. Today, it only takes minutes thanks to her computer.

We have learned to shove more & more things to do into each moment of our day, all the while believing the promise that this is somehow going to make us healthier, happier & give us more leisure time too! It hasn't. Instead it's made us more harried, hassled, sicker (physically, mentally, emotionally & relationally), & perhaps worst of all—**shallower**.

The increasing complexity of modern life contrasts vividly with what we see in the New Testament. For there we aren't encouraged to try & cram one more thing into our lives, instead we are challenged to **stop**—& focus on Jesus.

I fear that we have become busy little Martha's, missing Christ's call to simply sit at his feet & learn. Remember what Jesus said to her? "*Martha, Martha,*" *the Lord answered, "you are worried & upset about many things, but only one thing is needed...* Luke 10:41-42a (NIV)

"Only ONE thing is needed..." Hmmm...

This week we'll examine how our complex life impacts Christ's call to a Simple Life. **Today, let us ask God to help us be open, willing & ready to make whatever changes He challenges us to make, no matter how difficult or painful they may seem to be.**

Search me, O God, & know my heart; test me & know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, & lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV)

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK ONE: TUESDAY
The Good, The Bad, & Shallow, Pt. 1

Better to dig one deep well than 10 shallow ones. ~ Indian Proverb

There's good & there's bad, & some things can be both! Some of you reading this know all about good & bad cholesterol for example. A few years ago doctors announced there's good stress & bad stress.

Well I'm here today to tell you that there's good complexity & then there's bad complexity! Part of living the Simple Life that Jesus calls us to is learning just what's what, & how to tell the difference.

Today I want to talk to you about bad complexity.

Just like stress & cholesterol most of the complexity we see around us today is of the bad variety. When the computer revolution began we were promised "paperless offices." Yet today we are busy wasting out time filling out more forms than ever! When you go to a new doctor you practically have to write a book before he'll see you!

That's bad complexity (& is largely a result of out of control litigation).

Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers & your waves have gone over me.
Psalm 42:7 (ESV)

Who has time to be deep today? Most Christians will tell you that they don't have enough time every day to spend 10 or 15 minutes reading the Bible & praying, much less enough time to reflect deeply upon what God is trying to say to them!

We want it fast, quick & hopefully easy! Fly through that Daily Bread page & then it's off to work I go! That's good, but it's hardly deep!

Listen to the words we use about Bible study: "drill down" or "unpack" are two terms used a lot. Both speak to going deep & digging out the meaning of the text. But if my life is too complicated, I just don't have the time.

So this week make a list of some of the largest sources of bad complexity in your life. Is my FaceBook or texting taking away from time with people, ministry & alone with God? How about sports, etc.?

Test everything. Hold on to the good. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NIV)

*"Lord, help me be ready & willing to cut out the bad complexity so I have more room for You & Your Will in my life!" **Amen!***

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK ONE: WEDNESDAY
The Good, The Bad, & the Shallow, Pt. 2

"Come to me, all you who are weary & burdened, & I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you & learn from me, for I am gentle & humble in heart, & you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy & my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

At this point you might be wondering just how on earth complexity could possibly be good! Let me give you a couple of examples of the kind of complexity Disciples of Jesus ought to have in their lives.

Bible Study/Meditation: Studying the Bible in depth can get very complicated at times. Going through the steps (or phases) of study, checking out the language, grammar, historical setting, etc. can be a bit hairy. Then pondering how all this should be applied to our lives, seeking to find the deep (& usually simple) truths that can impact & change our lives, can be a bit complicated too.

Leadership: The basics of leadership are pretty simple, but making them work in any situation can be really complex. If you don't believe me then I suggest you volunteer to head up VBS next year!

Personal Ministry: Getting involved deeply with people, & their issues & families, friends, etc. can get really complicated! I often find myself trying to communicate the simple Gospel, or a simple truth to people trapped in incredibly complex situations. This is good complexity because it's what ministry is all about—*changing peoples lives!*

That's one of the reasons it's so important for you to clear your deck of bad complexity. Then you'll have room for the kind of complex ministry that God might want to call you into. Many of you have the knowledge, skills & desire to really get involved, but can't do it, because you are just too busy.

Jesus told us to take *His yoke*—which means that *we'll still be working!* Oxen only wore yokes when they worked. Jesus isn't saying don't serve, but to serve *His way!*

That means we have to forsake all of the carnal clutter in our lives & replace it with the kind of carefully measured complexity that Jesus is calling us to use for His glory.

Today—ask God to continue to help you divide the good from the bad. Tomorrow—how to discern the difference between the two types of complexity.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK ONE: THURSDAY
Learning To Be Discerning

"The function of good software is to make the complex appear to be simple." - Grady Booch

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, & a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down & thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Matthew 7:15-20 (NIV)

By now you've probably guessed one of the major ways you can discern between good & bad complexity. As Jesus said, you can tell good from bad by the fruit produced.

If you want a more simple, manageable, Christ-like life, then you have to take some time to examine the things that make up your life. How complicated are they? What kind of fruit are these things producing in my life? Is the end result being more like Jesus, or just more stressed out? Here's a few areas to examine.

My Spiritual Life: Is what I'm doing contributing to my walk with God, taking away from it, or does it appear to be a wash? Is this a real service that God wants me to perform, or is it something that my own insecurities & "issues" drive me to do?

My Marriage/Friendships: If you're married, how does all this busyness impact your marriage? If you are so busy doing things that you rarely even see your spouse never mind spending quality time with them, then guess what? *You need to cut things out of your life!!!* The same goes for single Disciples & their friendships. If you are putting things above the people God has placed in your life, you need to address this issue.

My Witness: I know many Disciples who live an incredibly busy life in part because they think that's what they have to do to be a good witness. Both at church & in the community they are running around like their hair is on fire! People admire them, speak well of them, but in private often shudder at the thought of being like them! *Is that really a good witness?*

Questions: *Am I ready & willing to do an inventory of my life, discern good from bad busyness, & then cut the bad out of my life as much as possible?* If you said yes, then God bless you as you **go for it!**

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK ONE: FRIDAY
Staying Simple with the Right Priorities

*"The heavens themselves, the planets & this centre
Observe degree, **priority** & place."
- William Shakespeare*

*But seek first his kingdom & his righteousness, & all these things will be given to you as well.
—Jesus (Matthew 6:33)*

Even if you manage to make some major movement towards a more Simple Life, keeping it simple won't be easy. Cutting things out of your schedule is a lot like cutting things out of your diet. Losing weight is really hard, & for most of us who struggle with it there's only one thing harder—**keeping the weight off!**

The same is true for living simple, Christ centered lives. Why is it so hard to do something so simple?

Our Culture: We live in a culture that encourages if not downright worships busyness. Everyone is busy, not just doing things & complaining about how busy they are! It's hard to be the odd one in the room who isn't that way. Our culture pushes us to be busy, & we tend to feel like a slacker if we aren't.

Our Churches: Church is really a subset of the culture in large. While holding different values on sexuality, etc. most churches buy into many of the larger cultural values around them.

