

L I V I N G
Simplicity

a journey to embracing a fully supplied life

_____ by _____

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Living Simplicity

I love simplicity

The concept of simplicity inspires pictures of minimalism and neutral paint colors, peaceful thoughts, and lots of deep cleansing breaths. I have been kind of in love with simplicity for a while now. As I shifted my focus a few years ago to a less stressful lifestyle, I found that simplicity fit perfectly into my new ideal.

However, for all my love of simplicity, it has taken some work to figure out how to live it out in my real life. As it turns out, *living* simplicity isn't the same as *appreciating* simplicity.

This book is about my own journey of learning to *live* the simplicity I love, from our decision to purposefully live more simply through about eighteen months into living our new lifestyle. Since I am sure I am not the only one who craves that sort of thing, I thought maybe you would like to join me as I worked through the changes from our *unsimple* to a more simple one.

I learned much over on this journey, and these lessons are the ones I collected as I went. I know that lessons learned in order are really valuable, so I am resisting going back and rewriting or amending words, now that I have a better understanding. I *may* feel that I just can't let something pass without a word from my current self, so I'll probably insert a few thoughts here and there.

Living Simplicity

You can follow along in a couple of different ways. You may simply read through, taking mental notes as you go; or, you may want to keep a journal of your thoughts. I provide some reflection questions at the end of each chapter, in hopes of helping you ponder the things we will touch on. You may also use the questions to share what you are learning with others who may be in the same boat as us.

I am glad you are here. Crazy always loves company.

Living Simply,

Courtney

Defining Simplicity

More than just pretty paint colors

A big step in learning to live simplicity is having a vividly clear idea of what it means. For me, the concept of simplicity conjures up pictures of homes with calm, neutral colors in rooms with only the most necessary furniture, no clutter, and ...no people.

Have you ever noticed that? As an expert on reading about simplicity, I can tell you that just about all of the book and magazine covers that speak on the subject forget to picture the real life part of simplicity, the part where people actually *live* it.

What I really desire is to marry the two: the image of my family of three growing (crazy, active, and busy) boys, one tall home-loving husband, one cat, one precious puppy, and that image of a well-organized, beautiful, tastefully simple home and life. I want to live simply inside those well-organized walls, with my unorganized, *un*simple family.

But what does it mean to live simply? What does it mean to say that we want simplicity, or that we are willing to sacrifice to get it? What are we sacrificing *for*?

One of my favorite descriptions of simplicity is by Tsh Oxenreider from her book *Organized Simplicity*. She says, “*{Simplicity} is about choices—about saying no to the things in your life that aren’t best so that you are free and available to say yes to those things you truly want.*”

Beautiful. Simplicity is about living a life that makes room for the things that we deem important. As Christian women, we want to make room for the things that *God* deems important. We want to live in such a way that we live our purpose, fulfill our tasks and succeed at the good work for which we were created.

Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (NIV).

Paul also says in 2 Peter 1:3, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness”* (NIV, 1984). And, in 2 Corinthians 9:8 Paul tells us that, *“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”* (NIV, 1984).

We have been created for a purpose, on purpose. We have been given exactly what we need to get that work done. We have everything that God needs us to have to live out our purpose, accomplishing the exact tasks He put us on this earth to do.

Simplicity is about making sure we have the resources available to do those tasks. It is about making sure we have the means to accomplish our purpose. Put another way, simplicity is about living within the means we have been given so they are available for the purposes for which they were given.

That is so much easier said than done, especially in our world of incredible demands and overwhelming expectations. We are juggling homes, jobs, families, marriages, and about a thousand other things. We are pulled every which way, and in the process, our resources are often distributed everywhere but where they need to be.

Our resources have many different forms, from time and money to our energies: heart, mind, and body. Our resources include our homes, but are also so much more than just living spaces. These resources are the *“all things”* given to us by God for the good work we abound in at *“all times.”* If we are not careful, we can easily redistribute those resources to things other than our good work, leaving us feeling like we are withdrawn and overwhelmed, short of what we need.

Simplicity is about living within our means. It’s about saying *no* to the things that don’t fit into the life God has for us, so that we have all the resources He meant for us to have to get done what we need to do.

It's about letting go of the stuff that doesn't matter, so that we can focus on what does matter.

What that looks like for each of us is different. How you live out your simplicity may look worlds different from how I live out mine because your resources are different. What you have to do with your resources is different than what I have to do with mine.

For me, I pour my resources into my three crazy kids, my marriage, and managing my home. Oh, and I homeschool my boys, too. Yes, I am crazy (more on that in the next chapter). We are working on living within our means, to use what we have for the right reasons and on the right stuff. Doing so has led us down some interesting paths that seem to be getting even more interesting as we go.

F O C U S

Simplicity is also about focus. It's about working on getting rid of the things that distract from the desires of your heart. It's about clearing the mental, physical, and emotional clutter so that you can focus on the things for which you need your full attention.

There are so many things in this world that can distract us. There is a constant barrage of things to think about, worry about, consider, fear, and ponder. We are constantly being pulled in numerous different directions, trying to meet an abundance of different goals all at once.

Simplicity is about choosing a specific focus. It's about honing in on the thing or things that are the most important and learning to let everything else go. It's about adjusting our vision to see a focal point, letting the rest fade away in importance, and then moving toward that point of focus.

