Guide on the Spiritual Discipline of SIMPLICITY
October 2011
Prepared by Reverend Colleen Hurley-Bates

Introduction

Thou my everlasting portion,
More than friend or life to me,
All along my pilgrim journey,
Savior, let me walk with Thee.

Not for ease or worldly pleasure,
Nor for fame my prayer shall be;
Gladly will I toil and suffer,
Only let me walk with Thee. . .

-From the Hymn, “Close to Thee” by Fanny Crosby

This month, our focus will be the spiritual discipline of Simplicity, which is defined by Richard Foster as: *The inward reality of single-hearted focus upon God and His kingdom, which result in an outward lifestyle of modesty, openness, and unpretentiousness and which disciplines our hunger for status, glamour and luxury.* We live in the world, but our hearts and minds are to be citizens of God’s kingdom, which has a much different value system than we experience every day. The discipline of simplicity allows us to live in freedom from things that clamor for our attention but do not fulfill our souls. This discipline calls us to remember our identity is in Christ and to put Him above all others.

This guide has been designed with simplicity in mind. It has been put together with the goal of having you KNOW God more deeply and to have His Holy Spirit guide you to more simplicity. Because we live very full lives with various pressures vying for our attention, it is good to ask the Lord how we can let go of a few things in order to hear Him more. In the book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster gives four ways we can be freed up from anxiety in order to live in simplicity. They are to seek God, to receive what He gives us as a gift, to trust God to care for those gifts, and to make those gifts available to others. This guide has been written so that the four weeks we study simplicity correspond to those four attitudes.
Dallas Willard writes that simplicity is “the arrangement of life around a few consistent purposes, explicitly excluding what is not necessary to human well-being.” (Spirit of the Disciplines) This statement reminds us that simplicity is an inward reality that becomes an outward lifestyle. Simplicity is very much in vogue right now. People who don’t know Jesus are exemplifying a lifestyle that rejects consumerism, slavery, practices that harm the earth, as well as lives that are too jammed packed with things to do. Those are all great and important things to do. Yet it must be stated here that the point of the disciplines is not simply to be a more thoughtful person on the planet so we can feel good about ourselves...or even because we decide it is the right thing to do. The purpose of the disciplines is to draw closer to the One who made us, so that we might love Him and love our neighbors, and love His created world in the way He does. We practice simplicity because it helps us to focus in on the intentions of God and frees us from being burdened with all the things we think are so important. Let the good we do stem from a healthy relationship with the Father and in this month, may He show you the unique places in your life where you need to simplify.

“May God give you--and me--the courage, the wisdom, and the strength always to hold the kingdom of God as the number one priority of our lives. To do so is to live in simplicity.”

-Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline
Week One: Seek God  
October 2-8

Sunday

It is important each week to take a day of Sabbath rest. For many this is the first day of the week: Sunday. On this day, take some time for worship, study and prayer. Relax, unwind and take a deep breath. If possible, rest from any work--from your job, around the house or something you volunteer for. Cook a meal, go for a walk, take a nap, play with your kids, do some gardening, linger over coffee with a friend, read a book, go to the beach, take a bike ride, listen to music. Simply be. Celebrate the Lord. Enjoy the life and world God has given.

Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know, to love what I ought to love, to praise what delights you most, to value what is precious in your sight, to hate what is offensive to You. Amen.

Thomas a Kempis in Little Book of Common Prayer

Monday-Wednesday

Read the chapter on Simplicity in Richard Foster’s book, Celebration of Discipline. Take time to allow it to sink in. Read it again. Underline things. Circle things. Stop and pray. Ask questions. Take a few notes. Do you agree or disagree?

“The life of discipleship can only be maintained as long as nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves--neither the law, nor personal piety, nor even the world. The disciple always looks only to his master, never to Christ AND the law, Christ AND religion, Christ AND the world. He avoids all such notions like the plague. Only by following Christ alone can he preserve a single eye. His eye rests wholly on the light that comes from Christ, and has no darkness or ambiguity in it. As the eye must be single, clear and pure in order to keep light in the body, as hand and foot can receive light from no other source save the eye, as the foot stumbles and the hand misses its mark when the eye is dim, as the whole body is in darkness when the eye is blind; so the follower of Christ is in the light only so long as he looks simply to Christ and at nothing else in the world. Thus the heart of the disciple must be set upon Christ alone. If the eye sees an object which is not there, the whole body is deceived. If the heart is devoted to the mirage of the world, to the creature instead of the Creator, the disciple is lost.”

