



the beauty of SIMPLICITY

LET US STRIP OFF EVERY WEIGHT THAT SLOWS US DOWN, ESPECIALLY THE SIN THAT SO EASILY TRIPS US UP. AND LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE GOD HAS SET BEFORE US. WE DO THIS BY KEEPING OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE CHAMPION WHO INITIATES AND PERFECTS OUR FAITH.

Hebrews 12:1-2

If we are honest with ourselves, we will recognize that there are things that have attached themselves to us that have started weighing us down. Maybe it was subtle at first and we didn't notice the imperceptible drag...but now it's begun to build up and it's becoming a hindrance. While it's important to practice regular introspection and repentance, sometimes a DEEP cleaning is necessary. This is what the Lenten season is about, A deep cleaning of our hearts to clear away the clutter so we can better keep our eyes on Jesus and run, free and unencumbered, toward the path he's set before us.



simplify your SCHEDULE

ARE YOU TIRED? WORN OUT?...COME TO ME. GET AWAY WITH ME AND YOU'LL RECOVER YOUR LIFE. I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO TAKE A REAL REST. WALK WITH ME AND WORK WITH ME—WATCH HOW I DO IT. LEARN THE UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF GRACE. I WON'T LAY ANYTHING HEAVY OR ILL-FITTING ON YOU. KEEP COMPANY WITH ME AND YOU'LL LEARN TO LIVE FREELY AND LIGHTLY."

Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG)

Jesus promises us an abundant life (see John 10:10). However, “abundant” doesn’t mean a jam-packed, stressful, stretched-thin life. In this verse, Jesus himself invites us to learn the “unforced rhythms of grace”...to live freely and lightly. Doesn’t that sound amazing? But, we humans love to say yes to more and more...to add one more thing to our schedule and then wonder why we are stressed out and full of anxiety.

Long before you were even born, God laid out a healthy rhythm for our lives and then modeled it for us himself. Work hard. Yes. But rest and margin are VITAL to our souls. God designed you. He knows your operating system needs a power-down every once in a while in order to function at its greatest capacity. Take a breath. Slow down. Allow your spirit to be renewed. Take delight in this life.

Sometimes we need to say “no” to good things in order to embrace greater things. So in this season, intentionally simplify your schedule. It’s ok to not be involved in everything. Make room in your life and your heart for rest, for love, for unhurried time in the presence of our Lord. Learn to live freely and lightly.

One of my favorite things about Jesus is that he was never in a hurry. Even when a life hung in the balance, he was calm, and moved at his own unhurried pace. May we walk in the slow, deliberate, steady footsteps of Jesus.



dear God,

TEACH ME YOUR UNFORCED RHYTHMS. HELP ME TO WALK AT THE PACE YOU'VE LAID OUT FOR ME. SHOW ME WHAT A HEALTHY BALANCE CAN LOOK LIKE IN MY LIFE. SHOW ME THE SIGNPOSTS THAT REMIND ME WHEN I'VE TAKEN ON TOO MUCH OR GROWN IMPATIENT WITH YOUR PACE.

amen.

simplify your STUFF



ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE RATHER THAN DESIRING WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE. JUST DREAMING ABOUT NICE THINGS IS MEANINGLESS - LIKE CHASING THE WIND.

Ecclesiastes 6:9

AND WHY WORRY ABOUT YOUR CLOTHING? LOOK AT THE LILIES OF THE FIELD AND HOW THEY GROW. THEY DON'T WORK OR MAKE THEIR CLOTHING, YET SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY WAS NOT DRESSED AS BEAUTIFULLY AS THEY ARE. AND IF GOD CARES SO WONDERFULLY FOR WILDFLOWERS THAT ARE HERE TODAY AND THROWN INTO THE FIRE TOMORROW, HE WILL CERTAINLY CARE FOR YOU.

