



PRACTICES SHAPE OUR LOVES

Week 9 | Practices Shape Our Loves Exercises

Exercise 1 - Slowing

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” - Annie Dillard

We spend much of our lives on autopilot—rushing from one thing to the next, not really paying attention to the subtle messages around us or even in our own souls. But these messages exist: as we do tasks around the house, sit in meetings at work, shop, browse social media, spend time with our children—we are taking in different messages that will affect what we love and worship.

Pick a day this week to practice **slowing**—living purposefully and prayerfully. Choose an average day, one that is not overly busy or difficult, and make it a point to move slowly, purposefully, and prayerfully though this day. Give yourself plenty of time to slow down and really notice what is going on around you and inside you. Pay attention to the internal and external voices you are hearing and consider how they are affecting what you focus on and what you love. Consider:

External voices:

- **What advertisements and commercials am I most drawn to? What do they promise will bring me peace and fulfillment?** (beauty, material possessions, significance, sex, food, comfort)
- **What (daily/weekly/monthly) habits or rituals do I have? Do I engage in these because they are healthy or because I am told they are necessary?**

Internal voices:

- **In what ways do I feel restless today?**
- **How do I feel when I am on social media?**
- **What daydreams do I have most often and what do they show me about what I truly want?**
- **In what ways have I desired to be closer to Jesus today?**

As you consider these questions, you may want to journal your thoughts and what you have noticed from slowing down and paying attention. Do you see any patterns in your way of thinking? Do you notice that certain desires drive how you live your life and make decisions? Pray and ask Jesus to continue shaping your heart through what you have observed today.

Exercise 2 - Simplicity

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven....For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” - Matthew 6:19-21

Most Americans today would describe their lives as very full, extremely busy, or even terribly complicated. When was the last time you heard someone describe their schedule, or even their life, as simple? Yet as Christ followers, we are called to follow His example of living a more simple life. He knows that our hearts will be tempted by the things of this earth and that our hearts will never be satisfied by them. The beautiful paradox of the Gospel is that the less complicated our lives are with things of the Earth, the more full they become of the one thing that truly satisfies us—the love and grace of Jesus.

Simplicity creates margins and spaces in our hearts and our lives to love God and our neighbors in a deeper way. Living simply can make us more aware of and more grateful for all that God has given us instead of focusing on what we want, but don't need. In this way, we are able to be more present in each moment and to more fully enjoy the simple pleasures of life that God has given each one of us.

Simplicity in our lives can take on many different forms. We can live simply with fewer material possessions, we can adjust our schedules to be more simple, we can even simplify aspects of our lives like our words or our choices.



Begin your prayer time with God by reading Matthew 6:19-21. Read the verses several times and ask God to show you what treasures here on earth you have stored up or may be tempted to store up. **Are there areas of your life that He might be asking you to simplify?** Consider your: possessions, time, thought life, words, actions. Share your honest thoughts and feelings about this with God. Ask for His grace in giving you awareness and desire to live more simply. Close your prayer with thanksgiving for the abundance of simple blessings He has given you today.

Exercise 3 - Simplicity in Action

“Simplicity is freedom, not slavery. Refuse to be a slave to anything but God.” - Richard Foster

Now that you have thought about the concept of simplicity, read over the following choices and ask God to direct you to the one(s) that you could do this week:

- Uncomplicate your life by choosing a few areas to practice letting go. Clean out the garage, basement, closet, or even just a drawer. Spend time in prayer as you do this, asking God to help you let go of things you don't need. Could you bless others by giving these away to them? If so, make a plan to do so. Consider: How does letting go of material possessions make you feel?
- Let go of a time commitment. Don't break a promise or leave someone in a lurch, but prayerfully let go of something that is unnecessarily complicating your schedule.
- Practice not giving spontaneous “yeses” this week. When you are tempted to say “yes,” stop yourself and say “Let me think about this for a moment; I'll get back with you soon.” Even 10 minutes can give you the time to pray and consider whether you really need to say yes to this demand on your time.
- Spend some time considering where you've complicated your life with God. Pray and make note of what practices simply bring you into the presence of Christ. Ask God to help you make more time for these in your week.
- Ask God to help you speak the simple truth this week. Practice speaking simply—no double meanings or half truths that put you in the best light. Be aware of when you are tempted to rationalize, deny, or blame. Ask Jesus to give you the grace and courage to speak the simple truth.

