

TIME

RELATIONSHIPS

MONEY

GOD

simple
Life

ACTION PLAN

THOM S. RAINER & ART RAINER

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WEEK 1 ■

The Simple Revolution

SESSION 1

Group Experience

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Share one way your life is not simple and one way you would like to simplify your life if possible.
3. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance." What do you think it takes to have the abundant life Jesus was talking about? How do complexity and busyness interfere with the abundant life?

Four Areas of Life

1. Show the DVD for session 1. Complete the viewer guide below.

The Simple Revolution

Four Steps Toward the Simple Life

Four Areas of Life

2. What statements in the video stood out as significant to you?
3. Identify the four areas of life on which this study will focus.
Which area is the greatest source of complexity for you? Why?

Four Steps Toward the Simple Life

1. According to the authors, what steps will move you toward the simple life?
2. Identify some before-and-after phrases that express your goals for this study. One is provided as an example.

From complexity to simplicity
From _____ to _____
From _____ to _____
From _____ to _____
From _____ to _____
From _____ to _____
From _____ to _____
From _____ to _____

3. Share your favorite phrase with the group. Use blank lines to jot down phrases that other group members share.
4. Share prayer concerns related to your need to simplify. Spend time praying silently that you will persevere and gain victory over the obstacles to a simpler life. Pray that your priorities will reflect God's will for your life.

Over the next six weeks you will read devotionals five days each week that will help you understand the four action steps and apply them to the four key areas of your life. You will also complete learning activities that will guide you to implement these steps in your life. You will establish goals for the four key areas of your life, and you will begin making changes to live with simplicity and intentionality.

Complete week 1 devotionals and activities before the next group session.

If you missed this session, go to www.lifeway.com/downloads to download this or any other session of Simple Life.

simple life

WEEK 1

Introduction

Imagine a day like this.

You awake in the morning. You lie there a moment and thank God for a good night's rest and for the opportunities of a new day. Then you stop and think, *What day is it anyway? Thursday. Yes, it's Thursday.* You pray that you will honor God in all you do today, and you roll out of bed and head for the shower, trying to recall your to-do list for the day. At work you have meetings at 9:00 and 2:00. You have a birthday lunch that's been planned for more than a week. You'll have to stay focused to make any progress on your assignments today. Then the kids have a soccer game after school, and you have a stewardship-committee meeting after church tonight. It looks like dinner on the run. Catch-up with your spouse will be on the run with a cell phone again. You've just got to plan a date for the two of you soon.

You get home about 9:30, check on the kids, and say good night. You look through the mail; decide you are too tired to read the newspaper; and check your e-mail, voice mail, and text messages one last time for the day while you grab a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich to make up for the dinner you skipped. You fall asleep watching the evening news, get up, and collapse into bed.

Before you fall asleep, you thank God for the day. Then you remember everything you didn't get done today and what you need to do tomorrow. You recall that you had intended to take out the garbage tonight since tomorrow is pickup day. You fall asleep reminding yourself that taking out the garbage is your first priority in the morning.

No one wants garbage to be the day's first priority. How did life get to be this crazy and hectic? You long to slow down, to live with greater meaning and intentionality. You want the simple life.

simple life

■ Day 1 From Busy to Purposeful

Like most people today, you are busy; there's no question about that. But the more you think about it, the more you wonder where your life is going. Where is all the busyness taking you? On your most recent significant birthday ending in a zero, you began to add up the hours and the days and paused to consider whether you were spending them the way you would if you had a choice.

Do you have a choice? Many people are considering their choices in how they are living their hours and their days. And they are choosing to simplify their lives. Instead of letting other people, events, and obligations determine their priorities, they are reevaluating their lives, making some hard decisions, and setting a new course, a new direction in life. So many are taking these steps that you could say there's a simple revolution going on.

If you feel that your life is out of control, that you are not spending your limited time and money on the things that are most important to you, that circumstances you have allowed to take over your life are hurting your relationships with people and with God, then perhaps you too want to become a revolutionary.

What has been the worst part of your day?

Your week?