Matthew 6:28-30



dear God,

TEACH MY HEART TO BE
CONTENT. MAY I TAKE
PLEASURE IN THE BEAUTIFUL
SIMPLICITY OF YOUR
KINGDOM. I DON'T WANT TO
KEEP CHASING THE WIND,
CHASING COMPARISON,
OR CHASING THINGS THAT
WON'T LAST. THANK YOU FOR
LOVINGLY PROVIDING FOR ALL
MY NEEDS. YOU ARE ENOUGH.

amen.

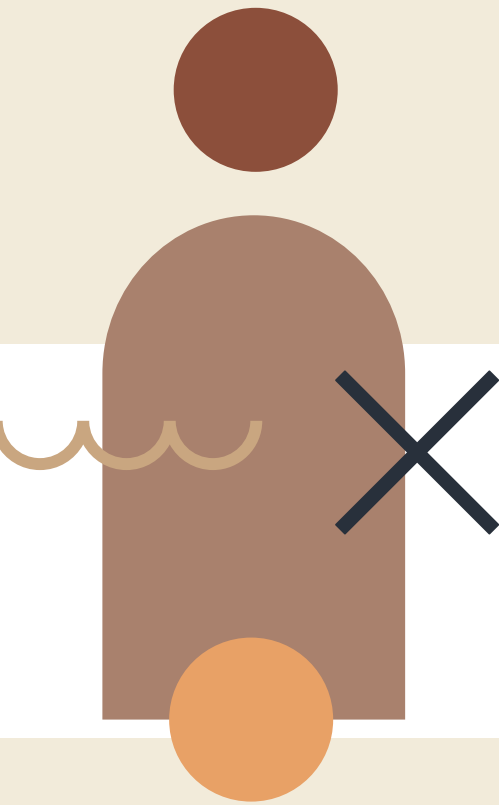
Let's face it. We live in a culture of excess. More is better! Too much is best! Hoard all you can and if you don't have room for the latest and greatest...get it anyway! If we take a breath to think about it, I think we will all agree that this is no way to live. This can't be what Jesus had in mind when he talked about the abundant life...slowly being suffocated by all of our STUFF. There's got to be another way.

Good news! There is! In Matthew 6, Jesus says, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." However, like toddlers...we need to learn the difference between wants and needs. Do we need a new outfit? A new phone? More knickknacks? Maybe...but probably not.

We need to ask ourselves: are we being more influenced by the excessive culture we're immersed in? Or the beautifully simple kingdom of God? Never once did we see Jesus fretting about anything...especially not earthly stuff that's here today and gone tomorrow. Even Solomon, who "had everything a man could desire" admitted that all of his huge houses and lavish things only added to the anxieties of his life.

I think we all realize that impulse buying things on Amazon is not going to satisfy the hole we are trying to fill. So why do we do it? Let's make a commitment right here and now. Let's chase after contentment rather than glut.

simplify your SPEECH



THE MORE WORDS YOU SPEAK, THE LESS THEY MEAN. SO WHAT GOOD ARE THEY?
Ecclesiastes 6:11

TOO MUCH TALK LEADS TO SIN. BE SENSIBLE AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT.
Proverbs 10:19

A TRULY WISE PERSON USES FEW WORDS; A PERSON WITH UNDERSTANDING IS EVEN-TEMPERED. EVEN FOOLS ARE THOUGHT WISE WHEN THEY KEEP SILENT.
Proverbs 17:27-28

I know many of us LOVE to listen to ourselves talk. I get it. We have A LOT of opinions and we are usually right (*wink) so the world deserves to hear all about it, all the time. Yikes. It's no wonder why the wisdom books of scripture have so much to say about our words. Our words matter. When we spout off before thinking, we usually leave in our wake some hurt feelings, some misunderstandings, and even some broken relationships. This is not God's best for our lives and it's not reflective of his kingdom. It would be so formative if we spent this season refining our speech and learning to live with saying less.

