



Practice Guide | *Simplicity & Generosity*

WEEK 1—Jesus & Mammon

Meeting Prep

1. Watch this short video: "[Simplicity](#)" (1:29)
2. Listen to this sermon: "[The Propaganda of More](#)" (40:52)

Read this Overview

O, how amiable this simplicity is! Who will give it to me? I leave all for this. It is the pearl of the Gospel.

François Fénelon

We live in a cultural moment enchanted by the lie that “more is better.” Ironically, however, the pursuit of more has left us feeling like we have less space for the things that really matter in life like spirituality, meaning, creativity, relationships, and generosity.

In this series, we want to explore the ancient way of simplicity, which is an invitation to find more of God’s kingdom by emptying ourselves of anything that would distract us from this single-minded pursuit. Simplicity is an inward way of being that results in an outward life-style of freedom, joy, and abundant generosity.

The quick working definition of simplicity we’ll use is this: simplicity is “the freedom to limit or let go of anything that distracts us from joyfully giving more of ourselves to Jesus and his kingdom.” As Richard Foster puts it:

[Simplicity is] an inward reality of single-hearted focus upon God and [his] kingdom, which results in an outward lifestyle of modesty, openness, and unpretentiousness and which disciplines our hunger for status, glamour, and luxury.

Richard Foster

A Year with God: Living Out the Spiritual Disciplines, p. 325

Rather than a lifestyle of restriction and lack, simplicity is an invitation to freedom and fullness that come through a wholehearted devotion to God.

Begin with Silence & Prayer

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

Discuss the Teaching

1. What stood out to you from the short video or longer teaching?
2. Growing up, what was your family's value for or practice of simplicity, especially around possessions? How have you carried those values or practices forward into life today?
3. There's a tension in the Bible between the goodness of created things and the danger of our attachment to them. Richard Foster writes, "To deny the goodness of the created order is to be an ascetic. To deny the limitation of the created order is to be a materialist."¹ How do you experience that tension in your life?
4. The Bible has a lot to say about money and possessions. Ask different people in your group to read the following passages out loud. Then discuss what stands out to you from them. What is comforting to you? What is challenging to you? What obstacles exist to your fuller and freer response to these words from God?

Mt. 6:30-33

Lk. 10:38-42

1 Tim. 6:6-10

Lk. 6:29-30

Lk. 12:13-21

Heb. 13:5-6

Lk. 9:58

Lk. 12:22-34

Jas. 4:1-3

Lk. 16:10-13

5. Where do you sense an invitation from God to relax your grip or let go entirely of something you're holding onto in the realm of wealth or possessions?

Individual & Group Practice: Examen

In this first week, we'll emphasize one of the core spiritual disciplines of the Christian life, the prayer of examen (pronounced like "examine"). While it will be the Week 1 focus, examen is a good practice to incorporate into your ongoing rhythm of life in Jesus.

Classically, there are two kinds of examen prayers. First, the *Examen of Consciousness* is the practice of reflecting on the preceding day and inviting God to help us notice where he was present and how we responded to his presence. Second, the *Examen of Conscience* focuses our attention on our own actions, attitudes, and inner world, asking God to make us aware of times we were *and were not* exhibiting the character of Jesus or walking in step with the Spirit. (For a good, short explanation of this spiritual discipline, try Ruth Haley Barton's *Sacred Rhythms*² or Adele Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*.³)

For the examen prayer of this Practice Guide, we'll focus our reflection on how we have *attached* ourselves to possessions or money (Mammon), so that we can begin to *detach* ourselves from them, be *reattached* to God, and envision a new freedom he's inviting us to live with. A simple practice of "examen of Mammon" could look like this: ⁴

1. Read Ps. 139:1-4, 23-24 as an opening prayer.

¹ Richard Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World*, New York: HarperOne, 2005, p. 11.

² Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006, pp. 91-109.

³ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, 2nd ed., Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015, pp. 58-61.

⁴ Adapted from Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, pp. 108-109.

2. Ask God to be with you and accompany you in a search for evidence of his presence and for a clearer picture of who you really are.
3. Review the major events of the day with particular attention to how you engaged with money or possessions, even if it was only the idea of them, not an actual transaction. Reflect on your interactions with others. Where did you act with generosity and openness? Where were you protective and closed? When did you feel anxious about what you have, need, or gave? When did you feel at peace?
4. Invite God to reveal what attachments lie beneath these attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. Ask him to shine a light on what your heart is attached to superficially (e.g., a specific possession), under the surface (e.g., a sense of security), and fundamentally (e.g., a strategy to ensure your own security).
5. Confess to God those things he's bringing to your mind, expressing a willingness to release your grip on those attachments (or even a plea to give you that willingness). Ask him to make his presence and love known to you in the day ahead, especially in the face of these tempting attachments. Be assured of his forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9), love, and power to transform you through the gospel.

[Optional Family Practice: “High, Low, Buffalo”]

At family meals this week, go around the table and have each person give a quick three-part summary of their day:

- **High:** What was the best part of your day? Where did you encounter God or see him do something great? *When did you give or receive the most love?*
- **Low:** What was the worst part of your day? What do you wish had gone differently? *When was it hardest to feel or receive God's love?*
- **“Buffalo”:** What was the *silliest* part of your day, or the *funniest* thing that happened?

Parents, help your kids to see how God is at work in both the good and the bad, and to learn to listen for what he's saying in all those things, including the noticing of our attachments to money and possessions. And celebrate that he's a God who loves their silliness!

Close with Prayer

O Lord, you created all things, and you called them good. But none of them is as good as you; none is worthy of my worship; none can give me life; none can fully satisfy me. Teach me, Lord, that what my heart most deeply yearns for is you. Strengthen me to release my too strong grip on lesser things. And give to me again the treasure of your love, that my treasure would be in you alone, and there my heart would be also. In Jesus' name, amen.