Stressed-out is not how God intends for us to live. Read what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about worrying:

This is why I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky: they don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? Can any of you add a single cubit to his height by worrying? And why do you worry about clothes? Learn how the wildflowers of the field grow: they don't labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these! If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't He do much more for you—you of little faith? So don't worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matt. 6:25-34).

What are the greatest sources of worry and stress in your life at present?

How do Jesus' words about worrying apply to your situation?

God said to Jeremiah, "I know the plans I have for you ... plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). Are you so busy that you might be missing out on God's plans for you both now and in the future?

The process outlined in this workbook will help you examine four significant areas of your life:

The Simple Revolution

1. Time
2. Relationships
3. Money
4. God

Two of these areas deal with your limited resources—time and money. And two deal with relationships with other people—spouse, children, other family members, friends, coworkers—and with God.

Are you satisfied with the way you spend your time and your money? Yes No

Are you satisfied with your relationships with your family—spouse, children, other family members, friends, coworkers—and with God? Yes No

Would you make some changes if someone outlined a process to help you make the changes you desire? Yes No

You may find that you are right where you want to be and where you believe God wants you to be in these four areas of your life. You may discover that you want to make small changes in your life in one or two areas. Or you may find that at least one area of your life needs a bigger shift.

When you make adjustments in one area, you affect the others. For example, if you decide to save more money for retirement, you'll have to cut back on something else. If you decide to cut back on entertainment, it may mean your kids won't have the newest electronic game system, and you might have to delay the purchase of the digital camera you wanted for your next vacation. And your vacation might also be delayed or shortened! How will that affect your relationships with family members?

You may decide to spend more time in daily devotionals. You'd like to do that first thing in the morning. Can you do that and help get

the kids off to school? Can you do that and continue to carpool? This simple shift to work on your relationship with God will impact your time and your relationships with others.

Can you think of a change that would make your life better, simpler, or more purposeful? How? Write your thoughts.

As you examine your time, relationships, money, and God, you'll follow a four-step process:

1. Clarity
2. Movement
3. Alignment
4. Focus

Taking these actions can help you move from chaos to control, from meaningless busyness to purpose and fulfillment. Is it simple? Yes. Easy? No. You'll find that following the four-step process in each area of your life (time, relationships, money, and God) is doable. It will make a huge difference in your life. But it won't always be easy. Saying yes to redirecting your life so that you can maximize your priorities means saying no to some time-stealing, money-guzzling activities and relationships. Choosing the simple life means eliminating some things in life that you may enjoy in order to elevate those things that are most important.

Making the tough choices will be worth the effort, however, in order to join the simple revolution, to find the simple life you desire. But before you begin the journey to a simple life, let's look at the revolution that's taking place all around us. Then we'll take a closer look at the four areas of your life and the process for change.

simple life

■ Day 2 The Revolution Around Us

If you are looking for the simple life, you are not alone. We have had the incredible opportunity to listen to more than one thousand people across America. They come from every geographic area, a diversity of races and ethnic groups, and across the age spectrum. They are nearly equally divided between genders.

Their stories are different; but at the same time, they have similar themes. Life is stressful. Life is busy. Not enough time for the things that really matter. And most of the time, they tell us they feel financial stress as well.

The answer? Americans are rediscovering simple. At least they are aware that they need to rediscover simple. People are hungry for simple because the world has become much more complex. The technology revolution has really become an information revolution. We have access to more information, more products, more research, and more ideas than at any point in history. But the information revolution and the material wealth of Americans have made life for many people much more complex.

Eric Geiger and I (Thom) wrote *Simple Church* a few years ago. We were amazed at the response. Church leaders wanted simple. Church members wanted simple. In the midst of the harried world of complexity and uncontrollably complex lives, people want to find simple for their lives. They long for it, seek it, pay for it, and even dream of it.

The simple-life revolution has begun. And we're finding it not only in churches but also in individuals. Our surveys show that people are desperately seeking the simple life.