Scientists estimate that each one of us speaks between 10,000 and 20,000 words each day. Obviously that varies between genders and personalities...but still...that's a lot of words. How many of those words do you think are purposeful? How many of those words are premeditated? How many took a lap around your head before overflowing from your lips? If we speak upwards of 10,000 words each day...let's think of those as 10,000 opportunities to speak life and goodness into this world. However, that's only possible if we learn to tame our tongue and simplify our speech.

Obviously this disciplined practice should extend to our online life. There is so much division, vitriol, and filth all over our feeds. Let us be different. Let our words, online or in person be a good, pleasing fragrance, rising up to bring honor to our King and speak beauty into the souls of others.



dear God,

*MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH
BRING HONOR AND GLORY TO
YOUR NAME. GRANT ME THE
PATIENCE AND SELF-CONTROL
TO THINK BEFORE I SPEAK. I
WANT MY WORDS TO BUILD
UP, TO ENCOURAGE, AND
TO BE SWEET LIKE HONEY.
PLEASE HELP ME TO CHOOSE
MY WORDS WISELY.*

amen.

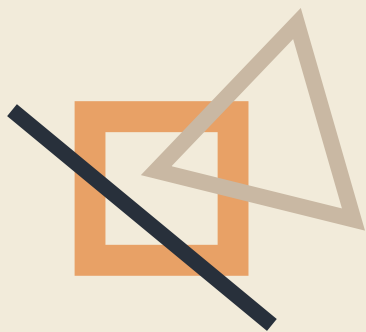
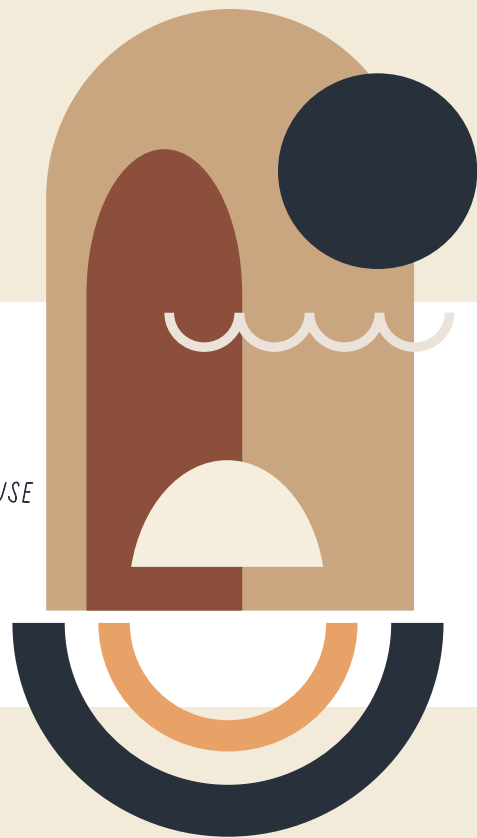
simplify your SUSTENANCE

DO YOU LIKE HONEY? DON'T EAT TOO MUCH, OR IT WILL MAKE YOU SICK.

Proverbs 25:16

MY CHILD, LISTEN AND BE WISE; KEEP YOUR HEART ON THE RIGHT COURSE. DO NOT CAROUSE WITH DRUNKARDS OR FEAST WITH GLUTTONS, FOR THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY TO POVERTY, AND TOO MUCH SLEEP CLOTHES THEM IN RAGS.

Proverbs 23:19-23



dear God,

*YOU ARE THE ONE I LOOK
TO FOR SATISFACTION.
YOU ALONE SATISFY MY
SOUL. FORGIVE ME FOR
MY OVERINDULGENCE AND
MY RELIANCE ON FOOD
OR ALCOHOL TO REGULATE
MY MOODS. AS I DENY MY
FLESH OF THESE TEMPORARY
PLEASURES FILL ME UP WITH
YOUR SPIRIT AND COMFORT.*