Here's the truth: **The American Church has bought the cultural busyness bug hook, line & sinker!** Our churches are filled with all kinds of activity, that generate very little spiritual growth at the end of the day. Christians think they are "doing God's work" when they ignore their family & friends, & bury themselves in all sorts of church activities.

Biblical Priorities: So what should our priorities be? I'll suggest a few, & then you can spend some time filling in the rest. (Feel free to use another sheet of paper to do this.)

1. **My relationship with Jesus**
2. **My spouse & family (if you have them)**
3. **My Ministry**
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK ONE: SATURDAY
Discipleship—Priority #1!

"If Christ does not reign over the mundane events in our lives, He does not reign at all.

--Paul Tripp

Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.

--Dietrich Bonhoeffer

I hope you've been thinking about your priorities and what should go where. Today let's just take a moment to look at what should be all Disciples number one priority—**Discipleship**.

I'm using Discipleship here to refer to my entire spiritual life, and primarily to focus on my own spiritual growth as I seek to be closer to God. It includes just about everything, but focuses on my becoming more like Christ.

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you've heard this said over and over again. And if you ask a lot of Christians they'll say, "Oh yes, Jesus is number one in my life!"

Oh really? Are you taking time *every day* to read the Bible and pray? Are you involved in a ministry and committed to it? When your schedule fills up what's the first thing that goes? Church or ministry related things?

Let's be honest, it's very easy to say Jesus is number one, and at times to believe that I'm actually telling the truth when I say that. *But it's extremely difficult to really make him that, and to keep him there!*

Since we are focusing on living a Simple Life, here's what the Leadership of KCC has boiled the Simple Life of Discipleship down too. We're going to spend the rest of this Spiritual Journey delving into how this works in our lives. Here they are:

Devoting Myself To God
Developing Christ-likeness
Doing My Ministry
Discipling Others

That's it folks! Simple, Biblical, and measurable. As we expand on these four benchmarks I believe you'll find your spiritual life renewed & focused like never before! Discipleship must be #1! That's what this journey is all about!

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK TWO MONDAY
“Devote myself to seeking His kingdom first”
Today's Reading: Matthew 6:25-34

With life come many concerns. Top priorities on the list are food, clothing and shelter. In today's society all these things cost money. So finding a means to provide becomes a priority. With finding a job comes many questions and more concerns. Does it matter what kind of a job I have as long as I am able to provide the necessities? Is the type of work I do important? Do I want a job that I will like? Do I want a job that is more than just earning money? The questions go on and on, and this is just one aspect of life!

It becomes even more complicated when you include a family. The concerns multiply when others are added and priorities change. Life gets more complicated. Do I work a job that conflicts with my spouse's hours? Do I work a job that doesn't allow me to spend time with my children? Do I take less pay just to be able to have time with the family? Is the most important thing to make sure all physical needs are met? The list goes on and on and on.

Thus goes the rat race that is known as life, and the examples above only deal with the basic necessities! What about social life? Educational goals? Recreation? Etc...? It is easy to see how a person can get so caught up in life that they forget about the most important part of life...What about one's relationship to Christ?

In today's passage Jesus addresses this very issue. Basically he says “What is being anxious about all these things really going to get you?” The answer he gives is “nothing of significance.” Why? David says it best “We are here only for a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace.” (I Chron 29:15, NLT).

There is nothing more important than your relationship with God: All other things in life pale in comparison to a relationship with God (a relationship that has eternal ramifications). Jesus said “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...” All of life should be lived with God in mind. When this happens Jesus says “all of these things will be added to you.” If we make our relationship with God the priority he will bless us with other things, but the focus has to be on Him!! We can't say “Okay, I'm going to focus on you God” in an attempt to get all the things we ever wanted. It doesn't work like that. Forget about everything else. It isn't going to last any way. When you focus on God your needs will be met as long as you are here on this earth. Can life really be any simpler?

Is your complete focus on God? If not, where is it? Will whatever it is on make a positive impact when viewing life from the eternal perspective? Do you need to make God the number one priority? This week we will be looking at just how we can do that, but for right now take some time to talk with God. Confess your shortcomings. Let him know that you are aware that you are not making him the priority. Express your desire to do so and ask for his guidance. Trust him. He will show you the way.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK TWO TUESDAY

“Devote myself to knowing His will”

Today's Reading: Romans 12:1-2

Between 1892 and 1954 Ellis Island saw millions of immigrants come to the shores of America. Why had so many immigrated to America? They saw opportunity. They were willing to leave their homes and give up their citizenship to be part of the American experience. They wanted citizenship in one of the greatest nations the world has ever known.

What God asks us to do is no different. In seeking His kingdom first we are essentially saying the same thing as most of those immigrants did on Ellis Island. We desire to give up our citizenship in this world and claim a new citizenship, but what does that really mean?

The world says to live one way, and most people live that way. God says to live another way, but only a few really choose to live His way. According to Webster's, citizenship means to have “a membership within a community.” One would be hard pressed to remain a member of a community if he/she didn't commit themselves to the set of standards and ideals that the community held.

If we say we are citizens of God's kingdom then we must commit ourselves to the standards of God. Ultimately this means seeking God's will because Christian standards are based upon His will, and it is for this reason alone that truly seeking God's kingdom means knowing what God's will is and doing it.

In our passage today Paul encourages us, as a result of God's mercy, to give our lives in service to him. In essence, he tells us to give up our worldly citizenship with its worldview, ethics, philosophies, etc... and conform to God's standards. He tells us to be transformed (literally “continue to change”) by the renewing of our minds, but the question is...how do our minds become renewed?

The Psalmist wrote “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105). God's word shows us the standard every citizen of His kingdom should follow. It reveals His will for each of us. God's word renews our minds. It renews in the sense of replacing old ways of thinking with new and better ways.

Seeking God's kingdom begins with devotion to knowing the Bible because it covers every area in life providing direction and answers for any and all situations we could ever possibly find ourselves in. God's word must be a priority to his citizens who live a simple life. Life becomes more complicated when we do things based on our own wisdom (or lack of). Knowing what God's word says puts life into perspective. Only the most important things are pursued making all other things minor and even trivial. That is not to say that we do not or cannot participate in the minor/trivial things, but when we do we do so for a higher purpose.

Are you making God's word a priority in your life? Spend some time talking to God. Admit to him that his word/will has not been a priority in your life. Express to him your desire to make it a priority. Ask for his help and trust him to help you as you seek to make knowing his word and will a priority.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK TWO WEDNESDAY

“Devote myself to doing His will”

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 11:13-17

There are simple ways to do things and there are complicated ways. With complicated ways there is usually a larger margin for error. The simpler the process is, the less of a margin for error and the greater chance of success. Many a person's success, or failure, has hinged on this principle.

Henry Ford is a good example. Where other auto makers failed he succeeded because he made assembling automobiles simple. His concept of the assembly line was ingenious and it enabled him to get far ahead of his competitors.

When it comes to our Creator's will for our lives it is no different. There is a complicated way of doing things, one that is promoted by the world, which results in little or no success. Then there is God's way, the simple way, resulting in success for anyone who follows it.

