

Give Me The Simple Life

By: Jim Hohnberger

The greatest threat for today's Christian is not gross evil. The devil is just as capable of killing the soul by a life of compulsive frenzy.

Satan called a world-wide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels he said, "We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from conservative values. But we can do something else. We can keep them from forming an intimate, abiding experience in Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them have their doctrines, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can't gain that experience in Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do, angels. Distract them from getting hold of their Savior."

"How shall we do this?" shouted his angels.

"Keep them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent unnumbered schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend and borrow, borrow. Convince the wives to go to work and the husbands to work 6 or 7 days a week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, soon their homes will offer no escape from

the pressures of work."

"Overstimulate their minds so that they cannot hear Jesus talk to them. Entice them to play the radio or cassette player whenever they drive, to keep the TV, the VCR and their CD's going constantly in their homes. And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays music constantly."

"Fill their coffee tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with bill boards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail: sweepstakes, mail order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotion offering, 'free' products, services, and false hopes."

"Even in their recreation let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week. Don't let them go out in nature. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead. And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotions."

"Let them be involved in soul-winning. But crowd their lives with so many good causes that they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family unity for the good

of the cause."

It was quite a convention in the end. And the evil angels went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and rush here and there.

Has the devil been successful at his scheme? You be the judge. The bottom line is that we simply are not living simple lives. Our lives are too congested. The whole system is overstimulated.

Twelve years ago, this was my life. God impressed my wife and I to simplify our lifestyles to save our family from spiritual death. It took drastic measures for us. We sold our 3,000 square foot house, our five vehicles, and got out of debt. We and our two small boys moved into a 960 square-foot log home in the mountains and learned to simplify our lives. We heat with wood, cook on a wood-cook stove, and grow and preserve much of our food. I took in just enough work as a wilderness real-estate agent, to provide for my family and allow time for my speaking and counseling ministry. Today, even though I no longer sell real-estate, I must constantly evaluate the demands of the ministry against the needs for our spiritual development.

Busy is not Better

I recently overheard this conversation in a post office, "Irene, I haven't seen you in years. How are you doing?"

"Oh busy, busy, busy ..."

Have you heard that? It almost seems as if we are not important people unless we are busy.

The lady responded, "That's great!"

No, it isn't! I wanted to preach a sermon in the post office. We are too stressed out friends. We are too pushed, too rushed. We run too fast.

I want to share a recent letter from a pastor's wife.

"... I have come to the conviction that I need to slow down, get on a schedule, and spend more time in prayer and in the word of God ... I realize that my husband is not going to join me in this resolution. Nevertheless, I need to be committed alone. I understand the concept of good, better, best. I surely want to choose the best.

"... I feel trapped right now. My schedule is so tight with cooking schools, Sabbath School teacher and leader, personal ministry leader for basically two churches, ingathering coordi-

nator for two churches, health and temperance leader, community service helper, vacation Bible school leader and teacher for two churches, news letter and sometimes bulletin editor, plus going every single month for state conference meetings with my husband. I also attend seminars for personal ministry leaders, and six other ministerial meetings a year with my husband, plus church board meetings because I have all these offices in the prospective churches.

"As I am writing this to you it seems crazy to me in light of the work of sanctification that needs to be done in my own life ... What do I quit? Where do I start? My life is a constant chase after unfinished tasks and upset people."

A wise Christian wrote, "... The Lord never compels hurried, complicated movements. Many gather to themselves burdens that their Heavenly Father did not put on them. Duties He never designed them to perform chase one another wildly. God desires us to realize that we do not glorify His name when we take so many burdens, when we are overtaxed, and becoming heart weary and brain weary, chafe and fret and scold. We are to bear only the responsibility that the Lord gives us, trusting in Him, and thus keeping our hearts pure and sympathetic."

Who put those burdens on the pastor's wife? She just picked up everyone's expectations. God didn't place these on her.

Listen to what God promises His people. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; **In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.**" Isaiah 30:15. We need to return and find our rest, to find that connection in God. When we experience that quietness and confidence, we will know that God is with us every moment and every second of the day. If we are going to find that living, vital connection with Jesus Christ, we must quiet our lives. We must simplify. But the text ends with a sad commentary, "and ye would not." It doesn't have to be said about you. You can choose God's rest.

Less is More

I had just finished speaking at a series of meetings when a lady handed me a note that read, "Call your sister, immediately!"

Why would Louise search for me in another state and give

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me a note like this, I wondered? Within five minutes I was dialing my sister. Her husband answered the phone. "Praise God you called! Your sister wants to talk to you!"

"What's up, Joe?"

"I can't tell you, Jim. I'll let Louise tell you."

Louise was in tears, "Jim, I'm so thankful you called. I just came from the doctor's office. He told me to make up my last will and testament. He says I'm a basket case. Can I come and stay with you for a month? I need help."

"Yes, come."

"You're sure? Don't you want to pray about it? You pray about everything, Jim."

"Louise, I prayed for this for ten years. I don't have to get on my knees any longer. I've watched your life. I've seen what's been happening. It's already an answer to my prayer. I'll pick you up at the train station. Come."

When Louise came she had bleeding ulcers, pre-cancerous cells, anemia, and was close to a nervous breakdown. She was 46 years old, and her hands couldn't stop shaking. Her eyes had that far-away look. I took her up to our little mountain home.