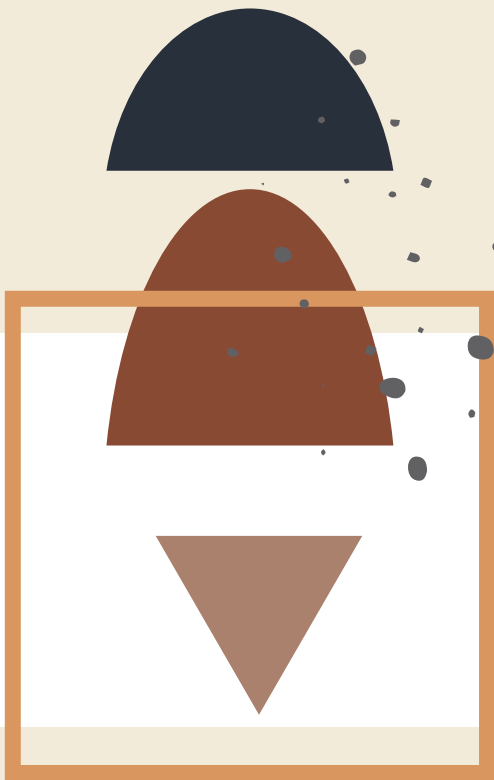
amen.

Don't you just love the straightforwardness of scripture? Too much sweets will make you sick! I guess my mom was right, after all.

Before we move on...let me just say something. As with all of these areas to simplify, let's make sure we are not approaching it from a legalistic framework. Especially when it comes to our relationship with food and our bodies. Please love your body and treat it with kindness, like you would your soul. Feed your body well, like you feed your soul well. Fasting or denying our flesh is NOT a diet.

Ok. While we don't want to link our spirituality to a dieting culture, there is a link between our physical and our spiritual bodies. There's a reason why fasting is such a long-standing effective practice. Just like with money or media or material possessions, our love for food or alcohol can start to consume us. What we feed our body can become an idol in our lives. This is why denying ourselves of these indulgences is a powerful tool of discipline.

Fasting during lent is a practice that teaches us discretion. While there's nothing necessarily wrong with sugar or caffeine or a glass of wine, it might not be feeding our bodies wisely. Furthermore, food and alcohol might be an area we turn to when we are overwhelmed and stressed. God himself wants to be our refuge. He wants to be the one we sit down with after a long hard day rather than distracting ourselves with a little culinary pleasure.



simplify your SOURCES

DON'T COPY THE BEHAVIOR OR CUSTOMS OF THE WORLD, BUT LET GOD TRANSFORM YOU INTO A NEW PERSON BY CHANGING THE WAY YOU THINK.

Romans 12:2

A WISE PERSON IS HUNGRY FOR KNOWLEDGE, WHILE THE FOOL FEEDS ON TRASH.

Proverbs 15:14

Now that we've talked about having discretion in what we feed our bodies...let's talk about what we are feeding our minds. Each and everyday we are being molded and formed into a likeness of something...either the likeness of the world or the likeness of Jesus. If we aren't VERY intentional in simplifying our sources we are going to look more and more like the world around us.

Where are you going for information? For wisdom? For entertainment? These things will have a profound impact on what you think and how you think will have an impact on how you act. Are these sources drawing you closer to the heart of God? Are they helping you along in your journey to love your neighbor as yourself? Are they filling you with compassion, mercy, and peace? Or are they causing you to be fearful and mistrusting? Paul tells us in Philippians to "fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." This is a great filter to help refine the sources we allow to penetrate our minds and hearts. Spend sometime testing your sources against these requirements. How do they measure up? It might be time to simplify and let go of some things that aren't molding your heart into the likeness of God's.

Or perhaps, what you fill your mind with isn't "trash" and it is lovely, but you've been using it as a distraction. You've been down the endless, mindless scroll of social media to escape reality or pass the time. Can I encourage you? Go to God instead. Spend your time on the endless scroll of his love and goodness! It won't be time wasted!