In today's passage we see a common covenant made with Israel and its kings throughout the Old Testament. It was a simple covenant that basically said “If you devote yourself to following my ways and doing my will all will go well for you.” Is this to say that if we do everything God says life will not have its difficulties? Of course not! Truth is, none of us will follow God's will perfectly. We will save how to deal with this for Saturday.

A more pressing problem is this. There have been plenty of stubborn prideful people who after being shown an easier way still continue to do it the complicated way. The result is ruin! Too many of us behave the same way. God says “Devote yourself to my ways and I will take care of you.” Simple! Yet many of us continue to do things the more complicated way. We devote ourselves to the business of life and we never feel like we really accomplish much as a result.

A citizen is someone who does what is required, not just know, what is required. Life is easier when a citizen abides by the laws of their nation. It is no different for those who consider themselves citizens of God's kingdom. God's way is the simple way. It may not stop every bad or difficult thing in life, but it will make handling such things easier.

Remember what Paul wrote in Galatians about the fruit of the Spirit. He said “For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.” Living the simple life produces this “kingdom character.” This character, the result of simple living, makes life easier to bear and more fulfilling.

Are you living a simple life or are you living a complicated one? Do you do things the complicated way not getting the results you want? Do you desire more out of life than what you are getting? Do you desire the strength to bear life's troubles? Then you desire a simple life. Take time to speak to God today. Confess that you have been doing things the complicated way without success. Ask God to help you do his will and live the simple life. Ask him to produce “kingdom character” in your life.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK TWO: THURSDAY
“Devote myself to sharing my life with others”
Today's Reading: Acts 2:42-47

A recent article in *McKinsey Quarterly*, an online journal of business management strategies, says that word-of-mouth recommendations may be better than expensive advertising, as reported by Social Media Today. “The article shows how many marketers are spending millions of dollars on elaborate advertising campaigns when often what's really needed to help influence consumers is a 'word-of-mouth recommendation from a trusted source' which 'cuts through the noise' of traditional marketing methods.”

When a person has a good experience with something they are more likely to share that experience with others (or their bad experience). If a person receives good treatment at a particular company or buys a product that is exceptionally good they will want to share it with others. Some businesses have boomed because of word-of-mouth advertising.

Churches have tried their hands at advertising tactics as well. A few years ago KCC purchased some television commercials and spots in the local newspaper. There is no doubt that the church received attention from this marketing, but the real growth of the church has always resulted from attendees telling family and friends.

What is most important is not the church one goes to. The most important thing we want to share with others is our relationship with God, but one has to experience a true relationship with Him in order to extol that relationship to others.

Acts 2:42-47 gives us a peek into the early Christian church in Jerusalem. All people had one thing in common; their love for Jesus Christ. This love created what is probably the first and only almost utopian society in history. Our peek shows us a near perfect society (at least that is the first impression). It goes on to say that the Lord was adding to the church on a daily basis.

This passage doesn't exactly say why God was adding to the church, but could it have been the result of simple living? People were doing what Jesus taught. As they lived simply, doing the will of God, they were getting results that caused those in the world to stop and look. Could what they saw have developed a desire for a simple life? If it did, this desire would have opened opportunities every day for the Gospel to be shared.

There is no doubt that living God's way is the simple way. Focusing on God and living His way makes life easier to bear and it makes life more fulfilling. When a person has truly experienced the benefits of living for God they cannot help but devote themselves to sharing their life with others.

Have you experienced a true relationship with God? Have you found that as you focus on doing His will He takes care of your needs? If you have, are you sharing your life with others? Take time to talk with God today. Confess your shortcoming in truly focusing on him and doing his will. Ask him to give you a desire to devote yourself in sharing your life with others as you continue to grow in your relationship with Him.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK TWO FRIDAY

“Devote myself to worshiping”

Today's Reading: John 4:19-24

Worship. What a confusing subject! When it comes to worship many people think of music style. “This church over here sings contemporary songs.” “That church over there is more traditional; they only sing hymns.”

There are those who think worship encompasses the entire Sunday morning service. “That church over there has a very liturgical worship style where everything is very ordered and structured.” “This church over here likes to allow the 'Spirit to lead' the worship service making the style very informal.”

When Jesus had an encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well the question of worship was brought up. The Samaritan woman's concern was where worship was supposed to take place. As seen above, many Christians have similar concerns. Unfortunately, such concerns only tend to fuel the “religious” side of Christianity and miss the “relationship” side.

It is interesting to note Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman. Any other Jew would have argued with her concerning the proper place to worship, but Jesus' response gives us insight into exactly what kind of worship God truly desires. He says to her “...the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Basically, Jesus was saying that worship is more than how, what, when and where. It is more than just a religious action. Worship is, very simply put, devotion that comes from deep within. He says that true worshipers will worship in spirit. It is a response to the awe and wonder a person experiences when they have a true encounter with God. Worship is also not done to get something. Many of the world's religions have developed elaborate worship systems for the sole, but false, purpose of getting what they want from their gods. Jesus, on the other hand, shows that true worship comes from within a person and is, again, a response to an encounter with God.

Simply put, worship is the devotion to God that we have been exploring this week. It is devoting ourselves to seeking God first. It is the devoting of ourselves to knowing and doing God's will. It is devoting ourselves to sharing the relationship we have with God with others, and, as we will see tomorrow, it is devoting ourselves to depending on God to help us accomplish all these things which are impossible on our own. Worship is true devotion that begins in the very center of one's being. It is a response to a true encounter with God.

Does your relationship with God make you want to devote everything you are and have to him? Life could be so much simpler if you only worshiped him in spirit and truth. Spend time talking with God right now. Confess that you struggle with devotion to Him. Ask Him to help you experience a true relationship with Him that will cause you to worship him in both spirit and truth taking every action in your life and making it an act of worship.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK TWO: SATURDAY

“Devote myself to trusting him to help me”

Today's Reading: Luke 22:39-46

The simple life gives new direction. It eases life's burdens, and it makes life more fulfilling. To be honest though, living the simple life can be extremely difficult. Reading through the Old Testament gives example after example of men who knew God's will but messed up time and time again.

A great example of this is King Jehoshaphat king of Judah. Jehoshaphat was a good king who walked in the ways of God. There came a time when he went to King Ahab of Israel and was persuaded to go into battle with him even though a prophet had revealed that the battle would not bode well for them. After the battle God chastised King Jehoshaphat for aligning himself with King Ahab who was an ungodly and wicked king. You would think Jehoshaphat would have learned a lesson. Unfortunately we find King Jehoshaphat doing it again with King Ahab's son Ahaziah. Apparently Jehoshaphat didn't learn his lesson.

All Christians are in the same boat: We wane in our devotion to God from time to time especially when things seem to be going good. We get too comfortable and we allow our devotion to shift to other things. When this happens we find ourselves in a lot of trouble.

The first step in Celebrate Recovery's 12 steps is “Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.” In this step is an understanding that there is someone else outside of ourselves who has the power to help us live the simple life.

