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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

100  
ways to  
Simplify  
your  
Life



FaithWords Edition  
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# Introduction

Everyone has them: those days where nothing seems to get done, except maybe what you've added to your already lengthy to-do list. Are you tired most of the time? Are you spent? Do you find yourself wishing for a better day—a simpler day? Too many things compete for your limited resources of attention, energy, and time. You may be suffocating and not even know it. If you feel like this, you're not alone.

Most people today live complicated lives that leave them frustrated and confused, weary and worn out. But I have good news: your life does not have to be that way. You can choose a life of simplicity, fruitfulness, fulfillment, peace, and joy. I want to warn you, however, unless you are determined not to, you will do what everyone else does. You will get sucked up in the system and spend your life wishing things were different, never realizing you are, in fact, the only one who can change things. Unless we are resolute and remain undaunted in our quest for simplicity, we are destined for complication and frustration.

I recall a time when I was complaining to God about my schedule being absolutely insane. How could anyone be expected to do all I had in front of me? Then the realization hit me that I was the one who made my schedule and nobody could change it but me. You can spend your lives wishing things were different, but wishing won't change anything. Smart decision making and decisive action is what changes things. If you picked up this book looking for change, are you willing to make a decision and follow it up with action?

I wasted many years *hoping* life would change and things would calm down until I finally realized life itself doesn't change; in fact, it has the potential to get worse. I understood my only real option was to change my approach to life. I had to say no to another day of rushing around

and feeling frustrated. I didn't want the doctor giving me another prescription to mask another symptom of the real problem—stress.

In my search for simplicity, I have come to believe life can never be simple unless I learn to approach all things simply. It is my attitude toward each event in life that determines how easy or complex each situation will be. Perhaps life is complicated because people are complicated. Is it possible that life is *not* complicated, but rather, individuals complicate life in the way they approach it?

I discovered it wasn't really life or circumstances or other people as much as it was me that needed to change. My problem wasn't the problem—I was the problem! When you spend your life in frustration trying to change the world and everyone in it, you fail to realize it could be you just need to change your approach to life. It can be very easy for someone to live an entire lifetime and never entertain the notion that the way they do things is the real problem.

Have you ever attempted to have friends over for what you initially intended to be a simple afternoon of food, fellowship, and fun, but somehow, it turned into a complicated nightmare? I remember those days vividly. I'd be at church on Sunday and, without much forethought, invite three couples over for the following Sunday to a barbecue. My initial thought was hot dogs and hamburgers on the grill, baked beans, potato chips, and iced tea. My motive was fellowship and fun, but by the time the guests arrived, I didn't even want them there. Fun was not going to happen, at least not for me. Why? I turned my simple get-together into a nightmare of preparation, expensive food, and fourteen people instead of the original six. My complicated approach to life and my complicated thought process convinced me hot dogs and hamburgers weren't nice enough so I bought steaks we could not afford. My potato chips turned into a huge bowl of homemade potato salad. The simple baked beans became four side dishes I labored over.

Insecure and wanting to impress everyone, I had to spend the week cleaning and getting everything in the house to the point where I thought it would be impressive. Of course, the lawn chairs were old, so I bought new ones. I got angry at Dave because I thought he wasn't helping me enough, and by the time our friends arrived, I resented them,



wished they hadn't come, and had a miserable day of pretending to be the happy hostess when in reality I was frustrated and miserable.

I could not figure out why I wasn't able to enjoy much of anything in life until God revealed to me I was killing my joy with complication. For years, I prayed God would change the people and circumstances around me when, in reality, He wanted to change me and my approach to life. He wanted me to simplify so, ultimately, He could be glorified.

Let me share with you 100 ways to approach living that can simplify your life and, in turn, release and increase your joy. I believe they will dramatically improve the quality of your everyday experience if you incorporate them into the way you do things. Jesus said He came so we might have *and* enjoy our life in abundance (see John 10:10). His principles are simple. Faith is simple! Trusting God is simple! A childlike approach to Him is simple! The plan of salvation is simple!

Jesus offers us a "new way of living," and I believe it is a simple, yet powerful way that enables us to enjoy everyday life. Are you ready to simplify your life? Are you ready to say good-bye to the complexities you've allowed to take over? Let's get started.

## 1

# Do One Thing at a Time

“The feeling of being hurried is not usually the result of living a full life and having no time. It is, on the contrary, born of a vague fear that we are wasting our life. When we do not do the one thing we ought to do, we have no time for anything else—we are the busiest people in the world.”

—ERIC HOFFER

*Looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith [giving the first incentive for our belief] and is also its Finisher [bringing it to maturity and perfection].*

—Hebrews 12:2

When we do things without truly focusing our minds on them, we immediately decrease our strength to do the work before us and do it well. By putting our hands to one thing and our mind to another, we divide the muscle behind our abilities and we make the task much more difficult. It's like removing an egg yolk from the egg white—both can be used separately but the result isn't as effective (or tasty) as it would be if we leave the egg whole. However, by directing all of our faculties to the one thing we are doing on a particular day, at that hour, at that moment, we find it much easier to do. The ability to concentrate and stay focused can only come from discipline.

The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6 to be anxious for nothing. Anxious people are always trying to live ahead of where they currently are. They spend today trying to figure out tomorrow and the result is the loss of simplicity. God expects us to trust Him with tomorrow just as He instructed the Israelites to do when they crossed the barren wilderness, pressing toward the Promised Land.