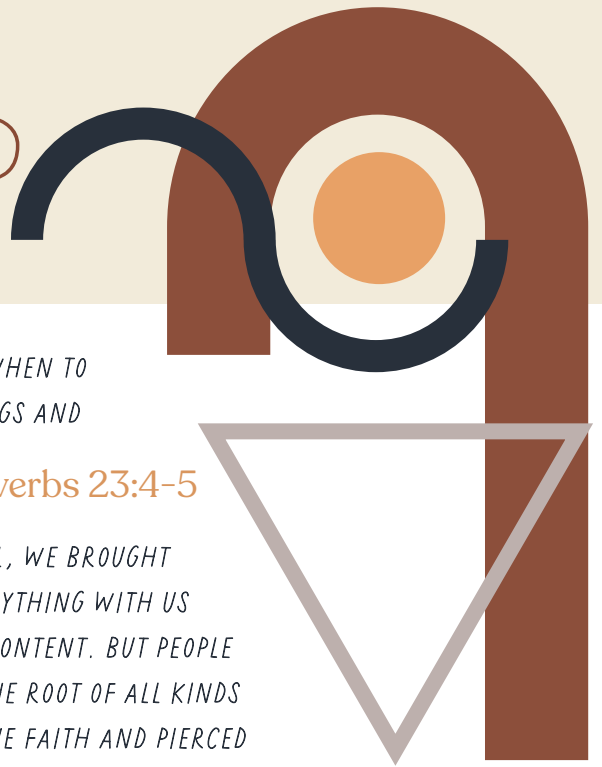


dear God,

SEARCH MY HEART AND TEST MY THOUGHTS. HELP ME DISCERN WHETHER WHAT I'M FILLING MY MIND WITH IS DRAWING ME CLOSER TO YOUR LIKENESS OR THE LIKENESS OF THE WORLD. GRANT ME THE SELF-CONTROL TO SAY "NO" TO THE SOURCES THAT AREN'T TRUE + LOVELY OR ONLY DISTRACT ME FROM YOU.

amen.

simplify your STEWARDSHIP



DON'T WEAR YOURSELF OUT TRYING TO GET RICH. BE WISE ENOUGH TO KNOW WHEN TO QUIT. IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE WEALTH DISAPPEARS, FOR IT WILL SPROUT WINGS AND FLY AWAY LIKE AN EAGLE.

Proverbs 23:4-5

YET TRUE GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS ITSELF GREAT WEALTH. AFTER ALL, WE BROUGHT NOTHING WITH US WHEN WE CAME INTO THE WORLD, AND WE CAN'T TAKE ANYTHING WITH US WHEN WE LEAVE IT. SO IF WE HAVE ENOUGH FOOD AND CLOTHING, LET US BE CONTENT. BUT PEOPLE WHO LONG TO BE RICH FALL INTO TEMPTATION...FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL. AND SOME PEOPLE, CRAVING MONEY, HAVE WANDERED FROM THE TRUE FAITH AND PIERCED THEMSELVES WITH MANY SORROWS.

1 Timothy 6:6-10



dear God,

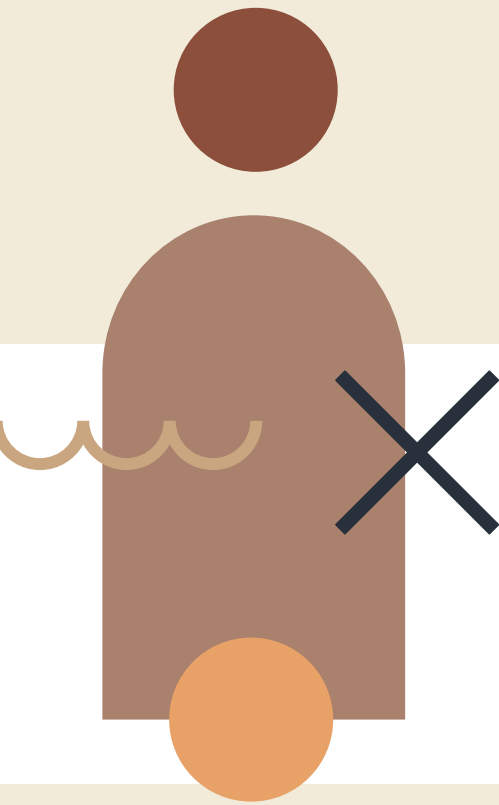
*EVERYTHING I HAVE IS YOURS.
TEACH ME CONTENTMENT
IN MY FINANCES. HELP ME
TO LIVE WITH OPEN HANDS
AND LOVINGLY REMIND ME
WHEN I START TO CLENCH
MY FISTS AGAIN. SHOW ME
OPPORTUNITIES TO BLESS
OTHERS AND TRUST IN YOUR
PROVISION AND BLESSINGS.*