Paul expresses what every Christian knows to be true in Romans 7:18; “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” What a dilemma! Fortunately Paul offers the answer in his letter to the Philippians. He writes “Therefore...as you have always obeyed, so now...work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (2:12-13). It is God who works in us and through us. If this is the case then wouldn't it make sense to seek God's power daily?

Jesus set the example for us when we read that he was in the habit of going off alone unto a mountain to spend time praying to God. Jesus made seeking God a priority, and it shows through his devotion to prayer. We get a very intimate glimpse of this in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Jesus, being not only divine but human as well, cried out to his Father asking for strength to do his will. Jesus was devoted to God's will and when his human strength began to fail him he turned to God who continued to fuel his devotion.

Devotion is a major part of the Christian life. It characterizes a “kingdom citizen” otherwise known as a disciple. Is it your desire to be completely and totally devoted to God? Understand that you cannot do it on your own power. You have to seek God's power daily. Take some time to talk to God today. Ask him to fuel your desire to be devoted in everything that has been discovered this week. Don't stop with today's prayer though. Pray everyday. Pray that God helps you be devoted to seeking his power and strength daily.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE— MONDAY
The Necessity of Spiritual Disciplines For The Disciple

"The greatest need today is not for a great number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

- Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Pg. 1

As if Mondays weren't bad enough, today we're going to talk about the necessity of practicing Spiritual Disciplines in our lives! *Yuck!* Have you ever noticed the relationship between the word Disciple and Discipline? They look the same because the English words come from the same root, according to Dictionary.com:

Origin: 1175–1225; ME < AF < L *disciplīna* instruction, tuition, equiv. to *discipul* (us) *disciple* + *-ina* *-ine*²

The truth is you can't be a growing, healthy Disciple of Jesus, unless you are disciplined in your approach to spiritual growth, & the more disciplined I become, the more mature I'm likely to be.

So how often do I need to practice this discipline? Jesus said, daily. *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23 (NIV)*

What's involved in bearing my cross? **Doing whatever it takes to be like Jesus!**

This week we're going to look at five classic disciplines that as Disciples of Jesus we all need to have in our lives. Odds are that you are already practicing some of these, at least in part. The goal is that we become more consistent with the ones we are doing, and *start doing the one's we aren't!*

Today we want to answer a simple question—**why is all this necessary?** I'm going to church, and I believe, isn't that enough to make me grow spiritually?

In a word—NO!

Spiritual growth isn't automatic, if it were the Bible would never say things like this: *We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you...* Hebrews 5:11-12a (NIV)

I hope you'll commit yourself this week to exploring these disciplines, and putting them into practice in your life. Pick up the cross & deepen your Discipleship.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE—TUESDAY
Reading, Studying & Meditating on the Bible

Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. Joshua 1:8 (NLT)

There's no way we'll be able to cover all three of the things in the title, so we're going to focus on reading the Word. If you read it enough you'll find that studying and meditating on it will come in time.

When you challenge people to read the Bible you get a variety of reactions. Most of them boil down to this: people think it's just too darn hard to read through the entire Bible in a year! "*Are you kidding me,*" they think, "*that would take forever!!*"

Wrong Bible Study Breath!!! Here's a few Bible facts for you.

There are a total of 1074 chapters in the Old Testament, and 260 in the New Testament. That's 1334 total chapters in the Bible. So what would it take to read through the Bible in a year? And what if you wanted a day or two off, make up days if you like, every week? Check out the chart below.

	7 Days A Week	6 Days A Week	5 Days A Week
Old Test.	3 (2.9)	3.4	4.1
New Test.	1 (0.7)	1 (0.8)	1

If you want to read through the Bible in one year, then all you have to do is read 3 or 4 chapters of the Old Testament every day (depending on time off) and just one chapter of the New Testament a day.

That's not very hard now is it? But let's say you aren't a good reader, a super busy, etc. Okay, how about this? I challenge you to read through the New Testament this next year! Take any two days off a week that you choose, and you still *only have to read one chapter a day!*

Given how much the chapters vary in length, the time needed will vary also, but it won't take you that long. And the results? Who knows how much it will impact your life in Christ if you take on either one of these challenges?

If you're wise you'll share this challenge not only with your spouse (if you're married) but with some good Christian friends (your small group is perfect!) so that you are held accountable, and have others to share the good things you learn with!

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE— WEDNESDAY
The Discipline of Prayer

God punishes us mildly by ignoring our prayers and severely by answering them. ~Richard J. Needham

Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.
~Søren Kierkegaard

“And when you pray...” (Matt. 6:5) Jesus clearly calls His Disciples to pray and expects them to do it regularly. Just about every Disciple knows that we ought to pray on a regular basis, and for many of us that’s just about where it stops!

Praying in a crisis is easy, praying in the midst of the stresses of everyday life tends to be something else again! This has been known for ages, and is why prayer is one of the Spiritual *Disciplines*! It’s not easy to devote regular time to prayer! This has been challenge for centuries of believers, so you are not alone, to put it mildly.

There are at least two parts to this challenge. One is the physical and mental challenge to get up, set aside time, and to stay awake while you pray! I know from personal experience how difficult this is—in college I found out my body can fall asleep in any position I can put it in—even *when I’m praying!* (You might try coffee, or light exercise before prayer!)

The other challenge is once I’m there—what do I do? How do I talk to God, what’s appropriate, etc.? Jesus helps us out here. *And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.* Matthew 6:7-8 (NIV)

Be real with God. Just tell him what your and other peoples needs are. Honestly talk about what you are thinking and feeling, just as you would with any close friend or family member. You don’t have to hold back, or edit yourself, or try and figure out what’s “proper” and what’s not “proper.”

Just say it! With love and respect of course, but honesty above all. I believe, and the Psalms back me up on this, that God desires honest prayer more than he wants anything else from us. The Psalmists questioned God, got angry with God, demanded him to explain why he wasn’t doing what they thought he ought to be doing, etc.

Now that’s real prayer! Maybe if we all prayed more like that, we’d all pray more? I think so, and encourage you try it as you consider making a commitment to a regular time of prayer every day.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE—THURSDAY The Discipline of Fasting—More Than Food!

"If a man has nothing to eat, fasting is the most intelligent thing he can do" - Hermann Hesse

"When the stomach is full, it is easy to talk of fasting" - St. Jerome

Is your stomach full? Whether it is or not, we're still going to talk about fasting! Of all the basic Spiritual Disciplines we'll discuss this week, fasting is far and away the most neglected one, in the Western Church at least.

Yet Jesus said, *"When you fast..."* (Matt. 6:16). **Not if, but when.** Well I *have fasted before*, so I guess you could say when, but it's sure been a long time!

Part of our problem is that we limit fasting to food alone, and in doing so we make a huge mistake. In the Bible there are different kinds of fasting. Remember Daniel? *"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.* Daniel 1:12 (NIV) That's what we call a partial fast. Limiting your intake of certain kinds of food (or other things) in order to please God.

