

# Small Group Material

## Rule of Life: Simplicity

*(Leader: there are several quotes mostly from Richard Foster. If they seem rather too much for your group at the time, don't use them. You can get the point across yourself.)*

**Welcome** (10 mins) Is there one 'simple' thing of life which have you particularly enjoyed during 'lock-down'? Why?

**Consider:** (15 mins)

1. Watch this short video (1.33 mins) from Bridgetown Church: <https://bridgetown.church/series/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life/>
2. There are two aspects to Simplicity - inward and outward. Why are both essential and how does one affect the other?
3. Richard Foster writes in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, 'Simplicity begins in inward focus and unity. It means to live out of 'The Divine Centre'. Experiencing the *inward reality* liberates us *outwardly*. Speech becomes truthful and honest. The lust for status and position is gone because we no longer need status and position. We cease from showy extravagance not on the grounds of being unable to afford it, but on the grounds of principle. Our goods become available to others.' (p.100)

He picks out what simplicity looks like in three areas: our speech, our lust for status and our attitude to possessions.

- Spend a few minutes unpacking these further...

**Word** (15 mins)

'Contemporary culture lacks both the inward reality and the outward lifestyle of simplicity.... We have no unity or focus around which our lives are oriented. Because we lack **a divine centre** our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things.' (Foster p.100)

**Read Matthew 6.25-33.**

1. What reasons does Jesus give for not worrying about our needs in life?
2. What does Jesus say should be the focus or centre of our lives? How does this help form a life of simplicity?

Soren Kierkegaard considers what sort of effort should be made to pursue the kingdom of God. 'Should a person get a suitable job in order to exert a virtuous influence? His answer; no, we must *first* seek God's kingdom. Then should we give away all our money to feed the poor? Again the answer; no, we must *first* seek God's kingdom. Well, then perhaps we are to go and preach this truth to the world that people are to seek first God's kingdom? Once again the answer is a resounding; no, we are *first to* seek God's kingdom.'

The desire to get out of the rat race cannot be central, the redistribution of the world's wealth cannot be central, the concern for ecology cannot be central. Seeking first God's kingdom and the righteousness, both personal and social, of that kingdom is the only thing that can be central. Focus upon the kingdom produces the inward reality and without the inward reality we will degenerate into legalistic trivia. Nothing else can be central. When the kingdom of God is genuinely placed first, ecological concerns, the poor, the equitable distribution of wealth, and many other things will be given their proper attention.'

**Getting Practical.** (20 mins)

1. Richard Foster says there are three heart attitudes related to possessions that lead to peace. "If what we have we receive as a gift, and if what we have is to be cared for by God, and if what we have is available to others, then we will possess freedom from anxiety." Which of these three inward attitudes do you find most difficult?
2. What is the great danger in setting forth outward expressions to Christian simplicity? (*Leader's notes: legalism, creating universal 'laws' rather than culturally appropriate guidance.*)

*(Leader: This is a time for people to ponder quietly by themselves. Put these bullet points up on the screen and ask people to get a pencil and paper.)*

Once we have begun to cultivate those inner attitudes, Foster offers 10 suggestions of what the outer expression of those attitudes might look like:

1. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status
2. Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you
3. Develop a habit of giving things away
4. Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry
5. Learn to enjoy things without owning them
6. Develop a deeper appreciation for the creation
7. Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes
8. Obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech
9. Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others
10. Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the Kingdom of God

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you which of these are particularly relevant to you now? Why and how? Make some notes about that one or two and any practical step you feel you could take.

*Leader: give people 5-10 mins to do this. At the end ask people if there is anything that they would like to share recognising that this is personal between them and God. Or share ways in which they have tried to live more simply.*

**Worship** (15 mins) Emily talked with Toby about the spiritual practice of the ‘Examen’. It is a reflection over the day and prayer as we look towards tomorrow. In it we bring ourself into God’s presence, asking the Holy Spirit to show us where we have encountered God throughout our day. Here is a simple guided prayer video to help you do just that. *(To the leader: the complete video is 8.30 mins. It has 1 min of quiet music at the beginning to help you settle - and over 2 mins at the end to give a peaceful ending. Encourage people to close their eyes if that suits them and to sit comfortably. They will have a minute of music to get settled.)*

Play this video from the website ‘Pray as You Go’: Examen at the end of the day <https://pray-as-you-go.org/player/prayer%20tools/examen-p-1>

You could then go straight into this gentle chant.... John Michael Talbot sings Psalm 131 with the Monks of Little Portion Hermitage (1.45 mins) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pS\\_0l2lc000](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pS_0l2lc000)