Practice living one day at a time; give yourself—your thoughts, your conversation, your energies, every part of you—to the day at hand.

Develop an ability to give yourself to what you are doing. You will sense an awareness enabling you to enjoy the current activity, instead of going through each day in a blur of activity and confusing thoughts which leave you drained and exhausted.

Do you fear you will not accomplish as much if you try to live this way? It's true you may not do as much, but you will also enjoy what you do *a whole lot more*. One key to simplicity is realizing that quality is far superior to quantity.

## 2

## Be Satisfied with What You Have

“Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have.”

—ANONYMOUS

*Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money [including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions] and be satisfied with your present [circumstances and with what you have]; for He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you.*

—Hebrews 13:5

The affluence of our Western culture has created an epidemic of coveting what everyone else has. People crave more and more, yet they don't enjoy what they already possess. A simple person is a satisfied person; they don't crave more of anything, but they do thoroughly enjoy what they have. They trust that more will come in due time.

Does “more” have the ability to make us happy as the world wants us to believe? The answer is No! In fact, the more we have, the more work we must do to take care of it. We may think “more” makes life easier, but in reality, it often complicates the day-to-day. The tenth commandment tells us not to covet; we aren't to want what others have. Paul states in Philippians 4:11 that he learned how to be content no matter what his circumstances were. Even hearing that statement reminds me of simplicity and ministers comfort to me.

There's nothing wrong with having things, but it is wrong to lust after them. When we feel we cannot be happy without something, we are lusting after it. We should develop the habit of asking God for what we want, and believe He will give it to us if, and when, it is right. This simple approach to life sets us free to *enjoy* life. Life is the journey, not the destination. Those who want to enjoy life must learn to enjoy

the journey, which is filled with waiting. Eventually, we reach our destination only to begin again on a new journey to another place; therefore, to never enjoy the journey is to never enjoy life. Make a decision to begin thoroughly enjoying what you have. Thank God for it and be content.

## Regularly Reevaluate Commitments

“If you don’t like something, change it; if you can’t change it, change the way you think about it.”

—MARY ENGELBREIT

*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden and overburdened, and I will cause you to rest. [I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls.]*

—Matthew 11:28

Jesus says He wants to give us rest. He invites us to come and, perhaps, He wants to give us an opportunity to reevaluate our commitments. He wants us to find what isn’t necessary and get rid of it. Anytime we feel like life has lost the simple flow it should have and, instead, has become burdensome and heavy, we should take those weights to Jesus. Life was not meant to make us feel dragged down and weary. We are not mules who spend their lives carrying a burden. We are God’s children with a blood-bought right to peace and joy.

Things in life are always changing and shifting. In order to grow, we must change also, and our commitments must change to match the changes happening in our lives. My youngest daughter, Sandra, worked on our ministry staff for fifteen years. She traveled with me, was in charge of our helps ministry, and did many things she enjoyed. When she felt ready to have children, she also thought she could still work, at least part-time. Much to her surprise, she had twins and it wasn’t long before she was in tears because her life was so complicated. She knew she had to make the difficult decision to not work for several years. The decision made a big difference in their family finances, and she didn’t want to feel left out of things at the ministry. I respect her so much because she valued a peaceful, simple lifestyle more than money and

position, and I believe God is blessing her in special ways because of her difficult decision.

I believe we often forfeit many blessings God has stored up for us because we are not willing to reevaluate commitments and cut out things that God is finished with or are no longer bearing fruit. Just because you have always done something does not mean you should always do it. We can easily get into a rut and find ourselves feeling bored and bland for no reason other than we have done too much of the same thing for too long and we need a change.

It is easy to cut things off you don't *want* to do, but what about when God asks you to lay something down your emotions are not ready to give up? What if it is something you have helped birth and build and feel attached to and even responsible for? Would you be willing to let go of something you still enjoy, in obedience to God, in order to simplify your life? Obedience is not always easy. Much of the time it involves sacrificing our ways for God's way. Sometimes we don't understand why, but those are the times when we need to trust Him and keep moving forward. God never asks us to do anything that won't eventually make our lives better. Don't be afraid to regularly reevaluate and make changes you need to make in order to keep your life on the simple track.

## It Is Never Too Late to Begin Again

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

—ANNE FRANK

*It is because of the Lord's mercy and loving-kindness that we are not consumed, because His [tender] compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great and abundant is Your stability and faithfulness.*

—Lamentations 3:22–23

Hopelessness is a burden none of us needs to endure because, with God, it is never too late to begin again. He is the God of new beginnings. Jonah went in the opposite direction of the one God instructed, but God let him have a fresh start once he admitted his mistake.

It is never too late to pray and ask for God's help and forgiveness. The devil wants us to feel hopeless. He loves words like “never” and “the end.” He says, “This is the end of everything. You have messed up and can never overcome your bad choices.” We must remember to look to God's Word for truth, because the devil is a liar.

The Bible is filled with stories about people who experienced new beginnings. Receiving Jesus as our Savior is the ultimate new beginning. We become new creatures with an opportunity to learn a new way of living. The Bible even says in Ephesians 4:23 that we must be constantly renewed in our minds and attitudes. If you ever thought or displayed an attitude thinking it was too late for you to have a good life, good relationships, or hope for the future, then you need to renew your mind right away. Choose to think according to God's Word and not how you feel. Nobody is a failure unless they choose to stop trying. Life gets a lot sweeter and easier if we live with the attitude that says, “I will do my best today and I trust God will do the rest. Tomorrow I will begin again and I will never quit or give up.”