

Spiritual Rhythms

SIMPLIFY

“For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.” –John Ortberg, author and minister

But Jesus calls us to something more:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. –Matthew 11:28–30

What we do with our hours today shapes the person we will become tomorrow. To experience the “deeper life,” we must develop spiritual practices that help us **encounter** God, **experience** the Holy Spirit, and follow Jesus’ **example**. What we do with our time, talent, and resources reflects our level of commitment to follow Jesus.

In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer notes “If you want to experience the life of Jesus, you have to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus.”¹ Comer reminds us that time is one of our most precious resources, and we can never increase the amount of time we have. All we can do is learn to live within the limits of that “time,” and in this book he teaches us about practices to help us do just that.

The deeper life is exemplified in three of CCC’s DNA statements:²

- *We are all for Jesus.* When we center our lives on Jesus, our focus becomes clear, and our values align with his. This leads us to the practice of simplicity.
- *We are empowered by the Holy Spirit.* When we work from the outflow of the Spirit within us, we stop striving for outward success and the approval of people. This frees us to practice sabbath.
- *We encounter the Father daily.* To encounter God, we need to quiet our minds, slow our pace, and pay attention to the reality of God’s presence. These choices require slowing, silence, and solitude.

Comer encourages us to incorporate these practices in our daily lives.

SCRIPTURE BASIS

Read and reflect on Matthew 6:19–34:

- What would you describe as your most treasured possession (a physical item, not a person)?
 - How much of your heart (time, investment, or energy) gets spent on it each week?
 - What does it cost you in time, upkeep, or energy? How does it benefit you or your family?
- Have you ever struggled to downsize your household or that of a family member? What was hardest about it and why?

¹ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (2021), page 82

² CCC’s DNA statements can be read here: cccomaha.org/dna

- What kinds of things do you currently have in storage but haven't needed, used, or seen in the last six months? What is the storage costing you?
- Verse 24 says "You cannot serve both God and money." Do you think this is a fair dichotomy? Why or why not?
- Do you ever worry about food or clothing?
 - Keep in mind, this doesn't just mean "I'm worried I may not have enough." It may also mean "I'm obsessing about what I will wear tomorrow or what I will eat for lunch."
 - How might we simplify our choices around food and clothing so that there is less worry or stress about them?
- Verse 34 says "Each day has enough trouble of its own." How does this relate to our earlier discussions about slowing down, paying attention, and being present in the moment?

REFLECTION

Read and reflect on 1 Timothy 6:6–10.

Sometimes in 21st-century America, we forget that we are among the wealthiest people in the world. How would you define "rich"? How would your life be different if your only priorities were (and you were fully content with) only "food and clothing"?

RESPONSE

- Make a list of all the items you purchased over the last six months. How many of them are still proving useful to you? How many of them have already gone missing?
- Write up and prepare a meal plan for the next week. Follow it daily so that you don't have to worry about what the next meal will be. Reflect on the experience with your family or small group.

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182–1226 AD) was a model of Christian simplicity.³ Though he was born to wealthy parents, he renounced their lifestyle in 1206, and walked away toward a life of poverty. Many men and women were drawn to his joyous heart and his followers (the "Franciscans") became known for both mystical contemplation and evangelistic fervor. Francis traveled all through Italy and ministered among Muslims in Spain. Francis was also a poet and wrote several hymns (best known is "Canticle of the Sun"). He praised God for any meager provisions and gladly depended on God for daily bread. At one gathering of his followers, Saint Francis encouraged them not to have "any care or anxiety concerning anything to eat or drink... but to concentrate only on praying and praising God. Leave all your worries about your body to Christ because he takes special care of you." When people in surrounding towns heard about the gathering, they brought provisions for a great feast.

PRACTICE

Choose one or more exercises to try this week, alone or in community.

New to this practice?

- Choose one closet to empty. Sort into three piles: "keep," "giveaway," and "maybe." Put the "keep" items back in your closet. Take the "giveaway" items to Goodwill or Salvation Army. Box up the "maybe" items and date the box. If you haven't needed the items in six months, donate that box.

³ Adapted from Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (Harper Collins, 1981, 2005), pages 60–61

- Cut the number of items in your closet by half. Commit to not buying any clothes for six to twelve months. When you do buy a new clothing item, give one away for every new item you bring in.
- Clean out your pantry and fridge. Use what you have for meals this week before buying more.

Ready to go deeper?

- Purge all closets and storage spaces and have a garage sale with the excess. Use the resources earned to travel on a short-term mission trip or to donate to your favorite charity.
- Limit your clothing choices to a capsule wardrobe. Here are a couple of websites to inspire you:
 - pinchofyum.com/how-to-start-a-capsule-wardrobe
 - emmaireneecavanagh.com/work-capsule-wardrobe-guide/
 - becomingminimalist.com/capsule-wardrobe/
 - bemorewithless.com/project-333/

PRAYER FOCUS

Use these specific prayer prompts as catalysts to action this week.

- Creator God, your creativity means that endless options for beauty surround me. Forgive me when my attraction to beauty causes me to buy items I don't need, or even eat foods I'm not hungry for. Help me to be content with noticing every beautiful thing without believing the lie that I need to *own* every beautiful thing.
- Almighty God, please transform my mind into one that is content with fewer items of clothing, art, books. You have the power to transform my desire for food into a desire for health and simplicity. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to transform me into someone who strives to live like Jesus.

RESOURCES

Books and websites that support this week's practice:

- John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*, (Waterbrook, 2019). See also Comer's web resources at johnmarkcomer.com/blog/unhurry
- Richard J Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World*, (Harper One, 2005)
- Joshua Becker, *The More of Less*, 2016. See also becomingminimalist.com
- Joshua Becker, *Things that Matter: Overcoming Distraction to Pursue a More Meaningful Life*, (Waterbrook, 2022)
- Richard Rohr, *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go*, (Crossroad, 2004)