

# RHYTHMS

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion?"

*Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest.*

*Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.*

I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.

Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

## **SIMPLICITY**

*Cultivating a lifestyle of detachment from the world's values of accumulation and busyness to live in contentment with God. (Matthew 6:21; Hebrews 13:5-6; 1 Timothy 6:6-8; Romans 8:5-6)*

The "why" of our spiritual rhythms is to simply remain connected with God in our daily lives. The goal of the spiritual life is to live in such a way as to hear, see, and even feel God's presence—and then cultivate a deep desire and joy to respond to His leadings. None of us start here, and so the entire Christian life is a journey of growth, as we walk in the teachings and rhythms of Jesus and the teachings of the Bible. Spiritual rhythms are our active participation in Jesus' invitation in John 15:1-17 to "*remain in Him*". This is central to the life of biblical discipleship, and paramount to living a life of flourishing and bearing much fruit.

The life of faith often calls us to live differently than the culture around us. One aspect of this is the rhythm of simplicity. *Our goal in the rhythm of simplicity is to create space, to slow down, and build an intentional firewall between our soul and the never-ending clamor of the culture around us. In addition to creating an oasis for ourselves, simplicity allows us to be more present to those in front of us and love with greater freedom, patience, and hope.*

With technology and innovation, our world gets more complicated with every passing year. Some of these *advancements* are helping us live longer and better in a variety of ways. Others are affecting humanity differently, forming us in ways that most of us are not even aware of. It's no secret that billions of dollars are spent annually encouraging us to lean into more complex lives with the promise that it is a better experience. The size of the average American home has quadrupled in the past 60 years as have the number of our possessions and the size of the plates we eat from. We can shop and be entertained 24/7 and most humans, age 10-80, carry a portal to the internet in their cellphone as an appendage. We sleep within three feet from it, and are only truly away from it when we shower. This leads to one big question: *Is the complexity of our lives leading to flourishing or bondage of some form?*

### **Why is the rhythm of simplicity important for us?**

Historically, part of being a Christian, or apprentice of Jesus, has been intentionally living differently than the world around us. We embraced different rhythms and values and slowly, by bearing fruit of this new lifestyle, won both individuals, people groups, and the civilizations to the hope of the Gospel.

In this rhythm we will explore *simplicity*. Our goal is to discern what it looks like to create time and space in our lives to be aware of ourselves, others around us, and God's movement in our lives. Unlike monastic, Mennonite, or Amish communities, there is no prescription or standard for Christian simplicity. It is an invitation to become aware of the temptations around us and for each of us, individually, to discern what

our life needs to look like to remain self aware, love others, and commune with God. How might God be calling you to live differently than the world around you? Is there a subtle or bold way of living your faith in contrast to the culture around us? What does it look like for a mom, a husband, a student, a CEO, or a mechanic to live within the rhythm of simplicity? Great question! You get to find out!

In Luke 12:16-31 Jesus tells a parable answering a specific question and uses it to lead into a lifestyle teaching. The parable teaches of the land of a rich man that produced great fruit. (Notice that the land produced the fruit, not the man). It goes on to speak of the man wrestling with how to collect and store his vast fortunes. Reading this passage reveals the *burden of his accumulation*, his selfish focus, and the foolish outcome of his life where he doesn't even get to enjoy all that he hoarded. His treasure actually consumed the rest of his life and then he died not having power to either enjoy it, or protect it beyond. Though most Bibles put a break in thought going into v. 22, the original writing did not, and it is clear that Jesus didn't intend to stop there. Jesus continues on this theme and turns this negative example into a positive application. He speaks of the anxiety of worrying both in not having enough and, in the story, having too much and fearing its loss. This teaching speaks boldly about the foolishness of over accumulation and fearful living and the opportunity to live in trust, faith, and expectancy of God's goodness. It addresses the sovereignty of God and an invitation to rest in and find true life under His care. This idea stands in stark contrast to a world trying to convince us to keep up with the culture around us or we will be lost. We might actually find ourselves if we say no.

From this teaching and from our lives, *what is the driver of our obsession with busyness and accumulation?* Fear of not having enough or missing out? Pride in needing to be in control or being seen as one in control? Believing the lies of advertisers tells us that more is...more? There are likely other motives, but none of them are motivated by trusting God and seeking contentment in Him.