What's fasting supposed to accomplish? Well in Isaiah God says he wants to use fasting to bring about justice. *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"* Isaiah 58:6-7 (NIV)

So fasting isn't just about being hungry or depriving yourself. It's about depriving yourself *so that good may come of it!* This can apply to yourself, your friends, family, church, community or world!

Which is why it's important not to limit fasting to food. Some of us need to fast from FaceBook to spend personal time with people right here right now! Ditto for texting, the Wii, etc. All of these are okay in and of themselves, but when they take us away from God or people or ministry, they *become a tool of evil!*

If you are neglecting your wife to play on the computer, or your husband to FaceBook—**wake up!** Let's carefully and prayerfully look at the things that clutter our lives and see how we can bring them *all under Christ's control!* Fasting is a way to do that—think about committing to do that this week.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE— FRIDAY
The Discipline of Giving—More Than Money

But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV)

"If you have much, give of your wealth; If you have little, give of your heart" - Arab Proverb

If fasting is unpopular, you can imagine how well liked this discipline is! I know some of you have a death grip on your wallet right now. Just relax, because what we are talking about includes, but is not limited to, money.

You can't be a real Disciple of Jesus without being a giver. God is a giver, and he wants his children to be givers too. He gave us the greatest gift of all in Jesus, "*For God so loved the world that he gave...*" John 3:16a (NIV) Adopting a lifestyle of giving makes me more like God.

Giving is also God's answer to the plague of materialism sweeping the land today. *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV)* If I'm freely giving what God has given me, it helps keep things in their proper place in my life. Giving also helps strengthen my faith (as I depend on God) and it also makes me happy. Studies show that people who give generously are happier than those who don't, as the Scripture says, "*...It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Acts 20:35 (NIV)

What Does God Want Me To Give? Clearly God does want us to practice regular financial support to his church. Ministry costs money, and it always has. A Disciple should regularly support his home church, and then give above and beyond that to mission work, etc.

But God also calls us to **give our time to him**. If you subtract 8 hours a day for sleep, then a tithe of your time every week is about 11 hours! Add up your devotional time, your time at church, Bible Study, etc. How close are you to that number? Maybe it's time to up the ante and see what God can do in your life?

We need to give our talents to God as well. Get involved in the ministry we are gifted to do, give our hearts to others and offer them the emotional support that we can. Give, give, and then give some more, that's the lifestyle of a Disciple of Jesus. Are you a giver for Jesus?.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE—SATURDAY
The Discipline of Fellowship

*“What men call social virtue, good **fellowship**, is commonly but the virtue of pigs in a litter, which lie close together to keep each other warm”*

- Henry David Thoreau

We need worship for our spirit, fellowship for our soul and committed subservience for our body.
Larry Norman

Fellowship is a Spiritual Discipline, socializing is not. Fellowship requires souls committed to Christ and each other. Socializing needs neither Christ nor any commitment beyond the moment. Fellowship is centered in Christ, socializing is not.

I hope you can clearly see the difference between socializing and fellowship. If you do you are *way ahead* of most other American Christians! These two things, which often co-exist together, are a lot like twins. They look a lot alike, but they are two completely separate things.

The New Testament is full of commands and exhortations about fellowship. Just look up all the “one another” passages to get an idea. We are told to serve, accept, love, forgive, greet, honor, be devoted, teach, submit and encourage one another—and that’s just a short list!

The Greek word for fellowship was used of partners in a business endeavor. That’s a great picture, because it points to several things that real fellowship is made up of.

Fellowship is a commitment. We don’t usually think of it that way, but it’s a committed partnership to Jesus and each other. You don’t just take it or leave it. That’s socializing, not fellowship.

Fellowship has a purpose beyond itself. Fellowship is about our relationship with Jesus, *not just having a good time*. If lives aren’t touched and changed but only entertained, *you’ve had no fellowship!*

We need both socializing and fellowship, but clearly God wants us to make **fellowship the priority**, with socializing coming in second.

The best way to experience the discipline of fellowship is to be in a small group. If you are part of a group that’s formed just for Simple Life—*that’s great!* **I want to challenge you now to make it permanent, and to develop this critical discipline in your life. Will you take the challenge?**

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE: MONDAY
“Ministry is having the heart of Jesus”
Today's Reading: Mark 10:42-45

In the culture of Haiti lies a problem: Everyone is looking for a leader and very few honest people are stepping forward to take the mantle. This problem probably stems from a past of slavery and poverty. When the Bible was translated into the common language of Kreole the translators chose the word “chef”, or chief, as the translation for pastor. This has given the Haitian people a false sense of what a pastor is. This idea has led many to think that the real work of the ministry is only done by the pastor. There is very little initiative of the average Haitian Christian to do ministry. Any ministry that may be done is done as a result of the pastor's direction. After all, he is the “chef.”

We don't need to look at another culture to see that this problem exists, to a certain degree, within our own culture. It is probable that most Christians would say, or agree, that everyone is responsible to do ministry, but truthfully all a person has to do is observe the modern Christian church in action to see that that we are in the same predicament. It is said that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people.

Part of the problem may be a misunderstanding of what “ministry” really is. For many, ministry is the job of the pastor, evangelist, missionary, etc... It is a “paid” position or if a volunteer does ministry it is because they have certain qualifications and time that the “average Christian” does not. Part of the misunderstanding may just be an unconscious excuse.

So what is ministry exactly? Ministry is having the heart of Jesus. In today's passage Jesus says very clearly what he came for; Jesus came to serve, but his service to humanity was in a completely unexpected way. Yes, Jesus met the physical needs of people. He fed thousands, he healed many and he taught a new way of living, but his ultimate service to man was helping us see our need for God and providing a way for us to have a relationship with Him.

It was in the early stages of the Church that followers of Jesus were given a derogatory name; that name was Christian. Christian literally means “little Christ.” Followers of Jesus in Corinth were trying to imitate Jesus, and apparently they were doing a good job. Even though the term was supposed to be derogatory it was readily accepted by His followers as an accurate and good description of who they were and what they were trying to accomplish.

If you call yourself a Christian, can your life be characterized by the description “little Christ?” Ministry is not a vocation. It isn't the job description of “professional” Christians. Ministry is a lifestyle; It is a result of an authentic encounter with Jesus Christ.

This week we will be looking at the different aspects of ministry and how they are reflected in Jesus' example. Ask God to open your heart and mind this week. Ask him to reveal where you have been lacking. Seek his strength and power to resist the temptation to do what is convenient and non-threatening. Ask him to give you the ability to step out in faith, trusting him to work through you, as you exhibit the heart of Jesus to those around you (the simple life).

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE: TUESDAY

“Ministry is meeting the needs of others”

Today's Reading: Matthew 9:35-38

Story after story shows us that a major way Jesus got people's attention was to meet their physical needs. Jesus healed, cast out demons, fed the hungry, etc... Why did he do these things? First, we are told that his miracles were signs that he was truly who he said he was. John says in his Gospel “....these (miracles) are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). Second, how else was he to meet the spiritual need of people when they were blinded by physical needs? Jesus had to get them beyond the physical in order to see the importance of the spiritual. There is a third reason and it ties into the first two. In today's reading Jesus was confronted with a crowd of people. It says that “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them...” Compassion is recognizing the needs of others and having a desire to meet those needs.

