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honoring God and loving others through our time, money, and work

by Fred Miller





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## section 1 Why live simply?

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One of our core values as Brethren in Christ is “living simply.” The statement reads, **“We value uncluttered lives, which free us to love boldly, give generously, and serve joyfully.”** In a stress-filled culture where everything seems more complicated than it needs to be, it’s natural to long for “the simple life.” But as this core value suggests, our commitment to living simply is not just a reaction to our materialistic culture; it’s deeply rooted in our desire to be obedient to God and give to others.

Nevertheless, a selfless lifestyle of obedience to God does go against the grain of North American culture, in which the wants of each individual are highly valued, and it’s easy to start following your own heart—with little or no regard for the needs of those around you. When the “me-monster” roars, the needs of others become a distant murmur.

1. Matthew 13 contains Jesus’ parable of the sower. In verse 22, what does Jesus say sometimes “chokes out” the word of God that people hear?
2. How might living simply help guard against each of these two “thorns”?
3. Read Philippians 2:4, then describe the degree of availability you think you have in your life to responding to the needs of others, in light of your present commitments, obligations and activities. (In other words, how free are you to respond to needs that you become aware of?)

4. If you had more time, what are some practical ways you might use that time in light of this text?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. If you were to practice living simply for the purposes of freeing up your time and financial resources for others, what might you eliminate from your life? (Or, share what you have already eliminated to live this way.)

Never before has a civilization had so much—with so much of that abundance available to so many. Advertisements and shopping malls scream, “you will be happier/safer/more complete if you buy this!” Though coveting is something every person in every culture must deal with, North American Christians are particularly inundated with temptations to pursue pleasure and security apart from God.

6. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10. List the dangers this text describes. What reasons are given for contentment being “great gain”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Read 1 Timothy 6:17. Reflect on some of the reasons why the accumulation of possessions can so easily dull our hearts to God—whether listed in this text or otherwise.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Have you or someone you know ever experienced the dangers described in the texts above? If you’re willing, share it with the group.



9. If you were to practice living simply for the purposes of being content with God and trusting Him for your future, what might you eliminate?

**Close this session** with prayer. Ask God for the wisdom and strength to live simply, surrendering your time and resources to Him.

## section 2 Simplify your schedule

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There is no direct command in the Bible to “live simply.” But the Bible *does* have something to say to people whose lives are busy, complicated, and distracted: if you’re not careful, the quality of your spiritual life will likely suffer. It’s as if life’s demands are shouting, “Come over here! Listen to this! Hey, pay attention to me!” and God’s voice is drowned out in a sea of activity.

1. Read Exodus 20:8–11, 23:12, and 31:13. Why does God ask us to take these regular times of rest? What purpose(s) do they serve?
  
2. Describe some times in your life when you have slowed down for a period of time (either minutes, hours, or days) and as a result your body and spirit became more sensitive and refreshed, allowing you to know and serve God better.

3. Read Romans 12:1–2. In what ways do you feel pulled to “conform” to your culture, making it harder for you to hear and obey God?

4. In what ways might these pulls be easier to resist if your life was simplified in some way?

Busyness isn't a problem in every culture. Compared to North America, many cultures around the world seem very laid-back and relaxed. People get to places when they get there, and the concept of being “late” is quite foreign. So telling a friend “see you at 1:00” becomes only a general guideline—and it certainly wouldn't stop you from stopping at another friend's house on the way to chat for an hour or so. Furthermore, many cultures don't have 27 options about what they might do with their time—and what their kids want to do with their time. But here in North America, people are busy, and that busyness can come from jobs, kids, house projects, recreational pursuits—and yes, even church!

5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being “I have all the time in the world” and 10 being “I'm swamped and have no free hours in my day”) where would you currently put yourself on the “busyness scale”?



6. Where do most of your busyness pressures come from?

7. Read Luke 10:38–42. What does busyness keep Martha from—and what does Jesus say about Mary's more simple choice?



8. In what settings or situations are you most like Martha—pursuing busyness at the expense of spending time with God?

9. If you were to practice living simply for the purposes of spending more time with God (in prayer, Bible or spiritual reading, spiritual friendships, etc.), what might be one or two things you would need to eliminate in your day or week? Would you be willing to give these things up?

**Close this session** in small prayer groups, praying that God will show you how to make space in your schedule to spend with Him and serve others.