Similar to Jesus' teaching, in 1 Timothy 6:6-10, the Apostle Paul encourages young Timothy in shepherding a church wrestling with living within balance of accumulation and contentment. Verses 6-8 read, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content."* The passage goes on to speak of the trap that riches and accumulation creates for us. It leads us to focus on the wrong things and losing our life (joy, peace, happiness) in the process. What does *"godliness with contentment"* mean? Are you experiencing it or, is it possible, that we are trying too hard to live the life of faith within the machine of culture? Are you living in a no win situation to try to live a life of godliness and contentment, while in the ecosystem of engagement and consumerism? Are we sacrificing *being human* for a complexity of life that actually pulls us away from ourselves and God? Author Henri Nouwen beautifully simplified this, saying, *"We discover that being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the results of our efforts. We discover that our life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared."*

### **What is the goal of the rhythm of simplicity?**

The rhythm of simplicity is practiced to create space in our lives. When practiced, the rhythm of simplicity will create *margin* in our minds, hearts, words, schedules, and even homes. This rhythm creates space for us to be more fully human and more aware of ourselves, God, and opportunities before us. Communally simplicity allows us to be more present, aware, and helpful to others. It creates the ability for us build the Kingdom of God because we are increasingly more aware of God and the people through which His kingdom will be built.

### **How do you practice simplicity?**

Pastor and author John Mark Comer, has broken simplicity into three specific categories.

- Simplicity of heart: *Identifying and eliminating unnecessary distractions that do not give us peace and restoration. Retraining our hearts away from the lies of false fulfillment and toward contentment in God's presence, the company of people that encourage us, and our unshakable identity in Jesus.*

- Simplicity of speech: *Stewarding our words to be a vessel of encouragement through our speech. Saying only what is necessary and beneficial to others. Embracing the discipline of listening, and encouraging with our silence, body language, and intentional words.*
- Simplicity of stuff: *Detaching from our cultural obsessions with accumulation and the lie that more is always better. Living with our means, sharing generously with others, or living with less to find deeper satisfaction in God.*

### Simplicity of heart

Through the course of our days, we are all drawn to various activities as we seek joy, rest, or peace of mind. Many of us are busy with a variety of activities we don't have to do, but rather choose to engage or passively consent to. Often they are not necessarily bad, but just fill space in our minds and hearts and don't bear positive fruit. Have you ever considered if/how these are actually forming you or if they actually satisfy our desire or just pacify our longings? Our goal in seeking simplicity of heart is to create margin to simply be present to ourselves, others, and God in our midst. It is an invitation to clear the *white noise* that often washes out the presence of God, presence of others, and awareness of ourselves.

### Simplicity of speech

We live in a day and age where people are constantly speaking over each other. The reality is that few people actually practice the discipline of listening and being present to others. We often scan conversations to find points we agree or disagree with and then are busy formulating our response even while others are talking. There are two issues at play when considering simplicity of speech.

The first is that many of us have an innate compulsion to get our words in or make a contribution, necessary or not. Something inside of us compels us to speak even if it's not needed. Have you ever wondered why?

The second reality in play is that true curiosity in others and/or listening to another person's story is a lost art. Have you noticed how often one person will share a situation they are experiencing only to have someone else cut them off to share their story that often overshadows the first person? What would happen if we resisted this compulsion and simply asked 1-2 follow up questions about the other person? What would it look like to cultivate a curiosity in others and grow in being present as a listening presence?

### Simplicity of stuff

It's no surprise that we are bombarded with advertising 24/7. Even during casual conversations, our phones are listening to curate our online activity toward the products that it thinks we're looking for. Simplicity of stuff is a discipline of living with less, so you and I can experience greater freedom and joy.

As you look around your house, your garage, your storage unit. How much of what you see truly gives you joy and is necessary to your flourishing? How much of what you have takes excessive energy to maintain, preserve, or protect, or simply adds a layer of stress to you because of clutter? The invitation to simplicity of stuff is truly an invitation to contentment and learning to simply live there.

### **The practice for the month ahead:**

This month we encourage you to process the above ideas and discern how to bring simplicity tangibly into your life. For the most fruit, we would encourage you to read through the exercise daily, discern which question resonates most with you, and let it work through your mind, heart, and life over the course of the full week. If you journal, that would be a fantastic place to capture your thoughts.