Jesus' compassion is motivated by love. It is the same unconditional love that God has for the world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son.” (John 3:16). Jesus' ultimate concern is the salvation of everyone, but this doesn't stop him from being concerned about people's present afflictions.

As disciples of Jesus we are to be little Christs to the world. Now, there are not many, if any, who will perform miracles, but that doesn't mean that God has not given us the ability to meet people's needs. If it is in our power to meet a need then we need to take the opportunity given. This is ministry, and as anyone can see it is not limited to the “professional” of Christianity. Every person who follows Christ has the ability to meet particular needs. To fail to meet the needs of others when we can is to fail at doing the work of ministry. Again, disciples meet the needs of others.

This meeting of needs has to be fueled by the same love that both God, by giving his son to the world, and Jesus, by sacrificing himself on the cross for humanity, exhibited. People are not stupid. Many “humanitarian” organizations exist to boost the image of a particular person or group of people. Most people can detect if they are being helped because of a genuine concern or for personal gain. Our meeting the needs of others has to have compassion (God's love) as the foundation.

Admit it. It can be hard to exhibit true compassion like Christ. We are, after all, human, but what is impossible for man is possible for God. If you want to do “ministry” like Jesus you have to have a compassionate heart. If you do not have a compassionate heart or find it hard to develop one then you need to turn it over to God. It begins with wanting to please Him. He commands us to “love one another.” Love, contrary to what the world says, is not an emotion; It is action. *Love is doing the right thing and best thing for others.* Obey and please God by loving others and pray for a compassionate heart. This is the simple life of God.

Talk to God about your compassion level. If you need to confess that it isn't where it should be then do so. Trust God to work in you. Pray that he will help you be obedient and love others. Do the ministry that meets the needs of others.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE: WEDNESDAY

“Ministry is serving the body”

Today's Reading: Acts 6:1-6

In the beginning chapters of Acts we see the early church doing something spectacular. Where there was a need Godly people would quickly step up to the plate and meet it. The newly formed church spontaneously began meeting each others needs. What a sight this must have been. Thousands of people helping each other, ministering to each other; making sure needs were met.

With so many people it isn't very surprising that a few problems surfaced. One of them had to do with a new food ministry to widows. Someone probably had an idea and started handing out food. The idea grew as others did the same until there was this loosely organized, but very valuable, ministry. Unfortunately some of the women were being overlooked and word of it reached the apostles' ears.

The apostles had been spending a majority of their time praying and preaching and teaching God's word. Someone might get the impression that the apostles felt it beneath them to wait tables, but that is not true. They saw the importance of this growing ministry and took the complaint very serious. How do we know? They found men who had good reputations and were filled with God's wisdom. They could have tried to appease those complaining by just filling the position with anyone who was willing to do it. Instead, a search was conducted to find the right people who could effectively serve the body.

Note that last sentence. “A search was conducted to find the right people who could effectively serve the body.” I have been in ministry for over 15 years. There are two big problems churches face. First, churches have a very hard time finding people to fill, and be effective in, ministry positions. Second, churches usually end up putting people in positions of ministry who have no right to be there. Church leaders care about the people in their churches. It is obvious that there are various needs throughout the church. Because of this they will often find just about anyone willing to fill the position of ministry leader so that the church can offer much needed ministries. The problem is, many of the people who readily volunteer are doing so for the wrong reasons. I can't tell you how many ministries I have seen fail because the people who volunteered were volunteering for selfish reasons and/or did not have God given gifts and abilities to make them successful.

Truthfully, too few Christians are willing to serve their church family. As we see in today's passage, ministry is not just telling others about Jesus or meeting the needs of the world. Ministry is serving your church with the gifts and talents that God has given. One of the biggest excuses for not serving is time. Our lives have become so complex/busy that we have failed to continue what the early church started: We fail to serve our church family.

Has your life gotten so busy that you are not able to serve your church family? Do you make up excuses of being too busy or not having enough time? Talk to God and confess where you have failed. Seek his will for you. Ask him to reveal gifts and abilities you can use to serve your church family.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE: THURSDAY

“Ministry is directing others to Jesus”

Today's Reading: Luke 17:11-19

Being Christian means to be like Jesus. There is no escaping this simple but profound truth. Looking at Jesus' life, it isn't hard to miss his concern and love for people. It is interesting to note, even though his priority “mission” was providing a way to a repaired relationship with God (through the forgiveness of sins) his strategy to get people's attention was meeting their perceived immediate needs. Jesus healed people, fed the masses, cast out demons, touched the untouchables, taught the uneducated, etc... Jesus met people's needs!

Jesus always had the ultimate need in mind, but he would often look for the perceived need (what we might call the “here and now problem(s)”). He understood humanities nearsightedness. People tend to focus on the here and now problems blinding them from seeing ultimate issues of life: particularly that concerning the ultimate future. Jesus knew that people needed to get beyond the here and now problems in order to see the ultimate problem of sin.

As followers of Christ we are in an amazing position: We have been given the privilege of being Jesus' hands and feet. Just as Jesus served by meeting physical needs so should we. Meeting people's needs is a small demonstration of God's love. The Holy Spirit uses our “ministry” to help people see that there is a greater need that only God can fulfill through Jesus Christ.

Just because we meet needs does not guarantee that people will turn to Jesus. Our Scripture reading today gives a great illustration of this. Only one of ten turned to Jesus as a result of his healing, but there was fruit from Jesus' labor. There will be fruit from our labor as well.

We might be tempted to base our service on what type of person is standing in front of us. The fact is everyone has the need for salvation. The decision to serve should be based on the ultimate *need* that is in front of us. Proverbs 3:27 says “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” God has given us the power to point people to Jesus.

A major part of ministry is praying for God's guidance. We are not always going to get it right when it comes to helping others, but God is more concerned about our serving hearts than he is about our occasional mess ups (the money you give to a homeless man is spent on alcohol.) If we trust him, “Trust the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5), he will be faithful to guide us.

Are you conscious of the needs of others? Do you try to help when you see a need? Is salvation for others your ultimate concern? Ask God to give you a servant's heart. Seek God and he will help you show his love to the world. Pray that He will use your service to others as a means of directing their attention to Jesus.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE: FRIDAY

“Ministry is essential for developing”

Today's Reading: John 15:1-12

Simple living is making the main things the most important things. We *devote* ourselves to God. We *develop* in Christlikeness. We *do* the work of the ministry. We *disciple* others. Simple living is developing these godly habits in our lives.

How does a person develop healthy habits? They must make repeated attempts at doing an action until it becomes a habit. When they fail in the process they start over. They keep doing and doing and doing until the desired habit is formed. The old adage is “Practice makes perfect.” It is no different for the Christian. When a Christian wants to develop Christlikeness the best way is to do the work of the ministry!!