41 questions
1,077 respondents
57% female
43% male
80% Christians

As in all things we can turn to Jesus as our example and our inspiration. He didn't have to contend with e-mail, cell phones, tweets, or pages—and maybe we can learn from that. We are amazed at the simplicity of His earthly life. Despite the demands of the entire world on His life and time, He spent time with His friends. He loved little children. He gave attention to those in need. He spent time with His Father. But He was also a revolutionary; He turned the world upside down.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5), Jesus said those who are blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who are mourning, and those who are persecuted. He said that looking at a woman with lust in your heart is the same as committing adultery. He said to turn the other cheek and to love your enemies.

Think about qualities you most admire in Jesus as He lived His life on earth. List them here.

Review your list and circle one or two characteristics of Jesus that you wish were more evident in your life.

How would simplifying your life help you live with the priorities Jesus had while on earth?

simple life

■ Day 3 Time, Relationships, Money, God

When we concluded our study of 1,077 individuals, we learned that they needed simple in four areas.

- 1. Time.** This theme was present in all of the areas, but it was a theme unto itself as well. Those surveyed wanted simple so that they could find time for the areas of their lives that really mattered.
- 2. Relationships.** Many respondents struggled with balance in relationships. The simple life for them meant more opportunities for closer relationships.
- 3. Money.** Financial strains were pervasive with many in this study. They longed for a simple life free of past-due bills, limited income, deficient savings, and increasing debt.
- 4. God.** These people, above all, saw a big void in their relationship with God. Aware of the irony that they were too busy for God, they longed for a simpler life to get closer to Him.

We know we can't replicate all Jesus did. But we can pattern our lives after Him. He kept His focus on what really mattered and managed His time accordingly. And so should we.

Read the following Scripture passages and identify ways Jesus spent His time.

Matthew 4:23:

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Matthew 12:1:

John 7:33:

Read the following Scripture passages and record ways Jesus placed priority on relationships.

Matthew 19:13-14:

Mark 6:31:

John 3:22:

John 11:5:

Read the following Scripture passages and describe Jesus' attitude toward money.

Matthew 6:24:

Matthew 21:12:

Matthew 26:6-10:

Mark 12:41-44:

The Simple Revolution

Read the following Scripture passages and identify ways Jesus placed priority on His relationship with His Father.

Matthew 6:6:

Matthew 14:23:

Matthew 19:29:

Matthew 26:36:

Mark 1:35:

Mark 6:46:

Look through the verses again. They are grouped under the categories of time, relationships, money, and God. As you read them again, write in the margin another area to which the verse might apply.

From these verses, what lesson from Jesus' dealings with time, relationships, money, and God can you apply in your own life?

simple life

■ Day 4 The Process

As we examine the four key areas of your life and outline a process for change, we will use the four words Thom and Eric introduced in *Simple Church*. They are *clarity*, *movement*, *alignment*, and *focus*. These words are important, so let's clarify what they mean.

■ Clarity

Clarity means you know where you are going. Before you move closer to the simple life, you need a blueprint of where you are going. You need clarity.

Each week we will challenge you to develop a clear plan toward the simple life:

- How do you plan to spend time on the things that really matter in life?
- What is your plan for developing healthier relationships?
- How do you plan to get your finances in order?
- What is your plan for getting closer to God?

You probably noticed the redundancy of the word *plan*. Clarity means that you have a plan and that the plan clearly states where you want to go. We will even encourage you to write your own mission statement for each of the four areas. But don't leave that mission statement as an inactive file in your computer. Let it be the blueprint toward the simple life.

We all know we need more clarity in these four areas, but most of the time we don't make a plan. Let us share with you some of the

heartfelt cries of those we surveyed. See if you can hear the clarity they need to move toward the simple life:

- “I want to be able to spend more time with my child instead of working all the time and having him go to day care.”
- “I would just love for the kids to get along and quit fighting so that we could have some peace in the house.”
- “I spend too much time taking everyone where they need to be when they need to be there.”
- “I want a job that would satisfy all of our financial needs without taking time away from our family time.”
- “We are constantly on the go due to our children’s sporting events. Whether it’s for practice, scrimmages, or games of multiple sports, we are gone from home almost every night of the week.”
- “I wish we could pay off all our debt. It would take a lot of stress off at home and let us spend more time together.”
- “We all need to be on the same page spiritually. Our relationship with God is an afterthought in our family.”