## section 3 What's wrong with money?

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As you've studied in the previous sessions, the Brethren in Christ motivation to live simply is driven by the biblical calls to draw near to God, to give to others, and to cultivate a contented heart. In other words, living simply is not the primary goal. It is a means to reach deeper goals.

1. Can you think of situations in which the value of “living simply” might actually hinder our spiritual life and the pursuit of God-given responsibilities, if isolated by itself? In other words, share some examples of when simplicity may not be pleasing to God—or when complexity or busyness may actually be pleasing to Him—and why.

2. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12 in light of money and possessions. Give an example of each of these—when money or possessions (a) are “permissible,” (b) are “not beneficial” and (c) “master” us.

(a)

(b)

(c)

Have you ever thought of yourself as a slave? Probably not. North Americans don't normally think of themselves that way. Your hands and feet aren't shackled. You're relatively free to come and go as you wish. And there's no taskmaster with a whip, yelling degrading slurs at you. You think you're free—but are you really?

3. Read Romans 6:17–21. What does this passage say about how “free” people really are?

4. Read Matthew 6:19–24. What reasons are given in the following verses for why money can be dangerous? (Try to use your own words as much as possible.)

verse 21:

verses 22–23:

verse 24:



5. In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul writes, “for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” Why is the phrase “the love of” so significant in this verse?

6. What are some signs that might indicate a person’s “love of money”?

7. In what ways do money and possessions enslave you? In other words, what things are you not free to be or do when you are in their grip?

8. Psalm 62:10 warns, “though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.” What makes this warning challenging for you personally? How do you personally fight this temptation in your life?

Matthew 6 serves as a reminder that the “tug-of-war” between God and money that pulls on your heart requires a winner; you cannot serve two masters. You may think you’re doing fine spiritually with church attendance, prayer, Bible study, and even above-average giving in the offering plate, but if your treasure is found in things on earth—the things that money can buy—your relationship with Jesus will experience a subtle (or not-so-subtle) erosion.

9. Read 1 Timothy 6:10. How does Paul describe the effect that loving money can have on a person? What kind of griefs might he be thinking of? (Verse 17 mentions two of them.)

10. Read Mark 10:23–25. Why do you think Jesus says it’s hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God?

11. Which dangers associated with money you have wrestled with most with in your life? Can you think of a response to this danger that God might be pleased with?

**Close this session** in prayer, confessing your weaknesses and sins with money, and reaffirming your commitment to follow after the goodness and riches God offers.

## section 4 Money as a blessing



Many North American Christians see riches as a blessing from God, citing Scripture verses like Psalm 112:3 and Proverbs 10:22. In addition, our country’s military might, medical knowledge, and affluence are often interpreted as direct blessings from God, which means many people consider their prayers “answered” when bombs kill enemies, when cancer is arrested through radiation, and when stock markets yield high dividends. But there are other texts that cause us to be more cautious in drawing these conclusions in every circumstance.

1. What do Psalm 73:12 and James 5:1–6 say about some people who are rich?

2. What do 2 Corinthians 6:10 and James 2:5 say about some people who are poor?

When North American Christians hear the word “prosperity” they tend to think of wealth, riches, and affluence. But the word as used in the Bible simply means “more than enough to live.” So someone can be “prosperous” if they live in a mud hut, with adequate food and clothing, and have money left over to buy an extra cow. One of the Hebrew words that is often translated “prosperity” in our Old Testament is the word “shalom” (see Jeremiah 29:11 in the NIV) which means a sense of wholeness, well-being, and completeness. It is this idea that we must think of when we hear Psalm 1:6 tell us that those who meditate on and delights in the law of the Lord will “prosper” in whatever they do.

3. What simple promise in Matthew 6:33 does Jesus make to those who seek first His kingdom (note vs. 31–32)?

4. How does the promise of 2 Corinthians 9:8 affirm this understanding of blessing?

From a young age, humans develop a strong sense of ownership. You may smile at a young child who clutches a toy while firmly stating, “Mine!”, but adults do this all the time—not quite as obviously, perhaps. We can be very possessive of our possessions—objects that, ultimately, belong to God.

5. What common truth do Psalm 24:1 and 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 teach? In what way(s) do these passages differ?