We don't do ministry because we need to earn God's favor. We have earned his favor through Jesus. We do ministry because we love God. Jesus said “Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love...” (John 15:9b-10a). We have a loving relationship with God and want to maintain it. We maintain it by doing what God says. In this passage Jesus goes on to say, verse 12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Ministry!

At the beginning of this chapter Jesus says that those who abide in him bear fruit. Fruit can refer to a number of things. It can be likened to the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians. It can refer to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives. It can refer to disciples being made as a result of our efforts to spread the Good News. Essentially, fruit is the result of ministry!!

There is a very important part of today's passage that is easy to miss. In verse 2 Jesus says “Every branch that does bear fruit [God] prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” God “prunes” us while we are ministering or serving like Jesus. God is in the process of completing his work in us (Phil 1:6). The *completing* work of God is taking place while we are *doing* ministry. Ministry is essential for developing!!

If we have learned anything about ministry this week we have learned that it is selfless action (the very way Jesus acted). Paul says to have the same mind as Christ. How does he tell us to develop this Christlike mind? “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourself. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-5)

The person who wants to develop in Christlikeness must engage in ministry. Learn to have the heart of Jesus. Serve others. Serve the church. Direct the world's attention to Christ. Don't get discouraged. God is in the process of perfecting the work he started in us. Start with small steps. Pray that God will show you what steps he wants you to take. Is there a friend who needs your help? Is there a small ministry position you can do at church? Is there someone who needs a small act of kindness that will move them closer to seeing Jesus? Trust God. He is faithful to answer the prayer of those who seek him.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK THREE: SATURDAY

“Ministry is an act of worship”

Today's Reading: Isaiah 1:9-17

Even though we have identified four characteristics of a disciple; Devote yourself to God. Develop Christlikeness. Do the work of the ministry. Disciple others), it is important to understand that all these characteristics overlap. It is important to do the work of the ministry for several reasons identified this week, but today it is important to see that ministry is also an act of worship.

Worship can have different meanings. Worship can be actions that show love. It can be actions that reveal devotion. It can be an action that glorifies something (draws attention to). It can be an action showing gratitude and appreciation. It can be an action that... If you haven't noticed yet worship is action, and we have discovered this week that ministry is action as well.

In most religions worship is concerned with the action that is exhibited towards the deity: singing, dancing, offering, meditation, etc... Though God wants us to worship him in such ways his concern is the state of our hearts. Mere action to him is worthless as we can see in our passage today.

Israel never seemed to quite understand that God was more concerned about the state of the heart than the actions of worship. Time and time again God has to rebuke Israel. They figured that all they had to do to appease God was to go through the motions of worship, but God revealed through Isaiah that when Israel did this it was detestable in his sight because there was no heart behind it.

Not everyone reading this is a parent, but parents may understand this more than anyone else. Parents appreciate it when children do what they are supposed to do when they are told, but parents *love it* when children do what they are supposed to *without being told*. Now a parent may not always know when a child is acting out of love, but God always knows when his children's actions are love actions.

A very important thing to notice in today's passage is God's revelation to his people concerning how they can truly worship him. God says "...cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." Basically God says "If you really want to worship me then you will do the work of the ministry. You will serve others as I and my Son have served you."

Many of us have fooled ourselves into thinking that God is just happy with us showing up to church once in awhile. We sing a few songs, participate in prayer, confess sins while taking communion and listen to a funny sermon from the pastor. Is God saying to you what he said to Israel so long ago? Is your "act of worship" as detestable to him as was Israel's? Do you need to confess to God that you have not been worshiping him as he requires? Today is a good day to get right with God. A great way to show God that you are serious about your relationship with him and a great way to worship him is to get involved in doing the work of the ministry. Pray about where God wants you to serve.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK FIVE— MONDAY
The Horror of Evangelism!

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."
Matthew 4:19 (NIV)

No man is born an Artist nor an Angler. - Izaak Walton

No, I'm not saying Evangelism is horrible. I am saying that most Christians react to it with a carefully hidden sense of horror. Which is why most Disciples in America do not share their faith on anything approaching a regular basis.

Why not? After 35 years of listening to people, I can sum up the real reason (not the one always given) in one word—**fear!** What are we afraid of?

Rejection: If I talk to people about Jesus some of them, perhaps many of them, are going to not only reject him but reject *me!* No one enjoys rejection and so we try to minimize it by saying things like, "*The way I live is an example, and that's my witness.*" Really? You mean you live such an incredible life that after knowing you a while people just fall on their knees crying out to Jesus to save them?

I didn't think so.

Seen As Uncool! This is really just rejection wearing another face. It's hard to be seen by friends and family as being "out of it." The more I want to "fit in" the less I'm inclined to witness, unless of course I'm hanging out with some gung ho Christians at the moment.

Making A Mistake. People often say, "*Oh I can't witness, I don't know what to say or how to answer people's questions!*" I've had people who've been Christians for 20 or 30 years tell me that! That's a sad comment on our depth as Disciples isn't it?

But beyond that, *evangelism doesn't have to be about being the Bible Answer Man!* If you can do that, great. But even brand new, spiritual diaper wearing, still drying off from their baptism, baby Christians are called to witness! No one would expect them to understand the complexities or the Trinity or be able to explain why God allows evil etc. Yet, they are called to be witnesses, as are *all Disciples*.

There's another way to witness, and that's what we're going to talking about this week. Today, I'm asking you to be open and willing to share your story about how Jesus has changed you. Are you ready and willing to be trained to do that? Stay tuned—more tomorrow!

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK FIVE—TUESDAY
Learning to Tell My Story, Pt. 1

"Lord, make me a crisis man. Let me not be a mile-post on a single road, but make me a fork that men must turn one way or another in facing Christ in me." - Jim Elliot

Jim Elliot had the right idea, he wanted to be used by God to direct people to face their need for Jesus. That's just what God can and will do in you—if you let him!

To do that you have to be willing to tell your story—to share your testimony. Thanks to the overly dramatic testimonies we've all heard, most Disciples don't think they have a testimony. *"I was never on drugs, or a Mafia hit man, so I don't have one."*

Oh yes you do! *Every Disciple of Jesus has not just one—but many testimonies of his love, faithfulness and grace!* You are no different. A testimony is simply the story of what Christ has done in, through, and for you. You have many stories about that! You just need to remember them. How has Christ helped you deal with personal problems, or stress or fears or loneliness or death, etc.

All of those things, and many more besides, are the basis for a testimony about how Jesus has and continues, to change your life! You just need to prepare to tell them! That's what Christ calls us to do, and that's what I hope you will do.

A testimony consists of four basic parts: **1) What I was like before Christ (or what my problem was/is as a Disciple. 2) How I realized I needed Christ. 3) What I did to commit myself to Christ. 4) The difference he's made in my life.**

Your testimony ought to be like a pyramid, with the least amount of time spent on me, and the majority of time spend on the good news of how Jesus has changed your life!

