

Melva's Corner

Simplifying Your Soul

(Mind, Will & Emotions)

February 14, 2005

Bible Text: Psalm 51:10-12, 139:16, 17, 23:1-3

Central Truth: The Lord is my Shepherd (to feed, guide, and shield me) I shall not lack. He makes me lie down in (tender) green pastures; He leads me beside the still and restful waters. He refreshes and restores my life (my self); He leads me in the paths of righteousness [uprightness and right standing with Him - not for earning it, but] for His name's sake.

The problem with simplifying your life is that achieving simplicity is not always that simple. We all have a haunting ache for a simpler life with fewer complications, more peace, more joy, more freedom. Yet we also have an addictive attraction to more. We live our lives right in the middle of too much - too much information, too much noise, too much activity, too much stuff. Our clutter suffocates us. It blocks us and distracts us, weighs us down and trips us up. Yet we keep collecting it, stuffing it in, filling our minds with it, scheduling it, piling it in corners and on countertops, stashing it in cars and handbags. Sometimes we even borrow other people's clutter.

Most of us believe that simplifying is part of the cure for our weary reality, but we don't know where to begin. We're not even sure we know what is extraneous and what is necessary.

As I mentioned earlier, simplifying isn't always simple! But it's worth it.

To achieve the goal of uncluttering our life, our simplifying efforts need to encompass at least three areas— our soul, our schedule, and our physical space. In each area, the same basic plan can guide our efforts.

Simple Plan for Simplifying Your Life

Most stressed-out people struggle with expectations. Do you ever feel like an octopus is attacking you, its arms grabbing and pulling? Everyone seems to want more and more. They want you to do things better and bigger and quicker, all the while with a smile on your face. Everywhere you turn, there's another expectation...until you're exhausted just thinking about it. Your family, your friends, your work, your neighbors, and even your church have expectations of you. You have expectations of yourself as well.

It's too much. Yet the **shoulds** and **oughts** don't stop. As they grow, you can feel the arms of the octopus wrapping tighter.

What can you do? The only way to stop the octopus from dragging you down is to have a plan. Below is a plan that can get you started.

Pray it out. Start by committing the whole simplification project to God.

Parcel it out. Unless you have a big chunk of time on your hands, I suggest you focus your simplifying efforts on one area of your life - one drawer, one room, one month, one issue - at a time.

Ask someone to help you out. You can use some support for making hard decisions about what to keep and what not to.

Sort it out. Once you start, address one item after another and decide what to do with it - confess it, delegate it, talk about it, cancel it, file it or give it away.

Carry out your decisions right away - before you proceed to something else. If you can't do it on the spot, mark your calendar. If it's a physical item, don't put it back where you got it! Keep it where you can see it until you act on it.

Maintain from here on out. Establish a plan for handling new information, new time demands, new material acquisitions.

Time for a Change

King David cried out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Surely one way God does this is by helping us clear out the mental, emotional, and spiritual clutter we're so tired of wading through.

Spiritual clutter has mostly to do with unrecognized and unconfessed sin in your life. Attitudes of defiance, greed, dishonesty, anger, jealousy, bitterness, lack of love, pride, lust, or selfish ambition may crowd your heart - especially if you haven't kept current with God.

Soul clutter leads to spiritual clutter and is the most damaging of all clutter. Not only can it wear you down and burn you out; it can destroy all that is meaningful to you and those you love. Take care of your soul which includes your mind, will and emotions and all else will become clearer. With such soul simplicity, stress has fewer corners in which to hide.

In my experience, one of the best strategies for uncluttering the soul involves a pen, a piece of paper, and some time in prayer. Writing down thoughts and feelings helps us sort them all out so we can make the right decisions. Of course the best plan to totally eliminate soul clutter is a working "**Blood Covenant.**"

Taking our confused thoughts and feelings to God in prayer also helps us sort out the junk and focus our thinking. Prayer provides the God-ordained answer to spiritual clutter. Confessing sin, expressing repentance, asking for and accepting God's forgiveness - this process is the spiritual equivalent to cleaning out the cluttered closet that's driving us up the wall. The best way to eliminate spiritual clutter is "**The Meditation Process.**"

Simplifying Your Schedule

Comedian Steven Wright says, "I think God is going to eventually pull civilization over for speeding." He's got a point. Most of us move far too fast, and we pack our schedules with no margin for error. At this pace it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to discover and appreciate all the things in life that really matter. As you race to reach your goals or obligations or to just keep up, true joy becomes a nice thought and nothing more. Don't misunderstand me I believe you should have a passion about

meeting your goals but not at the expense of enjoying the journey.

The faster you go, the more you tend to skim the surface of your life instead of going deep. You do what is quick and expedient, not necessarily what is important. If it looks to time consuming you have a tendency to move on to the next thing. You listen in sound bites, grab meals on the run, exercise when you can fit it in, and produce only what is demanded. Such a lifestyle fills time without filling you as a person, leaving you relationally, emotionally, and spiritually superficial. Uncluttering your schedule slows you down and gives you the time to grow deep and to enjoy life.

Can it be true that the simple pleasure of being alone with our thoughts and our God is reserved only for those who are special? "Doesn't God lead people beside still waters anymore?" Many stressed-out people would echo the question. We don't truly believe that God has suddenly become pro-exhaustion, but sometimes we feel He hasn't given us enough time to follow Him to still waters.

But the problem isn't with God, of course. We can't even put all the blame for the parched condition of our stressed-out souls on our hyped-up culture. The Lord still calls us to follow Him beside still waters on a regular basis so He can restore us. But He never forces us to do what is good for us.

I believe that we intuitively understand the value of soul nurturing, which is what happens when we follow the Lord's leading. When our need for such nurture is left untended, the longing for it deepens. We are like the deer that King David wrote about:

**“As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.”**

Even if we are in a season of life where we are barely hanging on, our souls' deep thirst - plus the Lord's leading and a little ingenuity - can help us find a way to welcome God into our day.

Instant Relief

Look ahead on your calendar and block off a day for a miniretreat. Check your telephone directory for retreat centers or call the chamber of commerce for suggestions. You can also enjoy your

miniretreat at home (with family or roommates away) or even at a nearby hotel. Be sure to unplug the phone, hide the remote, and pretend your e-mail server is down.

Simplifying Your Space

Our culture is obsessed with stuff. It occupies our days and dreams. We love getting it. And it's alright to have stuff. I believe in having stuff and a lot of it. But it should be organized and well maintained.

To combat physical clutter, I suggest you target a room or even a part of a room, pick up each item, and ask the following questions: Do I need it? Do I enjoy it? Does it really matter? Have I used it in the past year? If you can't say yes to at least one of these questions, it may be time to let it go. If you can't bring yourself to throw or give things away, put them in a box with a six-month date on the outside and reconsider at that time. When you bring something new into your space, try your best to get rid of something else.

And if all of this seems like more than you can handle, I urge you to get some help. A good book on home organization can provide direction. An honest friend or even a professional organizer can help you make those hard decisions. Any investment of time or money you make now in the service of simplicity will more than pay for itself in peace and renewed energy.

Saints, make no mistake—soul nurturing is not optional. It's not a luxury, but a necessity. I could almost define the stressed-out individual as a person who has allowed their soul to parch and wither because, for one reason or another, they have not been able to spend time beside still waters. None of us can find balance in our lives or become the person God has in mind for us if there is no room for the quietness that restores our souls and feeds our spirits.

The good news, of course, is that God wants us to have time with Him. He will lead us beside still waters if we just make it a priority to listen and follow.

Memory Text:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right, persevering, and steadfast spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit." (Psalm 51:10-12) Amplified