

## Embracing the Simple Life



Christopher News Notes

**MANY PEOPLE LEAD LIVES THAT ARE FULL, BUT NOT FULFILLED.**

They feel overwhelmed with responsibilities and worry. Yet, faced with a choice, they usually end up choosing to do more and to have more. Consumed by busy-ness, clutter, and complexity, what they want is peace, wholeness, and simplicity.

“Successful living,” suggests Rev. Martin Marty, “is a journey toward simplicity and a triumph over confusion.”

## What's So Simple?

While you may dream of scaling down possessions owned and obligations owed, goals need to be realistic. Don't feel guilty for providing for your own welfare or your family's welfare—or for working hard to change your life and world for the better.

On the contrary, simplifying your life demands hard decisions about the best way to use all the resources God has entrusted to you. If you are fortunate enough to have more than the basics, remember that "simplicity is not poverty," according to Duane Elgin, author of *Voluntary Simplicity*. "There is nothing...enabling about poverty; it's mean and degrading to the human spirit."

A benefit of trimming what is excessive and extraneous is how you can help those in need. There's a saying that bears repeating: We should live simply, so others may simply live.

In fact, the 18th-century Quaker preacher John Woolman said a temperate, simple way of life is one "where no unnecessary cares nor expenses may encumber our minds, nor lessen our ability to do good."

*"Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny You... or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of God."*  
—Proverbs 30:8-9

## Anything But Easy

True simplicity means leading the life Jesus asked of His followers. It wasn't an easy choice 2,000 years ago, and it's not an easy choice now.

When Elizabeth Yoffe was 30, she felt overwhelmed by demands and in need of control. Then, she nearly died. Yoffe commented, "After I had my stroke, I thought, if I can make it through this I can shape my own life, and I'm going to turn it into something transformative."

She went on to help others who have had strokes rebuild their lives. Yoffe believes that "people who are the unhappiest are those who can't see things from many perspectives."

In *Journal of a Soul*, Pope John XXIII wrote, "The older I grow, the more clearly I perceive the dignity and winning beauty of simplicity in thought, conduct, and speech; a desire to simplify all that is complicated and to treat everything with the greatest naturalness and clarity."

To appreciate the world and your place in it, you may need to take a fresh look at it. "The best way to a happy life is to wake up each morning and spend the first 10 minutes wrapping yourself in gratitude," writes Kay Winchester. "Once you have properly cherished what you have, what you don't have or whatever challenges you must meet will suddenly fall into perspective."

*"Look not at what is seen but at what cannot be seen; for what is seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal."*  
—2 Corinthians 4:18

## Spending Time

Carole Mayhill tells the story of a little boy who went into a fishing equipment store to buy 25 cents worth of worms. He asked the storekeeper, "Mister, how many worms do I get for a quarter?"

The man replied, "Son, don't worry. I'll do right by ya. Life's too short to be countin' worms."

He's right. Life is short. Learn to savor time, to treat it as the precious gift it is. "Creating something from scratch—whether it's a birthday card, cookies, or a go-cart—may be part of the antidote for a disease many of us suffer from: Time and Meaning Deficiency," wrote Elizabeth Berg in *Woman's Day* magazine. "[We should] slow down and remind ourselves of the natural order of things. Maybe we'd remember what it is we really need: a sense of fulfillment, of happiness, of peace."

Demands that others make on your time, along with the pressure you put on yourself, affect what you do and how you feel. Relax. Take a time out.

"Time with children is clockless time, like that of the artist or that of the sea," says writer and artist Joan Flynn Fee. "Childlike adults...take the time to sit and listen to the stories, rather than accomplishing,

*"'Tis the gift to be simple,  
'Tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down  
Where we ought to be;  
And when we find ourselves  
In the place just right  
'Twill be in the valley  
Of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gain'd  
To bow and to bend  
We shan't be ashamed,  
To turn, turn  
Will be our delight,  
'Til by turning, turning  
We come 'round right."  
—Shaker hymn*

accomplishing, accomplishing. They hear the parable about the birds in the sky and the lilies in the field. They believe Jesus' words that tomorrow will take care of itself, if they just stay with today."

*"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."*  
—Matthew 6:26

## Owning and Consuming

"The cost of a thing is the amount...of life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run," wrote Henry David Thoreau.

It's common to keep acquiring things rather than taking trouble to repair, recycle, or give away what is no longer useful. Make the time to really think about your responsibilities as a steward of the world's resources—and your own. Choose to be a wise consumer of what matters and a less frequent consumer of what means little.

"Clothes were taking too much time, too much money, too much of me," said Rev. Margaret

Henrichsen, a Methodist minister in rural Maine. So she bought several attractive and practical dresses, and gave the rest of her wardrobe away. "With seven churches to look after, I need all the time I can find."

"Keeping up with the Joneses," as the old expression goes, can sometimes be a problem. Too often, people feel entitled to things just because others have them.

"Envy is the result of comparing ourselves to others and not valuing what we have and who we are," observes Rev. Gerard Weber. "God wants every human being to have the things necessary for a secure and human lifestyle, but that does not mean that everyone should have all that everyone else has. Being satisfied with enough, and not desiring more, is a way of taming envy."

*"One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."* —Luke 12:15

## Find More Within

Simplifying life means far more than saving time and money. To truly change your attitude and expectations, you have to focus yourself spiritually.

In his book *Letting Go*, Rev. Philip Parham talks about "the still." When there is a crisis on British ships, an alarm calls for complete stillness, signaling everyone to prepare themselves.

Even a life on the run has chances for stillness, thought, and prayer if you look for them—and

don't expect perfection. "The supermarket or shopping mall is an excellent opportunity for solitude—not the solitude of an empty church or a familiar path in the woods," says Joseph Gosse in *Marriage & Family*. "Instead of lamenting my place in line, I can see it as an opportunity...God can speak even in the mild storm of a modern market."

*"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also."* —Luke 12:32-34

## Let Yourself Let Go

"Letting go isn't an easy thing to do, whether it's letting go of old and useless possessions or letting go of old and useless attitudes. Perhaps it must happen by increments, little by little, until finally our hands are no longer cramped in a permanent clutch position," says Jonathan Golden.

Ultimately, simplifying means letting go of one thing because something else is more important. It's deciding what really counts. Writing in *U.S. Catholic*, Dan Grippo recalled the verse from Mark 8:35, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

Surprisingly, the truth of this statement hit him while he was flossing his teeth. He said, "It's hard to listen to Jesus talk about losing one's life. His message flies in the face of our sense of self-preservation and security...He's talking about turning one's life and will over to God."

Each of us should take stock of our lives every once in a while to see if they are more complicated than they need to be. Are there areas we can simplify in order to live more fully according to God's plan for us? If so, we may find that embracing the simple life will lead us to a greater sense of peace and happiness.

  
**"It's better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness."**

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