



Practice Guide | *Simplicity & Generosity*

WEEK 2—Simplicity of Heart

Meeting Prep

1. Watch this short clip: [Video journal entry on simplicity](#) (4:44)
2. Listen to this sermon: "[Simplicity of Heart](#)" (39:51)

Read this Overview

Purity of heart is to will one thing.

Søren Kierkegaard

Danish philosopher & theologian, 1813-1855

When we speak of simplicity, our emphasis is often on its outward expressions, like money and possessions, or time and commitments. Those things are significant, and in future weeks we will focus on particular aspects of outward simplicity. But the resounding witness of both the Old and New Testaments is that all of our external simplicity has to be grounded in and empowered by an *inward* simplicity, what many have called a “simplicity of heart.”

Simplicity of heart is about the singleness of our devotion. It’s about the centering and elevation of our love for God above all else. Simplicity of heart does not mean we love nothing besides God; it means there is nothing we love *as much as* God. Our love for him comes first, is greatest, and orders and enlivens all of our other loves. Simplicity is found in having one great love, God himself.

Begin with Prayer & Silence

Pray together: *O God, you will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are fixed on you; for in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be our strength.* (Isaiah 26:3; 30:15)

Keep silence together for a few minutes, simply being with God to listen for his voice and to experience his loving presence. Close the silence with a brief prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

Discuss the Teaching

1. What stood out to you from the short clip or the long teaching? Consider one of the long teaching’s central ideas, that “it’s not enough to simplify our possessions, we must simplify *around* something (or someone). And what you center your life on will define who you become, for better or worse.” Have you seen this to be true in your own life? How?
2. In Matthew 6 and Luke 12, Jesus sets up his famous command to “seek first the kingdom of God” as the antidote to anxiety over whether we will have enough. Anxiety about provisions is

an indicator that we are *not* seeking God’s kingdom first, *not* living with simplicity of heart. Besides anxiety, what other emotions, attitudes, behaviors, or patterns in your life are indicators that you’re seeking first something other than God’s kingdom?

3. Read Mt. 13:44-46, the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. Imagine the sort of unrestrained joy and love felt by the people Jesus is describing. Think back through your life with Jesus. Has there been a time when you have loved him so single-mindedly and wholeheartedly? What made it possible to live with simplicity of heart?
4. In Phil. 3:7-16, Paul’s point is that his (and our) standing before God has nothing to do with personal “spiritual credentials,” but solely whether we know and are known by Jesus. But read this passage again with fresh eyes. What does this teach about inward and outward simplicity?

Individual & Group Practice: Margin



Simplicity of heart is about making God our one great love. But we can’t will ourselves into such devotion. Love doesn’t work that way! Even though inward simplicity is the foundation of all outward simplicity, external practices can help create conditions for our love of God to grow and outshine all other loves.

One of those practices is the discipline of margin. Like a piece of paper filled to the edges with text, or a painting without a frame, a life without margin has no room for what is most important. (Even the page you’re looking at is a bad example!) In his book *Margin*, Richard Swenson writes,

The conditions of modern-day living devour margin... Marginless is being thirty minutes late to the doctor’s office because you were twenty minutes late out of the hairdresser’s because you were ten minutes late dropping the children off at school because the car ran out of gas two blocks from the gas station—and you forgot your purse.⁵

This week, experiment with new margins for the sake of freeing yourself to be with God, to seek first his kingdom. Where holes appear from removing activities or shifting timeframes, don’t refill them. Instead, allow them to remain blank space, cushioning your life among the things you can’t move.

⁵ Richard Swenson, *Margin*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992, p. 32.

And in that space, simply be with God. Don't rush. Don't be "productive," even with "spiritual" things. Leave phones, screens, and entertainment off. Allow your life not to be written out to the very edges of the page. And as you experience this margin, open yourself up to God being in it with you. How do you experience him? Do you experience his deep love for you? How do margins allow your hard-packed soul to breathe and open and love him more in return?

The practicalities of creating margin can feel difficult at first. As James Bryan Smith puts it, the secret "is simple but very difficult to do: *just say no*. Say no to what? Anything that is not absolutely necessary to the well-being of your soul or the welfare of others... This is not about good versus evil but good versus good."⁶ Here are a few practical suggestions for creating initial margins:

- ***Just say no:*** Start with what is absolutely necessary, and then scale back or cut out entirely. Work, home, church, relationships, and extracurriculars are all on the table.
- ***Close the door:*** If your day is filled with interruptions and other people's needs, find a place where you can be physically separate and unreachable, even if it means not getting things done.
- ***Follow the old roads:*** Explore ways you've connected with God in the past but haven't had time for recently. A trail hike, or a walk through the neighborhood? A visit to a museum? Sitting in a comfortable chair and watching the clouds? Crafting a special drink or meal?
- ***Sleep in on the front end:*** Instead of hitting snooze to get another 30 minutes of sleep in the morning, go to bed half an hour earlier. Then start the next day with margin.

After experimenting with new margins, talk with a friend about ways you found yourself able to seek first God's kingdom, or how new love for God was kindled in you. How did outward margins nurture your inward simplicity of heart?

[Optional Family Practice: "Coloring in the Lines"]

Each family member takes a clean piece of paper. Tape off the edges of the paper with masking tape. Then get creative with markers or crayons to color or draw through the open areas of the page!

Now remove the tape. See how margins allow for clean space around your artwork, helping you to see it better? What if you make the margins wider? Or put them in different places? Parents, talk with your child about the purpose of adding margins into life: leaving room for what's most important; not doing every conceivable activity; going to bed at a good time (and perhaps winding down to it); etc. How might life become a more beautiful work of art if you "colored in the lines" in new ways?

Close with Prayer

⁶ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009, p. 129.