-From The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
**Thursday**

Spend some time with Jesus reading Matthew 6:25-34. If you have time, write some thoughts about what it means to SEEK the kingdom of God. What does it mean that we have a God who dresses the flowers beautifully and wants to provide for us as well? What do you learn about Him in this passage?

**Friday**

Exercise: Spend some times watching the birds of the air and listening to them. Take into account the simplicity of their lives: fed with what they find, clothed with their own feathers, and sheltered in various ways. Their alertness and vitality seem to suggest a confidence in God’s plan. What do you learn from your observations?

**Saturday**

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any man would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life, for me will find it.”*

This is a radical statement by our Lord. Take time in prayer today about what it means to deny yourself, to try to save your life and to lose it for Christ . . .only to find real life again. Talk honestly to God about how you are living this truth--or not-- and listen to how He responds.

“The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says, ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.”

C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*
Week Two: Receive what God has given you as enough
October 9-15

Sunday

All that we are and have comes from God. This simple truth can free us from the pressures, worries and strivings we experience daily. When we stop to acknowledge that God is the author of everything, we realize there is someone else in charge. God gives to us each day. . .in so many different ways. The lesson for us in this is to truly receive what He offers. This means believing He really wants to give us good things and that His love for us compels Him to care for us. It also means being content with what He gives us and not living in envy or discontent about what we don’t have. Take some time on this day to really consider what God has given you. Thank Him for what He has provided. If you have time, write it down and show it to someone who loves you.

We have forgotten the gracious hand which has preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving Grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us. --Abraham Lincoln

Monday

“Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty or riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”

-Proverbs 30:7-9

Are there areas in your life where you have disowned God because you have too much? Are there places where you have ‘stolen’ something that was not yours or was not meant for you? Meditate on the truth of this Proverb for your life today.
Tuesday

“The sinful worship of Mammon does not consist in eating and drinking and wearing clothes... for the needs of this life and of the body make food and clothing a requirement. But the in consists in being concerned about it and making it the reliance and confidence of your heart”

-Martin Luther

Wednesday

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Timothy 6:3-10

For the next few days, we are going to consider what it means to be content with what we have. Are you content with what you have? The message of our culture is to have more... because we deserve it or it will make us happy. Yet, often in our envy and covetousness, we fall into a depression that it hard for us to comprehend. Meditate on these words, “godliness with contentment is great gain.” Allow these words to soak into your heart as you seek God today. Think about where in your life you are truly content--where you could ask God for nothing else because you are at peace with your circumstances. Give the Lord praise for this.
Thursday

“I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.”

Philippians 4:10-14

Exercise: Make a list of what you are content with in your life and make a list of what **things or material goods** you would really like to make your life more happy. Does anything on this list surprise you? Allow God’s Spirit to challenge and comfort you as you take a look at these things. Seek God for what He would have you change. Ask Him to help you with that change.

Friday

“We must learn to realize that the love of God seeks us in every situation, and seeks our good. His inscrutable love seeks our awakening. True, since this awakening implies a kind of death to our exterior self, we will dread His coming in proportion as we are identified with this exterior self and attached to it. But when we understand the dialectic of life and death we will learn to take risks implied by faith to make the choices that deliver us from our routine self and open to us the door of a new being, a new reality.

The mind that is the prisoner of conventional ideas, and the will that is captive of its own desire cannot accept the seeds of an unfamiliar truth and as supernatural desire. For how can I receive the seeds of freedom if I am in love with slavery and how can I cherish the desire of God if I am filled with another and an opposite desire? God cannot plant His liberty in me because I am a prisoner and I do not even desire to be free. I love my captivity and I imprison myself in the desire for the things that I hate, and I have hardened my heart against true love. I must learn therefore to let go of the familiar and the usual and consent to what is new and unknown to me. I must learn to ‘leave myself’ in order to find myself by yielding to the love of God. If I were looking for God, every event and every moment would sow, in my will, grains of His life that would spring up one day in a tremendous harvest.”

-From New Seeds of Contemplation by Thomas Merton
Saturday

As you wind up this week, it is important to think about our relationship to the material world and our relationship with God. In the covenant God made with His people through Abraham, He was clear about worshipping Him above all gods and putting Him first. When Jesus came, He gave the same admonition. The readings this week, as well as the exercises have been designed to help you think about how to incorporate simplicity into your earthly life. Jesus lived with no house, no car, no bank account, very few possessions, yet had all He needed. He calls us to live in simplicity in the sense that we are not enslaved by what we own. Many Christians today are burdened with too great a focus on wealth. Continue to pray about your own relationship with money/possessions/wants as the Lord leads.