amen.

There's this common theme in scripture...loving money and chasing after wealth leads AWAY from the heart of God and oftentimes towards destruction. Proverbs 1:19 says that being greedy for money actually **ROBS** us of LIFE. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be robbed of the abundant life God has for me! Even Solomon himself, who was one of the wealthiest men EVER, says "how meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!... the rich seldom get a good night's sleep." (Ecclesiastes 5) I think we probably all "know" this. Money can't buy happiness. However, we are constantly being inundated with messages to the contrary. We compare our lives to the (fake) images others portray and we end up chasing wealth and material possessions anyway. The generous, unworried, un-hoarding way of Jesus truly is counter-cultural. The world says "money is security." God says, "I will provide for you from my abundance. Do you trust me?"

God wants generosity FOR you. He's not after your money, he's after your heart. He wants you to experience the fullness of life and to live freely and lightly (Matthew 11). Maybe it's time to give up the chase. To free yourself from worry. To stop the comparison game. God is ready to pour out blessings upon you, but you'll have a hard time receiving it with your fists clenched tight.

simplify your SOUL



MAKE IT YOUR GOAL TO LIVE A QUIET LIFE, MINDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS AND WORKING WITH YOUR HANDS, JUST AS WE INSTRUCTED YOU BEFORE. THEN PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT BELIEVERS WILL RESPECT THE WAY YOU LIVE, AND YOU WILL NOT NEED TO DEPEND ON OTHERS.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

THE WISE ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR UNDERSTANDING, AND PLEASANT WORDS ARE PERSUASIVE. DISCRETION IS A LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN TO THOSE WHO POSSES IT, BUT DISCIPLINE IS WASTED ON FOOLS.

Proverbs 16:21-22

Lent is ultimately about decluttering our souls.

It may come through letting go of some material possessions or changing the way we feed our bodies and minds...but ultimately it's about our soul. Who we are at the core of who God made us to be. Not the image we portray or all of the other added "stuff" we've acquired. The truest sense of your self might be buried underneath all of the frivolous things and habits and coping mechanisms that have attached themselves to us...sometimes without our knowledge. So we need an intentional season of chiseling.

We are the clay. God is the potter. Allow him to shape you. Allow the steady and sure hands of God to form your soul into the beautiful masterpiece he's been designing all along. All the other stuff...the busyness, the worry, the never-ending chase...that's the stuff that makes us look like everyone else. But that's not who you were created to be. Your soul is beautiful. Your soul is unique. Your soul is something worth fighting for and waiting for.

I'm not going to lie. This chiseling, refining process is not always easy or pleasant or quick. As Father Gregory Boyle says it, "Trust in the slow work of God. Ours is a God who waits. Who are we not to? It takes what it takes for the great turnaround. Wait for it."

Your soul is worth it.



dear God,

I WANT THE SIMPLE, BEAUTIFUL LIFE. I DON'T NEED RICHES OR FINE THINGS. I DON'T NEED BUSYNESS OR CONSTANT NOISE FILLING MY BRAIN. GRANT ME YOUR LIFE-GIVING DISCRETION IN ORDER TO CHISEL AWAY THE THINGS THAT DON'T BELONG. I TRUST YOU TO MOLD ME INTO WHO YOU'VE DESIGNED ME TO BE.

amen.