



One-Week Reflection Guide - From Simplifying to Rest

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

Revelation 3:20

“True, whole prayer is nothing but love.”

St. Augustine

“The most important way to show love is with your time.”

Anonymous



Back in 2007, I (Fiona) wrote these words for our church retreat reflection guide and they are even more true today than 14 years ago,

We live in a fast-paced culture – fast food, instant messaging, DSL over dial-up...everything needs to happen fast and now. Otherwise, we feel bored, agitated, impatient and that something or someone is wasting our precious time. We also live in a culture that is packed with information. With the convenience of the worldwide web, information about anything is instantly within our reach in seconds. We are always reading something, finding out the latest news, latest gadgets and sales.

Though all these (technological) developments have brought tremendous advances and impact on our living in many positive ways, it also poses tremendous challenges to our Christian growth. With our expectation that everything should happen fast, the often seemingly slow process that the Christian journey takes is not appealing to us. We give up easily if nothing happens right away when we pray, or when we ask God to help us grow. We do not have the ability to persevere when it is necessary to do so. And before we know it, we stop growing. Furthermore, because we live in a culture that is full of noise (music in the car, in the mall, in the restaurant...), and one that does not feel comfortable with silence, we also become people who are not able to be quiet and attentive to the gentle whisper of God (1 King 19:11:13).

Because we are constantly being bombarded with tons of information and noises, there is limited space in our hearts and spirits for the living Word of God. But if we truly desire intimacy with God, to live a life that truly satisfies our inner hunger and thirst, and to bring glory to God by witnessing to the abundant life promised in Christ, we need to stop and consciously make a choice to pull ourselves out of the rat race the world has drawn us into. This requires sacrifice, discipline, and God's grace. The questions we need to ask ourselves are, 'How much do we want



God? How much do we want the living presence of God to dwell in our life in tangible and transformative way?"

To be encountering people, we need to make space and time regularly to examine our hearts and the way we live, so that we are building with "gold, silver & costly stones" (1 Corinthians 3:12). You are invited to take a week to simplify your life and schedule; to take time to examine, reflect and listen. A journey of transformation is not an overnight journey, but it needs to start somewhere. Cultivating a life of listening and simplicity is crucial on the long run if we want to become who we are called to be in Christ.

General Suggestion

Here are some suggestions for this week.

1. Take a look at your schedule and see if it reflects your life priorities. If not, are there negotiable things in your life that you can take out this week (or for longer time) to help simplify your life and clear some space in your schedule for more time with God, with yourself or people that are most important to you? Maybe you don't need to take something out completely but cut down the amount of time you allocate to it since it's not top on your priority list. This may be an initial step you take which will turn into a long-term commitment or change you make to your life and schedule. Obviously, if at this point, you are unable to find things that are negotiable which you can eliminate but yet you are so busy that you have no or only minimal (left-over) time for God and your other priorities, then it is time for you to re-evaluate your priorities and consider letting go of some things, even if it is hard.
2. To help slowing down your pace and your heart, and deal with hurry-sickness (Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, p. 79), deliberately choose to drive in the slowest lane, drive under speed limit, and/or stand in the longest line at the check out line this week.
3. Take time to enjoy the provisions of God: 1) eat slower and be mindful of how God sustains you in so many different ways; 2) take notice of the beauty (nature, people) around you.



4. Be mindful of new opportunities that come up. Make sure if you are going to say “yes” to something, then think about whether there is something else you need to say “no” to in order to not increase your commitments and responsibilities levels in an unhealthy way.

Suggestions for Families

“As parents, we want our children to hold every advantage in the world and to experience all kinds of activities and social interactions. We want them to have fun and be happy. While the Discipline of Simplicity embraces helping children develop interests and talents, it does not elevate such opportunities to the status of idolatry, to the point where we put doing and acquiring – keeping up with the family next door and friends at school – above a growing soul ... Remember, your kids will learn this discipline best from what you demonstrate, not from what you say. First comes *your* response to the discipline and then comes your children’s.”

Valerie Hess & Marti Garlett, *Habits of a Child's Heart*, pp.91-92

When we have a family, simplifying our lives is not just an individual endeavor. It’s a family decision that requires a family response.