“Father in heaven! What are we without You? . . . What is all our striving, could it ever encompass a world, but a half-finished work if we do not know You: You the One, who is one thing and who is all!

So may you give to the intellect
    wisdom to comprehend that one thing;
to the heart,
    sincerity to receive this understanding;
to the will
    purity that wills only one thing.
In prosperity, may you grant
    perseverance to will one thing;
amid distractions,
    collectedness to will one thing;
in suffering,
    patience to will one thing.”

-Soren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing
Week Three: Trust God to care for us and take care of what God has given you.  
October 16-22

Sunday

On this day, take a few minutes to think about the following passages. As you rest, allow the truths you glean from them to infiltrate your mind. This week we are going to think about what it means to trust God to care for us...and what it means for us to model that caring.

“Now this I know:  
The LORD gives victory to his anointed.  
He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary  
with the victorious power of his right hand.  
Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.  
They are brought to their knees and fall,  
but we rise up and stand firm.  
LORD, give victory to the king!  
Answer us when we call!”

Psalm 20:6-9:

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight”

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.”

John 14:1-4
“The creation story is a starting point for understanding simplicity. The radical dependence of the entire creation upon God is a central teaching of this breathtaking narrative, and certainly the pivotal notion for our understanding of simplicity. We have no independent existence, no self-sustaining ability. All we are and all we possess is derived. We need to lift high the biblical doctrine of creation today, particularly our own creatureliness. We are not the captains of our souls nor the masters of our fates. We are part of the created order and hence totally dependent. Our posture is not one of arrogant acquisition, but of simple trust. What we have or ever will have come from his gracious hand. We are dependent upon God for even our sense of worth as individuals. Our uniqueness and dignity is rooted in our creation in the image of God. Our value is not tied to wealth, status, accomplishments, or position. It is a gift….The terrible reality of the fall was nothing more than a repudiation of our dependence upon God. Adam and Eve took to themselves what God had forbidden. They said, in effect, “We will provide for ourselves.” …Independence always comes at a high price, and especially so when it involves a rejection of the gracious provision of God. Simplicity means a return to the posture of dependence. Like children we live in a spirit of trust. What we have we receive as a gift.”

Richard Foster, The Freedom of Simplicity

Monday-Saturday: An Examen

For this week, we are going to thank God for how He has blessed us with certain gifts and how we can trust Him to take care of His gift. Then, we are going to consider if we are exemplifying that caring in our daily lives. A life of simplicity is one where we are asking the Lord to show us what to do with what He has given us.

“Consider that wonderful world of life in which you are placed, and observe that its great rhythms of birth, growth and death--all the things that really matter--are not in your control. That unhurried process will go forward in its stately beauty, little affected by your anxious fuss. Find out, then, where your treasure really is. Discern substance from accident. Don’t confuse your meals with your life, and your clothes with your body. Don’t lose your head over what perishes. Nearly everything does perish: so face the facts, don’t rush after the transient and unreal. Maintain your souls in tranquil dependence on God: don’t worry; don’t mistake what you possess for what you are. Accumulating things is useless. Both mental and material avarice are merely silly in view of the dread facts of life and death. The White Knight would have done better had he left his luggage at home. The
simpler your house, the easier it will be to run. The fewer the things and the people you ‘simply must have,” the nearer you will be to the ideal of happiness--’as having nothing, to possess all.”

-From The House of the Soul and Concerning the Inner Life by Evelyn Underhill

Monday

Care for your time. So many people are ‘overwhelmed’ these days. Yet, in God’s economy, He has given us enough hours in the day to complete the tasks He gives us and He also gives us time of refreshment. What does it mean to trust God with your time? What are some ways you can simplify some things in your schedule to reflect His purposes for you? How can you take more time with Jesus?

Tuesday

Care for those around you. Loving your neighbor as you love yourself is a main teaching of Jesus. God is so involved in this aspect of your life. Today, look at your friendships with all kinds of people. Ask God where you He can help you be more loving, forgiving, blessing and present. Our culture often ranks achievements and material wealth over relationships. Our lives or full of “things” and often not simplified enough for room to have real relationships with our friends and family. Make some time this week to simplify your schedule and linger for a while with someone you love.

