



## Daily Devotionals: Rhythms | May 8, 2022

### Simplicity

There is a Shaker hymn that says, “’Tis a gift to be simple. ’Tis a gift to be free.” And perhaps the Shaker lifestyle is what you picture when you think of practicing simplicity: austere, plain, monotonous. So, is simplicity really a gift, or is it just boring?

In 2000, a pair of psychologists set up an experiment in the form of a sales display table of specialty jams at a grocery store. The first day, the table held a selection of 24 different jams; the second day, it displayed six. Would you like to take a guess which table sold more or had the highest customer satisfaction? The table that contained six jams. We’ve become conditioned to think we want the most options and the widest range of possibilities, when, in fact, this study (and other similar ones) have shown that simpler choices not only help us make decisions but also lead to more satisfaction with what we’ve chosen.

What does that have to do with our relationship with Jesus? In **Matthew 6:31-33** (CSB), Jesus says, “So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.”

When we practice simplicity, we do so because we desire to uncomplicate and untangle our lives so we can focus on what really matters. Perhaps you’ve been trying to find satisfaction in a full schedule, a multitude of options, or in sophisticated pleasures. And perhaps you’ve found the words of another hymn to be true: “I can’t get no satisfaction.” If that’s the case, then simplicity might be for you.

### Scripture

*Philippians 4:11-13 (MSG):*

Actually, I don’t have a sense of needing anything personally. I’ve learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I’m just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I’ve found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands



empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.

## **Practices**

Perhaps the hardest thing about the concept of simplicity is actually practicing it. Our appetites are kings in our culture. So...to “stick it to the man” try implementing one of these three practices into your life this week. Like always, the goal isn’t to check off a to-do item. The goal here is to notice what we feel attached to and to learn contentment in all things, to learn that there is more to life than the accumulation of possessions.

### **Practice 1 – Gratitude and contentment**

Two other practices or frames of mind are closely associated with simplicity: contentment and gratitude. This first practice will help cultivate both.

#### **Spend time meditating on the scripture above from Philippians 4.**

Interact with it. Without judging, see what God, through the scripture, might reveal to you. Ask God and yourself questions, like:

- Have I learned to be quite content?
- What would that kind of contentment look like for me?
- Am I just as happy with much as with little? With little as with much?
- Have I found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry?

#### **Once you’ve sat with the scripture, create a gratitude list.**

Set a timer for 5 minutes and write as many things as you can—from your closest family members to your coffee pot to a good conversation you had last week—that you are grateful for. Whatever comes to mind, write it down. Once the 5 minutes is up, give the list to God in prayer. Tell him how grateful you are for the gifts in your life.



## **Practice 2 – Simplicity of pleasures**

Simplicity doesn't have to mean boring. In this exercise, you'll identify simple pleasures you enjoy and schedule time to do those things. (You might notice how this can easily coincide with carving out some of that sabbath time from a couple of weeks ago.)

First, spend time thinking about the simplest pleasures you enjoy; ask God to reveal them to you. That could be a leisurely walk, getting away in nature, good conversation over coffee, sitting by a fire, you get the idea. Name the top 5 simple pleasures that you love.

Second, schedule time to do one of those things. Block out time and prepare so the crush of busyness doesn't interfere. And when the time comes, actually do the thing; don't put it off because something seemingly more pressing or more important has come up.

Take time once you're finished to notice how that experience affected you when you were intentional about doing it.

## **Practice 3 – Simplicity of stuff**

These practices are taken from the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Calhoun. Find an area to uncomplicate your life by letting go. Here are a few examples. Use one of these or find your own area where you want to simplify.

1. Clean out your garage, attic, or closet.
2. Eat simple foods for a period of time (maybe it's an egg sandwich for breakfast, maybe it's a grilled cheese for a lunch, maybe it's chicken noodle soup for dinner).
3. Instead of buying something for yourself this week, take the money you would have spent on that thing and, in secrecy, gift something to someone else!
4. If you can get where you need to go by walking, walk rather than drive.
5. Eliminate something from your schedule from the upcoming week.

Once you've done the letting go, reflect on how it made you feel. Did you experience a sense of freedom or satisfaction? Was it harder than you thought it would be?



**Questions for reflection:**

1. Which practice did you experiment with this week? What was doing it like for you?
2. How did this practice help you simplify and experience God more? Explain.
3. What takeaways or invitations from God did you experience as a result of using this practice this week?