

Simplicity 06

Simplicity of Pleasure



Weston Brooks

OVERVIEW

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

- Psalm 16:11

Narrowing the channels of pleasure (that is, saying “no” to excess and “yes” to sober-mindedness) is not a way of limiting who we are. It is the way we will embrace the full scope of our potential to be empowered by God’s Spirit, and to step into our God-given calling. God does not call us to simplicity as a way of keeping us from joy and peace, but as a way of protecting and enhancing our joy and peace.

Remember that pleasure was part of God’s original design, but also remember that when our loves are misordered, we lose sight of a key truth: God alone can satisfy us, and he wants to. The Bible teaches us that the way one pursues and attains intimacy with God (and spiritual formation, healing, wisdom, maturity, and spiritual insight) is through simplicity.

Simplicity (sobriety) is the means by which we set our minds on Jesus (1 Peter 1 & 4) and is how we resist the devil (1 Peter 5). Indulging in an excess of pleasure can keep us from experiencing the in-breaking rule and reign of God in the here and now. Operating in “the flesh” prevents us from operating in the Spirit and from experiencing the goodness of God in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

Simplicity of pleasure brings all the other simplicity practices together by decluttering our minds and souls, moving us to become active channels of the Holy Spirit. Excess can sabotage the potential of our apprenticeship to Jesus. In this week’s Practice, we’ll explore what if anything in our life needs simplifying or restricting

PRACTICE SIMPLICITY OF PLEASURE

Our Practice this week is to start recognizing and naming the excess of pleasure in our life and to take a step, with the Holy Spirit's guidance, towards the simplicity of pleasure. Take a deep breath and welcome the Holy Spirit to speak. This conversation may be challenging, so make sure that you give yourself time and space to do it thoughtfully.

Read through Galatians 5v16-21. As you read, ask: Are there excesses in my life that need simplifying? What are they? Some examples may be:

Relationships (avoiding being alone, constantly seeking approval, etc.)

Sexuality (porn, sleeping around, neglecting spousal relationship, etc.)

Substances (alcohol, weed, prescription drug misuse, etc.)

Technology (phone, internet, Netflix, etc.)

Work (too much too often, overfocus on productivity, etc.)

Appearance (social media, shopping, etc.)

Rest (excessive "self care," avoiding relationships via isolation, etc.)

None of the categories are inherently bad (though many of the parenthetical examples aren't included in Christian practice).

Ask: What need is this excess or pleasure meeting in me? And how may the Holy Spirit want to meet that need instead?

Ask: What will I do about it? Spend some time engaging the Holy Spirit and listening to God. Don't get overwhelmed. Instead, start with the question: What is the first step towards simplicity? Maybe it's a conversation with someone; maybe it's deleting an app; maybe it's changing your schedule. What is the first step to take?

Ask: Who will I ask to hold me accountable? As with all Practices of Jesus, don't go it alone. Who could be someone you could share this journey with?. Take a minute and reflect on who it is. Then before ending the Practice, reach out to them.

Note: If the excess of pleasure has ceased to feel like a choice, and has moved into the space of addiction, please know healing and freedom are possible. Consider reaching out to a counselor or seeking an addiction support group in your area.

Finally, spend some time abiding with the Spirit in gratitude. Pray and ask God for strength to trust his goodness. Ask God to open your eyes and heart to the pleasure that is yours in Jesus.

Remember that simplifying and limiting pleasure is a disciplined gesture that says, "the way I order my decisions and days and priorities will reflect my love of Jesus and his calling on my life." As you begin to explore this concept, remember to start small: where you are, not where you think you should be.

Reflection

Were you able to name a few areas of excess of pleasure in your life this week? What was one step you took towards the simplicity of pleasure? What was your experience?

RESOURCES

Abundant Simplicity

by Jan Johnson

The Freedom of Simplicity

by Richard Foster

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