Wednesday

Care for your planet. Our world is a precious commodity that we take care of because the Lord commands it and because we want to be good stewards of that gift. Are you careful of what you dispose of and how you dispose it? Are you mindful of the limited resources many face as you accumulate? Do you know where your good came from? Check out www.notforsalecampaign.org to see how you can help end slavery and oppression. Take some time today to pray for the earth and those who inhabit it. Commit to being part of the solution by addressing injustice and by living responsibly.
Thursday

*Care for your finances.* All you have belongs to the Lord. Does your spending reflect this truth? All of us have a relationship with money. Today, think about what that means for you. If you are out of control with your spending, consider talking with a trusted person in your life. Ask God to help you to continue to orient your budget to a balanced, more simple way of living.

Friday

*Care for your body.* God has given all of us bodies that are in various stages of vitality and health. No matter what shape your body is in, there are many ways to care for it. Do you eat well, exercise and get enough sleep? It is amazing how we can feel better just by taking time to breath deeply each day. As you begin to incorporate simplicity into your life, you may find more time to care for your health. Do not neglect your physical well-being.

Saturday

*Care for the lost.* The story of God we find in the Bible is the story of how He pursues those who are far from Him and invites them back to His family. All of us have people in our lives who do not trust the Lord, yet they have been given to us to love in various ways. Sometimes we make seeking the lost people in our lives into a complicated production or major campaign. Direct, simple love, however, will always be more powerful than a program. Pray about who God wants you to love...and how He wants you to communicate His truth to them. Don’t consider people a project, but simply be with them. When the door opens, tell them in simple terms who God is and who He is to you. Pray for wisdom.
Week Four: Making our Resources Available to Others
October 23-29

Sunday

On this Sabbath day, thank God for His generosity. He is so good to His children. Yet, there are moments and seasons in life where we feel we are entitled to what we have. The truth is that whatever we have received has been from the hand of the Lord. When we understand this truth, then we are free to share with those who have need. As you rest today, ask God to show you where you are generous and where you are stingy… and why. Listen to the promptings of God in your heart.

“Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say let your affairs be as one, two, three and not a hundred or a thousand… We are happy in proportion to the things we can do without.” – Henry David Thoreau.

Monday

“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. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

-1Timothy 6:17-19

How do you ‘do good’ with your resources? All of us are rich in something. All of us have resources of time, gifts, money, or spirit. How do you bless others with what you have on a regular or spontaneous basis? Pray with your spouse or close friend about how living more simply might free up more resources to give away.

Tuesday

“Father, I want to know thee, but my cowardly heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a
rival. Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God

**Wednesday**

Simplify your possessions. Clean out your closets, garage and ‘junk’ drawers. Consider on the half-birthdays in your family to give away things to balance all the gifts you receive on your birthday. Have a frank conversation with the children in your life about how the accumulation of things can drag our lives and souls down. When you buy something new, give something away. Instead of giving gifts for birthdays, tell your friends you want to give them something you already have that has meant a lot to you. Be creative in your simplicity. . . . it may look different for everyone.

**Thursday**

'If we reject materialism and asceticism it seems to me we are left with the biblical way of generosity, which in turn is linked with simplicity. Simplicity is not to be understood in 'nothing' but 'enough.' When we consider the needs of the poor, and indeed the needs of world mission, then there is a challenge to generosity - something that can always be increased as we simplify our lifestyle. This is a sensitive area, for simplicity can easily become pharisaical when we begin to bring our opinion and judgement to bear on how others should simplify their lifestyle. (And particularly pharisaical if others should suggest how we might simplify our lifestyle!) The reality is that we are all extravagant in different ways. Voluntary simplicity of lifestyle is a way to increase our generosity."’ John Hosier

**Friday**

Exercise: Richard Foster encourages people, either individually or in groups, to evaluate the ‘things’ in your life to which you are inordinately attached—whether people, places, technology, work or possessions which is seriously impeding a life of simplicity. If you have an unhealthy attachment to something that is causing a problem in your spiritual life, we encourage you to meet with a trusted friend to talk about it. Pray together. Ask for accountability. Talk about how letting go of this thing would bring greater freedom and simplicity in your life. As you seek
God, figure out a strategy for doing this. If it is too overwhelming, consider talking to a pastor in your life about it.

“There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.” G.K. Chesterton

Saturday

“The joyful paradox in all this is that while simplicity is complex it is also simple. In the final analysis we are not the ones who have to untangle all the intricacies of our complex world. There are not many things we have to keep in mind—in fact only one: to be attentive to the voice of the true Shepherd. There are not many decisions we have to make—in fact, only one—to seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness. There are not many tasks we have to do—in fact, only one: to obey him in all things.”

Richard Foster, The Freedom of Simplicity