We will begin each week’s study by focusing on clarity. Simply stated, we will help you see the path you need to travel. Paul wrote about achieving God’s goals for his life:

Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus. Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this to you also (Phil. 3:12-15).

Paul also wrote, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. For now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known” (1 Cor. 13:11-12). Maturity is God’s desire for us. If we ask Him, He will help us clearly see the changes we need to make.

Write your own definition of *clarity* and describe how this step can help you move toward a simple life.

■ Movement

Congestion is rarely a good thing. The word can take on different meanings, but few if any of them are good. *Congestion* means *to be blocked up* or *to be too full of something*. Whether referring to sinuses or highways, congestion is bad.

Congestion in life means you aren’t moving toward the goal. To make progress, you need to identify and remove the obstacles. I (Thom) was 40 pounds overweight for four years. Why? Because I had no movement toward my goal. Wishing and hoping didn’t get the job done. Then one day I visited my youngest son, Jess, to find him slimmer and healthier than ever. He inspired me. I made commitments to eat better and exercise more. I removed the congestion. I had movement toward my goal. Today I am 40 pounds lighter and feeling great.

In each of the four areas of time, relationships, money, and God, we will look at movement—how we can remove the congestion or obstacles to get where we need to go. Movement involves two elements.

1. Movement is intentional. We are sometimes asked how we write a book. It’s not rocket science. We are just intentional. We purposefully act on our plan.

After you have decided that you will make better use of your time, you act on it. You are intentional. The same is true for healthy relationships. And the same is true for financial health. You are intentional. After you have decided that you want to get closer to God, you act on it. You are intentional.

2. Movement is incremental. You don't try to conquer the world in a day. You take short-term steps. You have the clarity of where you want to go, but you don't try to arrive at your destination all at once.

For example, if you want to be healthier, you may start with a mild exercise program, take a multivitamin, or start eating healthier foods. You have literally dozens of choices, but you take only one or a few steps. If you try to do everything at once, you will become frustrated and give up.

That's the way it is with the simple life. Movement requires taking incremental steps so that you won't give up.

Write your own definition of *movement* and describe how this step can help you move toward a simple life.

■ Alignment

As we delve into the tough issues of moving toward the simple life, we need to look at areas where we go wrong, where our lives are out of line with our goals. Most of the time, it takes only one small misstep to evolve into a major problem. Most people don't have debt problems overnight. Most Christians don't stop attending church suddenly. Most relationships don't fail over one incident. Most people don't become workaholics in one day. Instead, their lives get out of alignment. It begins small. But it doesn't remain small. You can't reach your goals if your daily habits and activities don't line up with your stated

objectives. We will help you identify ways to make sure your personal choices and actions align with the goals you have set for your life

Write your own definition of *alignment* and describe how this step can help you move toward a simple life.

■ Focus

After you clearly state where you want to go (clarity), begin making incremental steps in the right direction (movement), and match your daily life to your stated goals (alignment), you are ready to eliminate some good stuff. Yep, you read right. You eliminate some good stuff.

You see, it is one thing to get those bad habits and problems out of the way. But it is another thing to stop doing some good things. We call this last phase *focus*.

Many problems we heard in this study were not always the result of doing bad things. As we looked at the lives of those who graciously participated in the study, we saw many good intentions. In fact, we saw too many good intentions. We saw families take on activity after activity. We saw work lives that became workaholism. We saw the good become the bad because there was just too much of the good.

The simple life demands that we eliminate some things. It means we have to make some tough decisions. In fact, focus may very well be the toughest step toward the simple life. But it is absolutely necessary.

Write your own definition of *focus* and describe how this step can help you move toward a simple life.

Clarity. Movement. Alignment. Focus. These four strategies will bring you closer to the simple life.

simple life

■ Day 5 Mission Statements

A mission statement is a goal that defines the decisions and actions of an individual or organization, based on values and priorities. For example, your church may have a mission statement that states its God-given purpose in the community, state, nation, and world. Many church mission statements are based on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 or Acts 1:8. Your business may have a mission statement that defines the company's purpose. Perhaps you have a personal mission statement, a purpose you have discerned that God has uniquely gifted and commissioned you to do.