Week #1- Meditate on the passage from 1 Timothy 6:6-8, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content."*

- “Godliness” means the pursuit of becoming like God. What does godliness mean in the context of simplicity and normal living? What might it look like for these to work together more fully in your life?
- What does contentment mean to you? What does spiritual contentment mean? Do you feel you are content? Where in your life is this a struggle? How does it intersect simplicity? Is there an action step you could take to sit in greater contentment with God?
- How does the second half of that verse intersect with Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12? What does it say to you in this season of life and current circumstances?
- What does God want you to *know* about this passage and idea?
- What does God want you to *do* in response, or obedience to Him?

Week #2- Simplicity of heart: *Identifying and eliminating unnecessary distractions that do not give us peace and restoration. Retraining our hearts away from the lies of false fulfillment and toward contentment in God’s presence, the company of people that encourage us, and our unshakable identity in Jesus.*

- What activities could you subtract from your schedule to create margin? Each morning? Each evening? Weekly? Monthly? Note, the invitation is *subtraction*, doing less...
- With the margin you create, how could you repurpose that time in simplicity that would bring flourishing? What use of that time could bring you refreshment or life? (e.g. reading, resting, practicing gratitude, doing something creative rather than passively being entertained.)
- Could you make getting outdoors, even a walk around the block, a part of your daily rhythm?
- Consider writing out a rule of life. A rule of life is not legalism, but rather capturing the values you ultimately want to live by. Consider loosely writing out these for your daily routine. It might be helpful to write it for your work/school day, your day off, and your sabbath day. Google “rule of life” for more ideas or ask us if you would like some help.
- What does God want you to *know* about simplicity of heart? What might He be trying to show you?
- What does God want you to *do* in response, or obedience to Him?

Week #3- Simplicity of speech: *Stewarding our words to be a vessel of encouragement through our speech. Saying only what is necessary and beneficial to others. Embracing the discipline of listening, and encouraging with our silence, body language, and intentional words.*

- Are you, by nature, more of a talker/verbal processor, or passive in conversation? Do you think this is healthy, or could you be trying to prove something or there is something you are fearful of? Can you linger here and identify the motive or reasons?
- How could you grow in your curiosity in others and learn how to be a better question asker? Who, specifically, could you focus on being more curious about in your life?
- How could you celebrate or encourage others more frequently and even discipline yourself to talk less about yourself?
- In what settings would it be healthy for you to say less and listen more? In what settings would it be healthy for you to participate/engage more? What is your unique social contribution?
- Our body language and facial expressions communicate at least ½ of our message with people. How could your posture and facial expressions communicate greater openness and interest in others?
- What does God want you to *know* about simplicity of speech? What might He be trying to show you?
- What does God want you to *do* in response, or obedience to Him?

Week #4- Simplicity of stuff: *Detaching from our cultural obsessions with accumulation and the lie that more is always better. Living with our means, sharing generously with others, or living with less to find deeper satisfaction in God.*

Practice of simplicity of stuff:

- Is there a single room in your house you could purge this week?
- Are there things you could simply give away to someone else that would enjoy it, or extend an invitation for what you have to be borrowed by others?

- Could you abstain for a season from buying anything unnecessary?
- What does God want you to *know* about simplicity of stuff? What might He be trying to show you?
- What does God want you to *do* in response, or obedience to Him?

Heart questions to ponder (in relation to simplicity of stuff):

- Do I have possessions that complicate my life but don't really bring me any enjoyment?
- Do I buy things that I don't need, won't use, or can't afford?
- Am I seeking God's will and purposes prior to things that I purchase?
- Do I strive to fit into the material pursuits of my culture?
- Do I live out of "wants" or true "needs"?
- Are there objects in my life that I spend too much time or emotional energy protecting?
- Do I have possessions or clothing that I really don't use, but someone else could get use out of?
- Are there treasures in my life that challenge Jesus as my true treasure?

### **Suggested Resources:**

[Podcast]

For a deeper dive into understanding the rhythm of simplicity we encourage listening to the below episodes of the John Mark Comer Teaching Podcast.

- *Simplicity E1: February 3, 2023 - The Propaganda of More*
- *Simplicity E2: February 10, 2023 - Simplicity of Heart*
- *Simplicity E3: February 17, 2023 - Simplicity of Speech*
- *Simplicity E4: February 24, 2023 - Simplicity of Stuff*

[Books]

- *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry - John Mark Comer*
- *Abundant Simplicity - Jan Johnson*
- *Freedom of simplicity - Richard Foster*
- *The More of Less - Joshua Becker*

As always, talk with a spouse or friend about this process. The open dialog will be of benefit for your processing and it could be a beautiful way to include them in this transformational process.