Besides some of the suggestions listed above, you may want to pay attention to how much you hurry yourself, your spouse and your children in doing something or going somewhere. Is it because of habits (you say it just because it’s the thing you always say) or is it because you do not create enough cushion time for yourself in between activities? This week, consider changing the way you ask yourself, your spouse or your child(ren) to finish their work or get going to somewhere so as to encourage a less hurried heart with your words. Words are powerful in affecting the state of our hearts. In addition, try to create more cushion time in between necessary activities so you would experience less rush and hurry in daily life. Talk



together on what you will be doing and encourage one another to be relaxed and yet be responsible when you do need to get something done or go somewhere.

In addition, consider having some spontaneous time of just hanging out as a family and doing something fun, which is less likely to happen if you have packed your schedule with too many things. That means you really need to look at your schedule and take things out to create more space and time for these special times to happen spontaneously.

Prayer Focus

The prayer focus this week is on God's loving care for us and the truth of our need for Him to be the Lord of our lives. Often one of the main reasons why we get ourselves so busy is because we feel responsible for bringing security and stability into our lives. We want to have some degrees of control over what is happening and how our lives are to be. Let's take sometime this week to reflect on God's loving and protective care over us, and areas of striving in our lives that need to be freed.



Day 1

Suggested Scripture:

Psalm 91

¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

³ Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

⁸ You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

⁹ If you make the Most High your dwelling — even the LORD, who is my refuge

—

¹⁰ then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.

¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

¹² they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

¹³ You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

¹⁴ "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

¹⁵ He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

¹⁶ With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."



- SLOWLY pray through this psalm. There is no need to complete the whole psalm. Feel free to focus on a few verses that seem to speak to you most strongly.
- Let the Spirit speak to you of the tremendous care and protection of the Lord through these words. If there are specific situations you are in right now that need the assurance of God's protective care, bring them each before the Lord.
- Rest and wait. Receive God's assurance.
- Journal.

Day 2

Suggested Scripture:

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Psalm 90:12

Suggested Reading:

"[L]ook for a moment at our daily routine. In general we are very busy people. We have many meeting to attend, many visits to make, many services to lead. Our calendars are filled with appointments, our days and weeks filled with engagements, and our years filled with plan and projects. There is seldom a period in which we do not know what to do, and we move through life in such a distracted way that we do not even take the time and rest to wonder if any of the things we think, say, or do are *worth* thinking, saying, or doing. We simply go along with the many 'musts' and 'oughts' that have been handed on to us, and we live with them as if they were authentic translations of the Gospel of our Lord. People must be motivated to come to church, youth must be entertained, money must be raised, and above all everyone must be happy. Moreover, we ought to be on good terms with the church and civil authorities; we ought to be liked or a least respected by a fair majority of our parishioners; we ought to



move up in the ranks according to schedule; and we ought to have enough vacation and salary to live a comfortable life. Thus we are busy people just like all other busy people, rewarded with the rewards which are rewarded to busy people!"

Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, p.10 (1981 edition)

- What caught your attention from these words? Do you have enough *pauses* in your life to help you discern whether "any of the things we think, say, or do are *worth* thinking, saying, or doing"?
- What are the "musts" and "oughts" in your life? Dialogue with Jesus. Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit that is able to free you from all of them.
- Pray for the grace to be free and for the grace of wisdom.
- Journal.

Day 3

Suggested Scripture:

"What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless. A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

Ecclesiastes 2:22-26

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.



And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6

- Read and listen to these words of the Scriptures using the practice of lectio divina.
- Ask for the light of Christ to reveal the anxious thoughts in your heart and the meaningless striving in your life.
- Practice what Paul says in Philippians 4:6 – “by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Lift up your requests to God.
- Rest in God’s loving presence. Wait for His peace to fill your heart.
- Journal.

Day 4

Suggested Scripture:

**“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.
In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.”**

Psalm 127:1-2

- SLOWLY read these words aloud a few times. Then sit quietly before the Lord, allowing the worries and concerns of life to surface from your heart so you can hand them over to Him.
- Do not be afraid to share with God the struggles you have in trusting Him.



**“Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”**

Psalm 46:10

- SLOWLY read these words aloud a few times.
- Sit quietly before the Lord, allowing Him to imprint this truth deeply into your heart and spirit.
- Spend sometime praising God for who He is and thanking Him for His loving care for you.
- Journal.