From the goals defined in these mission statements, decisions are made about the ways valuable resources like time and money will be spent. Mission statements not only help people, churches, businesses, and other organizations determine what they will do; they also help them decide what they will not do. In order to do well what they have stated they will do, the person, business, church, or other organization must eliminate or choose not to do other things—even good things—to excel at the task outlined in the mission statement.

If your church has a mission statement, record it here.

Identify some of your church's ministries that directly flow from that mission statement.

When you write a mission statement that defines your life purpose, you should consider what you like to do; your personality; your unique combination of gifts, talents, abilities, interests, strengths, and weaknesses; and what you believe God has called you to do. Unless God specifically directed otherwise, a good mission statement for introverts probably would not focus on a purpose that continually forced them to initiate contacts or to be public speakers. Someone who is 5'6" tall might not want a mission statement to become a player for the NBA.

List some of your gifts, talents, abilities, interests, strengths, and weaknesses.

Your gifts and abilities will have a direct effect on your mission statements. For example, maybe you want to grow in your relationship with God, but you've struggled all your life with having a daily quiet time. You have difficulty sitting still, staying focused, and reading or remaining silent for long periods of time. You may not want to set a goal of getting up at 4:30 each morning to pray for an hour. But you may want to set a goal (write a mission statement) of listening to the Bible on a CD every day for 40 days. Or you may want to write a mission statement like this:

As I will walk for 30 minutes three days a week, I will pray and listen to what God has to say.

Your mission statement should be like your favorite clothes. It should fit well and be comfortable. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). He wasn't saying to rest, take it easy, and enjoy life. He was saying that when you do His work, if you obey Him and

stay the course, like the oxen in the harness pulling the plow, the yoke will fit well. Obeying Christ in what He is calling you to do is the foundation of any mission statement.

Read Jonah 1. How did God discipline Jonah when he turned from what God wanted him to do?

A mission statement is important because it establishes clarity for your goals, which in turn guide your decisions and actions toward the simple life. In this study you will be asked to write not just one mission statement that applies to your whole life but four mission statements to identify your goals in the areas of time, relationships, money, and God. Your mission statements will be yours alone. You can choose to share them so that someone can hold you accountable, or you can keep them private, letting your statements guide your decisions about your resources (time and money) and your relationships (people and God).

To be valuable, a mission statement must be specific. It must state exactly what you intend to do to reach your goal. It must also be measurable; it must state how you will accomplish something and must include a completion date. For example, you may write this goal for your relationship with your parents:

Because I love my parents, I will make my relationship with them a priority.

That's a worthwhile goal, but it lacks specificity. A better mission statement might be:

Because I love my parents, I will call them at least twice a week, and I will visit them at least once a month.

This statement tells exactly how and when you will do something.

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Identify the mission statements that are specific and measurable.

- 1. I will limit my time on the Internet to 30 minutes each day.
- 2. I will be nice to my coworkers.
- 3. I will give a tithe to my church, and I will give it twice a month.
- 4. I will grow in my relationship with God by having a daily quiet time for 15 minutes every morning.
- 5. I will simplify my life by being more aware of how I spend my time and money and by having a better relationship with friends and family and with God.

If you chose 1, 3, 4, you are correct. These statements define what you will do and when you will do it.

The remaining five weeks in this study will guide you to understand and engage with the four areas of time, relationships, money, and God and will help you put together a holistic plan for your life at the end of the process. By the end of the study, you will have completed 30 devotionals that help you understand the four areas of life and the strategic steps of clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. Complete each suggested activity as an action plan that challenges you to move toward the simple life.

This study is not a quick-fix solution to get your life in order. It's a beginning. It's an action plan for the simple life. To that end we have prayed for you. We don't know you by name, but we know that the God to whom we pray knows everything about you. And by His power you can see despair become hope and confusion become simple.

Join us for the journey.

Join us for the victory.

Welcome to the simple life.