Your testimony *should be short!* Learn how to communicate your basic story in about three minuets. I know you have lots more to say, but save it for when people *will actually listen!* To break the ice, share your story in a simple and true way, that focuses not on you, but on Jesus and what's he's done in your life.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK FIVE— WEDNESDAY
Learning to Tell My Story, Pt. 2

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! Luke 15:17 (NIV)

"Any method of evangelism will work if God is in it." - Leonard Ravenhill

Just like the prodigal son, there comes a moment in life when you awake to your need for Christ. In your testimony you need to be specific about what made that happen. Was it a crisis, or a series of events, or did you just grow into it gradually? However it happened, you need to explain that clearly.

Then comes the commitment step. At some point you prayed a prayer or made a decision to let go of your problem, and let God lead you in how to deal with it. Be very specific in describing what you did. Did you say a prayer? Explain it clearly, so your listener will know what they can do.

The Difference it has made. This final part of the testimony is where Jesus gets the credit he deserves! Talk about the benefits you've experienced, the problems resolved, etc. How has Jesus changed you into a better person? Now's the time to share that briefly by using current examples if you can.

The "classic testimony" is a salvation one. Some of you were raised in a Christian home, or become a believer at an early age, and think that you don't have a testimony. You are wrong.

You might not have a salvation testimony, but you still have all sorts of testimonies about how Jesus has helped you and your friends and family in all sorts of ways now don't you? *Those are stores you need to prepare to share with your unsaved or unchurched friends.*

God can take true stories and use them in powerful ways. People can and will argue over doctrine. They can debate you about the inspiration of the Bible, whether or not Jesus really came back from the dead, or walked on water etc.

But they can't argue with you about your own personal experience! They might not believe it right away, but God use that as a powerful seed planted in their hearts.

We need both testimonies and explaining our reasons for faith. Don't just use one approach, use as many different stories as you have. God has never sanctioned just one way to share the Gospel, but has given us many. Use them all for the glory of God to the salvation of many!

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK FIVE—THURSDAY
Wise Witnessing—Know Your Fish! Pt. 1

"Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell." - C. T. Studd

The more you understand something, the better you are at doing it. Likewise, the better you understand someone the better you should be at relating to them.

This applies to bringing people to Christ as well. The better you know the people you are dealing with the easier it should be for you to know what testimony will reach them, what problems they need answered, etc.

But just how well do we understand the process of coming to Christ? Most Disciples have probably never thought about it at all. Conversion is a murky subject, dealing with human hearts, sin, the Holy Spirit and salvation. There is not a human on earth who totally understands it.

However, when you study carefully what happens to most people, you begin to see a pattern emerge. There seem to be a series of steps or stages that most people go through on their way to receiving Christ. Not everyone goes through all of them to be sure, but many do.

If you know these stages, and can find where the people you are witnessing too are on it, then obviously you'll be much better equipped to help them come to Christ. Here's the basic stages most people see:

Stage	Description
Resistant	Self-satisfied, spiritually apathetic
Receptive	Aware of unmet need or spiritual void in life
Seeker	Begins looking for spiritual answers to problems
Consideration	Considers the difference between believers and non-believers
Understanding	Learns why & how to become a Christian
Ready!	Ready to believe and receive Christ!

Can you find your unsaved friends on this scale? Can you see how important it is to tailor your approach to them based on where they are at? You wouldn't approach someone in the resistant stage the same you would someone at the seeker stage would you? List your unsaved friends & family, and where they fit in this process.

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK FIVE— FRIDAY
Wise Witnessing—Know Your Fish, Pt. 2

If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.
Ecclesiastes 10:10 (NIV)

Here's a few general hints about how to deal with people in these different stages. This will help you be more skilled in your approach to them.

Resistant Stage: Pray for them. Don't necessarily tell them that—some people get mad about it, others like it. But pray for them and work on building a closer relationship with them so that they can see Christ in you.

DO NOT argue with them. If they have questions try and answer them of course, but avoid arguing about things, especially non-essentials! (2 Tim. 2:23-26)

Receptive Stage: Offer to help them out in practical ways. Share a testimony with them about the same kind of needs they have, or something related to it. Tell them you are praying for them—*they will appreciate it!* Ask them open ended questions like, *Tell me about the spiritual side of your life.* to get them thinking and talking.

Seeker Stage: Invite them to one of our weekend services. This is also a great time to invite them to your small group (if you aren't in one, *get there bunky!*). Remember: they may well be seeking in other religions as well, so be prepared for that and try to keep them focused on Christ!

Consideration Stage: Introduce them to other Christians, just as Jesus introduced Zaccheus to his disciples (Luke 19:1-10) Talk about how believers respond to life's challenges.

Understanding Stage: Explain to them God's Plan of Salvation! Tell how you made your decision to follow Christ. Also, don't forget to help them see the benefits of being a Christian, *as well as what it will cost them!* **Don't** shy away from this—tell them the truth, and keep praying!

Ready Stage: Offer to lead them in a prayer of commitment to Christ! Make sure they understand how to establish their Spiritual B.A.S.I.S., and get in touch with either Pastors Louie or Brian, or one of the Elders, to schedule their baptism. (Remember, you lead them to Christ, you should baptize them if that's okay with them and you!)

So there you have it. Do you see how *your story* can be used by God to make an eternal difference in the lives of people? Are you ready and willing to start preparing to share your testimony today?

SIMPLE LIFE—WEEK FIVE—SATURDAY
All Part of Becoming A Disciple

Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Christian ideal has not been found tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried.
- G.K. Chesterton

Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self
- C.S. Lewis

Congratulations! You've made it to the end of the journey! This is the last of our **Simple Life** devotions. If you've read all these and been part of a small group and at our weekend services, I want to personally thank you for investing that time and effort with us.

I hope by now you see the Christian Life, the life of a Disciple of Jesus, is supposed to be a Simple Life, that's lived for Jesus and focused around these four simple but profound activities:

Devoting myself to God, Developing Christlikeness, Doing my Ministry & Discipling Others.

Have you memorized them yet? I hope so. More than that it's our hope that you'll begin to organize your life around them.

And not just your "spiritual life" (*whatever that means!*) either! Your whole life can and should be lived out in the light of these four steps (stages, activities, whatever!).

Serving Jesus was meant to be simple. We have a simple Gospel to share with the world, and a simple approach to life as well. *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

It doesn't get much simpler or more pure than that. I hope you will take some time and do the work to purify your life, so that you are simply living for Jesus, and letting everything either fit into that, or fall by the wayside where it belongs.

It's time to reject our Culture of Complexity and embrace the Simple Life our Savior sets before us. Let's begin to really live, and in doing so be the vibrant witnesses that Jesus calls us to be, and that all of us wish we could be. It's in our hands now—what will we do with the **Simple Life**?

Where Do I Go From Here?

Devoting Myself To God:

Worship God—

Saturday—6:00 PM

Sunday—9:30 AM

Developing Christ-likeness:

Get into a Small Group

Read Your Bible & Pray Daily

**Give Your Time, Talent & Treasure
to God's Kingdom**

Doing Ministry:

**Get involved in one of KCC's
Ministries**

**Worship at one Service, Serve at
the Other one.**

Discipling Others:

**Talk to your unchurched & non-
Christian friends about Jesus!
Be their friend—invite them to
church!**