What happened to my sister? We were raised in the same home, in the same family. She got caught up in the American -- I'm not going to say dream, but myth. My sister was working 14 hours a day, 6-7 days a week, leaving her children behind, trying to find that dream home, and furnish her place with her dream furnishings. Necessity started controlling her. It was destroying her. It took a doctor to wake her up!

The modern American dream is a myth. But the myth doesn't only exist in America. It exists in Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Europe, Japan, Brazil and all over the world. People are caught up and it's destroying their lives.

Our whole family began to minister to her, and she became one with us in our daily routine. She had worship with us in the morning, and in the evening. She sang with us. She walked with us, ate our diet, played pick-up sticks and dominos with the boys at night and joined in our family reading time.

My wife, a nurse, ministered to her in the health areas and her anemia improved. As she slowed down, a desire for God was reborn in her heart. At the end of 30 days, she told me, "You know, Jim, I can summarize my stay with your family in three words: **less is more.**" These words summarize a ser-

mon I could not preach in an hour. You see, we had a smaller home than she did. We had less furnishing, less clothes, less in our garage, less in everything that the world offers, but we had more than the world could ever give. We had love in our home. We had companionship. We had time for one another. That's why she said, less is more. I wish that commentary could be said in every one of our homes.

The message is simplify, simplify, simplify.

The Excess is Killing Us

I was visiting my parents recently, and I went for a long walk through my childhood neighborhood. As I walked, God began to speak to me, "Jim, I want to show you the progression that Satan is doing in this world." And as I looked at those simple homes about 1200-1300 square feet, they all had what kind of garage? One-car garages. No extras. That was in the 1950's.

And then my parents sold that home during the 60's and moved into a newer section in town. As I walked through that area the houses had grown to 1,600-2,000 square feet. Nice homes. What size of garage did they have? Two-car garages.

And then the Lord said, "Jim I want you to take a little longer walk." So I went to the new subdivision in that community and what size do you think the homes were? 3,000-5,000 square feet. And what size were the garages? Three and four-car garages.

And the Lord said to go on a longer walk. Go where your grandparents lived. I walked into that neighborhood, and I was astonished. All those old homes had big, covered porches. You could have meetings on these front porches. Why did all those old homes have porches? Because they didn't have TV sets. When the father came home at night, the family would all go to the porch and talk. The children played and grandma would knit. And the family would just sit and talk.

It's quite a sermon, isn't it? If you could live in those new subdivisions with the 3,000 square foot homes and the three or four vehicles in the driveway, and listen to the family interact, what would you see? A happy family gathered together? Would you see a difference between this and grandma's home? Is there more happiness in modern society? Is there more peace? Do you think they are living the simple life?

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Is our excesses just in the sizes of our homes? No. When we speak we often stay with families. One of our hosts had 50 pairs of shoes - under her bed, in her closet, just everywhere!

At one place, I thought my hosts had company. They had four vehicles. A vehicle for this, a vehicle for that. Wait a minute. Four vehicles for what? They had to be paid for, maintained, and washed once a week. That takes a lot of time and money. I'm not down-grading the people. It's the system. Before we moved, we had 5 vehicles.

Another home we visited was about 4,500 square feet, with a huge kitchen, six different sets of dishes, one of which were "just to match the drapes." This poor woman bought dishes to match the drapes. We had an opportunity to see her closet. I counted 30 dresses, 35 skirts, 39 blouses, and I'm not going to tell you how many shoes.

Once I counted 25 pairs of tennis shoes - Nikes - in a young boy's closet. Have we lost our minds, friends? Do we need to simplify? Think about your closets.

When we moved from our 3,000 square foot home, we held a rummage sale. Some of you could be wealthy holding a rummage sale. We made \$10,000. That was 12 years ago. You talk about excess. We needed the simple life.

The devil has this whole world on a train going faster and faster down to perdition. And he won't stop that train to let anybody off because he knows that when you have time to think and reflect, that is the opportunity to draw close to God. I praise God that we got off the train twelve years ago. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Isaiah 30:15.

Keep it Simple

"Well," I can almost hear someone saying, "the simple life is hard and dull, Jim."

Right out our back door we see elk and moose. We can pet the deer. One day I was putting clothes on the line when a huge buck put his nose in my back pocket. Now that's a little bit of heaven. Isn't it better than Disneyland? And when you get close to nature, you get close to nature's God.

My boys are never bored. All we have to do is say, yes. Yes, you can go back-packing, canoeing, and cross-country skiing. Yes you can go mountain-climbing, repelling, and you can go track down that moose. Yes, you can go explore in the back woods. Yes, yes, yes. And yes, we'll go with you. Children in

the other environment are told no, no, no. Rebellion sets in. By the way, **simplicity is a stern discipline**. But this is not a new sort of legalism. We do this with Christ. We also do this so that we may find Christ and bring Him into our marriage and into our families. It's not just some new reform that we all follow, thinking that we are the saved ones because we live the simplest lives in the world.

Christ lived a simple life, friends. He is the pattern, isn't He? He is our timeless example. The utter simplicity of Christ's life can be found in one verse: Luke 2:52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." We just summarized 30 years of Christ's life. The silence of the Scriptures about his early life teaches an important lesson. The more quiet and simple the life, the more free from artificial excitements, the more in harmony with the nature, the more favorable is it to physical, mental and spiritual strength. Again, less is more. The 30 quiet and simple years prepared him for the 3 1/2 busy years.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you? Get off that train and follow Christ's example. He promises, "My people shall dwell in a peaceful habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." Isaiah 32:18.

Power for Living



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