Day 5 & 6

Note: The suggested reading for Day 5 & 6 is long. Read through it once and then divide it up for two days for reflection.

Suggested Scripture:

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

Exodus 20:8-11

Suggested Reading:

“I get the feeling we are a tired generation. Evidence of that fatigue abounds in a multitude of articles about health problems



related to overwork and exhaustion. *Workaholism* is a modern word. No matter how hard we are willing to work in our competitive world, there always seems to be someone willing to put in a few more hours than we are. What is strange about our general fatigue as a people is the fact that we are such a leisure-oriented society. We actually have what is called a leisure industry, and it is among the most profitable in our economy

We probably have more time for leisure than we ever had before. The five-day workweek is, after all, a relatively new innovation in history; we have moved away from the farm, where there was always more work to do; we can leave work behind if we want and head for leisure. So why is there so much exhaustion and fatigue today? Is it real? Imagined? Or is the contemporary form of exhaustion evidence that we no longer understand genuine rest, which is different from the pursuit of leisure?

There is a biblical view of rest that needs to be uncovered and examined. In fact, the Bible reveals God Himself to be the first 'rester.' 'On the seventh day, He rested....' An even more enlightening comment is made by Moses in Exodus 31:17: 'In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day, He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.' The literal translation suggests the phrase 'He refreshed Himself.'

Does God indeed need to rest? Of course not! But did God choose to rest? Yes. Why? Because God subjected creation to a rhythm of rest and work that He revealed by observing the rhythm Himself, as a precedent for everyone else. In this way, He showed us a key to order in our private worlds.

This rest was not meant to be a luxury, but rather a *necessity* for those who want to have growth and maturity. Since we have not understood that rest is a necessity, we have perverted its meaning, substituting for the rest that God first demonstrated things called leisure or amusement. These do not bring any order at all to the private world. Leisure and amusement may be enjoyable, but they



are to the private world of the individual like cotton candy to the digestive system. They provide a momentary lift, but they will not last.

I am not by any means critical of the pursuit of fun-filled moments, diversion, laughter, or recreation. I am proposing that these alone will not restore the soul in the way that we crave. Although they may provide a sort of momentary rest for the body, they will not satisfy the deep need for rest within the private world....

When God rested, He looked upon His work, enjoyed its completed appearance, and then reflected upon its meaning. 'And God saw that it was good.'

This rest then is, first of all, a time of looking backward...We gaze upon our work and ask questions like: what does my work mean? For whom did I do this work? How well was the work done? Why did I do this? And what results did I expect, and what did I receive?

To put it another way, the rest God instituted was meant first and foremost to cause us to *interpret* our work, to *press meaning into it*, to *make sure we know to whom it is properly dedicated*.

True rest is happening when we pause regularly amidst daily routines to sort out the truths and commitments by which we are living. We are daily the objects of a bombardment of messages competing for our loyalties and labors. We are pushed and pulled in a thousand different directions, asked to make decisions and value judgments, to invest our resources and our time. By what standard of truth do we make these decisions? God meant for His people to take a day each week in which this question was firmly dealt with.

If the first two meanings [of rest] centered on what was past and present, [the third] one centers on the future. When we rest in the biblical sense, we affirm our intentions to pursue a Christ-centered tomorrow. We ponder where we are headed in the coming week,



month or year. We define our intentions and make our dedications.

Jesus often withdrew to seek solitude. While others were lulled to the rest of sleep, Jesus was drawn to the rest of gaining strength and direction for His next phase of mission. No wonder He met every encounter with a fresh burst of wisdom. No wonder He had ample courage not to fight back, not to defend Himself. His spirit was always rested, His private world ordered. Without this kind of rest our private world will always be strained and disordered.

Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, pp.163-169

- Do you take regular Sabbath? There are weekly Sabbath as well as periodic time away (monthly/quarterly/yearly) that are helpful in restoring rest and order in our private worlds. Allow the reading to speak to you about your need for regular rest (vs. leisure) in your weekly/monthly/yearly life.
- Listen to what the Spirit is showing you and seek wisdom on how to live out God's word and command in this area of rest in practical ways.
- With the Spirit's guidance, come up with some steps you will begin to take to bring in more rest to your life. Pray for grace to follow through well.
- Journal.
- Share with at least one other person for support and accountability.