Have you ever felt like you needed to focus on something, whether it be your home, your marriage, a child, your health, or a specific project but the world around you just wouldn't allow for it? Has your heart desired anything that your life just isn't shaped to fit?

Simplicity is a life structured for exactly those things. It is about creating a lifestyle that allows for your establishing a singular focus, for diverting resources to working on the things on which you need to focus.

Maybe your heart is heavy with the need to spend more time with your children or to give more attention to your health. Maybe your heart's desire is to stay home with your kids, or you desperately need to nurture your marriage. Maybe you are single and would love to travel, do mission work, or start a charity.

Simplicity allows for us to sort through and get rid of the things that distract from our focus. It lets us create homes, schedules, and perspectives that are honed in on what it is our heart desires for this season.

RELATIONSHIP

Simplicity is also about relationships. It is about creating a life that nurtures relationships over things, as well as schedules, expectations, and demands that don't measure up. Simplicity is about focusing our resources on the people in our lives, and drawing closer to God through them.

Scripture makes it incredibly clear that God's plans for His creation revolve around His people having relationships: relationships with Him and with one another. But, relationships take resources; a lot of resources. In fact, they should take the majority of our resources. Yet, it seems like the faster the world gets, the less we have time or energy for nurturing those relationships that should mean the most.

If a counselor were to tell you that to improve your marriage you must spend at least two hours a day together, what would your main objection be? If we were convicted that we needed to spend a certain number of hours a week with people outside our family having nothing to do with work or business, what would your first obstacle be? If you were asked to mentor a teen mother, what would you present as the reason for why it wouldn't work?

That is why our hearts call out for simplicity. These sorts of things are our heart's desire, yet our lives of busyness do not allow for them. Our heart's desire is to be in deep relationship with others, but when our resources are stretched thin from other things, there is simply nothing left for them.

A life of simplicity allows relationships with others to take center stage. If your life were a pie chart, relationships would take the biggest slice. It allows for us to marry *living* with *people*. We can manage a home while nurturing strong bonds with our families; we can choose activities in and around our homes that lend themselves to drawing closer to them and others. We can structure our schedules in such a way that we have time and energy to be with others for reasons other than work or business.

P E R S P E C T I V E

Finally, simplicity is about laying up our treasures in a different world where things and worldly expectations don't matter. Godly simplicity is about a perspective that is different from the world's perspective. It's about a vision that takes us past the demands of this world, of the expectations of what we should do, where we live and what we accomplish. It's about a focus beyond this temporary, failing whirlwind of busyness and expectations.

Simplicity is about living the bigger picture. It's about seeing beyond the gobbledegook (real word) to the real stuff, the stuff that is important. Can you recall a time when your thinking shifted dramatically? When you thought something one minute, and your perspective shifted in an instant? Maybe you lost a loved one, watched the World Trade Center towers fall, found out you were expecting, realized he was leaving, learned someone was dying, or discovered that maybe you lost everything in a fire or other disaster. These kinds of moments are the kinds of moments when what is important becomes crystal clear, and those things come into sharp focus in contrast to the worthlessness around us.

Thankfully, we don't stay in those situations that provide such clear vision all of the time. In real (less dramatic) life, we find ourselves constantly fighting to keep the right things in our field of vision and not to focus on the wrong things. It is a battle, and to keep an intentional perspective that is as clear as when we are faced with those clarifying moments takes work.

Living Simplicity

Living God's life requires a different perspective, and seeing things differently is the reason we are willing to make big changes and give up things that matter to many people around us:

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal"
(2 Corinthians 4:16-18, ESV).

When we look at our struggles and our blessings alike as having eternal repercussions, it changes things. It makes things matter that others may not consider as important, and vice versa. Simplicity is a life built around a clear vision of eternity, and the importance of every day and every choice we make.

Learning to live simply has been a process, one that has had to begin with our getting a clear picture of what that actually means. It's been somewhat slow as our minds have had to shift to new paths, and our hearts have had to adjust accordingly. We are beginning to consider new ways to commit to living within our means, to open our mind to new possibilities.

As we become comfortable with the small changes, I can see God making bigger ones. As we embrace this notion of living in a way that we are purposefully and intentionally aware of everything at our disposal, we are being challenged in new and exciting (albeit scary) ways.

Simplicity isn't just about pretty, calming paint colors. It's about making daily choices about which resources to protect and which ones to put all in, for the right reasons. It's about focusing our energies on the right things and the right people. Be warned; it may lead to some crazy ideas and challenges.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Depending on your own style of processing, ponder these questions, share them with friends, journal them, or do some of all of the above.

1. How would you define *simplicity*? Does it look like the definition described here?
2. At this point in our journey together, how would you describe what your own life of simplicity would look like? What would “*living within your resources*” be for you and your family?
3. What would be the focus of your own life of simplicity? If you were to structure your life in such a way that you were able to have a specific focus, what would that look like?
4. Which relationships in your life would a life of simplicity benefit the most? Make a list of those people with whom you wish you had more resources to develop deeper relationships.
5. Recall or note something in your past that has shifted your perspective dramatically. How does that change in perspective add to or otherwise influence your desire to live a life of simplicity?