6. How does the truth that God owns your bank account and your possessions affect you, and why? (Does it scare you? Confuse you? Worry you? Comfort you?)

7. Read 1 Timothy 6:17–19. You may not feel “rich” by North American standards, but when you think about yourself as a global citizen, you must face the bold fact that you are rich. How would you summarize Paul’s specific instructions on how to manage wealth?

8. In 1 Timothy 5:3–4, 8, 17–18 Paul gives suggestions on how money should be used. How can your own spending and giving patterns better incorporate these suggestions?

Scripture passages like Exodus 35:35 and Deuteronomy 14:26 imply that there is a time and a place for celebrating important events, and for honoring quality goods and human creativity. What principles might guide us in knowing when “simplicity” could appropriately be abandoned for “extravagance,” knowing it pleases God. (For instance, how do you know when/if it pleases God to buy a quality piano or painting, or have a feast?)

9. What are some of the practical challenges you face with this tension in North America?



Then there's the question of how much. How much should you give away, how much should you save for the future, and how much should you spend on yourself? Some have suggested the Old Testament "tithe" of giving 10 percent of one's income to God's work, though the emphasis in the New Testament is on giving with attitudes of generosity, sacrifice, joy and according to our means. Many suggest 10 percent as a good minimal discipline, and warn against legalism. Randy Alcorn, in his book *The Treasure Principle*, says, "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving." Another way to think about this is, "The more simply you live, the more you can give."

10. What attitudes or principles help you personally in discerning how much to give away, to save and to spend?"

**Close this session** in prayer, thanking God for the privilege of managing His resources, and asking God to help you use them well for the good of others and the celebration of His kingdom.

## section 5 Working simply, or simply working?



Working at a job can easily take on a life of its own. The routine can become mechanical and dull—or the excitement can be intoxicating or invigorating. Maybe it's the money that drives you. Or the recognition and power. Or the simple challenge. Perhaps you're motivated to show up at a job because you enjoy the people there. Or it could be an escape from family responsibilities and disappointments.

1. Throughout the course of your life, what motivations have driven you most to go to a job?

2. Read Genesis 2:2–3. How is the word “work” used here?

When you begin thinking of work as an act of creation, it quickly becomes obvious that work is about more than getting paid for services rendered. Work is all around us—at home, at play, at school, and yes, at a job that compensates you financially for what you do. For the purposes of this study, we are going to focus on this latter type of work, which is usually classified as a “job.”

3. List some of the jobs you’ve held and describe what you “created” at those jobs (for example, particular objects, services, beauty, knowledge, etc.)

4. Read Genesis 1:31 and 2:15. Also note that sin does not enter the human experience until later in chapter three. So from these texts, what can you conclude about “work”?

5. Read Colossians 3:22–24 (and, if you wish, 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12 and 1 Timothy 6:17–19). What are the reasons given for why we work?

6. In what ways might it make a difference for us to work for Jesus (not just for a boss or clients)?



7. Jesus was a builder before He started His public ministry. Peter, James and John were fishermen. Paul made tents. Luke was a doctor. These men had jobs that provided some kind of service to others—which is an aspect of love. Think about the job(s) you currently have. What service do you provide—either directly or indirectly?

Another way of saying you should do your work “in the name of Jesus” is that you should glorify Him—to know and show His greatness through your work. This means to both experience the glory of God (His love, His holiness, His truth, His majesty, etc.) and to demonstrate the greatness of God to others.

8. If God is to be glorified in your work, your goal in working must not be your own glory. What does Deuteronomy 8:17–18 have to say to this concern, and what does it mean for you personally to apply this to your work right now?

9. No matter how hard you try to glorify God, however, you will always face limitations—perhaps a bad back, not-so-great math skills, or insufficient energy to manage all that your job requires. In light of the above considerations, think about what it means to glorify God in the quality of your work. Here are some questions to get you going:

- o Does God always require “excellence”?
- o Is it ever okay to be average?
- o Is it possible to strive too hard to do well?
- o Is it ever O.K. to “cut corners” in a job?
- o What should you do if a boss puts limitations on you that force you to do lower-quality work?

**Close this session** in prayer, thanking God for the privilege of work. Ask God to give you the transformed heart and mind necessary to manage your time, money, and work with godly attitudes. Commit yourself to the joy and obedience of living simply, allowing space for God to work in and through and all around us.





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