

Freedom of **SIMPLICITY**



7. OUTWARD SIMPLICITY: BEGINNING STEPS

There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.
—G. K. Chesterton

Personal finance is the new forbidden subject of modern society. Once we were afraid to discuss sex in public, but no more. Now we flaunt our newfound freedom like an adolescent first learning to smoke. Then death was the subject no one dared discuss above a whisper. That day is gone too. Seminars on death and dying abound. We can buy tapes, films, and books on how to die gracefully. Gerontology is fast coming into prominence as a major science.

The great taboo today is personal finances. How we spend our money is our business, and nobody is going to tell us what to do with it. Vigorously we resist any public airing of so private a subject. When laws are passed to force public officials to give an open accounting of their stewardship, they still find ways to obscure the truth. Sermons on lifestyle or our obligation to the poor are viewed as a personal affront, a breach of private boundaries. We pull down the shades over our financial affairs; we balance our budgets and shuffle our credit cards behind closed doors.

Today there is a heretical teaching that is an absolute plague in American Christianity. It is the dogmatic and unexamined credo that whatever we gain is ours to do with as we please. If we earn \$50,000, how we spend it is our private affair. Perhaps we will concede that it is legitimate for the church to talk about tithing, but the other 90 percent is none of its business.

How utterly self-consumed and provincial! In no way can we

twist the Scripture to justify such a belief. Our lifestyle is not our private affair. We dare not allow each person to do what is right in his or her own eyes. The Gospel demands more of us: it is obligatory upon us to help one another hammer out the shape of Christian simplicity in the midst of modern affluence. We need to love each other enough to sense our mutual responsibility and accountability. We are our brother's (and our sister's) keeper.

Precision without Legalism

In attempting to determine what simplicity might look like in the marketplace, we are accepting a massive assignment, one fraught with difficulties. We are now moving out of the realm of interpretation and into the realm of application, and that is always risky business. No longer is our primary question "What does the Bible say?" We must now concentrate on the question, "What does the Bible say to us?" As you know, we have been working on this second question all along, but it now becomes the center of our attention. It is wise to begin such a difficult task by setting forth some foundational building blocks which will undergird our effort.

The first such overarching principle is the necessity of precision without legalism. No one knows more keenly than I the grave danger in giving specific outward application to simplicity. How do you address such a wide variety of people with different needs and vastly different circumstances?

Some have large families, others have small families or no children. Still others are single. Some children have unusual needs that increase significantly the demands of time and money. The needs of teenagers are different from the needs of children.

We come from varying backgrounds. Some grew up during the depression, and felt keenly the evil of too little. Others grew up in post-World War II affluence, and felt keenly the evil of too much. It is not hard to see why the accumulation of possessions would be called prudent by the first group and hoarding by the second.

We are different emotionally. One needs privacy, another

thrives on crowds. One is sensitive to beauty and symmetry, another has no interest in such matters. One person may need a variety of new wallpaper or paint, while another person could not even tell you the color of the living room after five years.

Different jobs make different demands. The president of the university where I teach needs a larger house than I do. He regularly entertains groups of forty to fifty people; I panic if we top six. Some jobs are so publicly oriented that absolute privacy in the home is a psychological necessity.

There is also the problem of personal bias. In issues such as these it is always easy for an author to ride a favorite hobby horse or grind the proverbial axe. At the very least, you can be assured that I am keenly aware of the problem of personal prejudice and desire very much to avoid it.

That is not all. We also have the difficulty of the changing culture and world scene. We cannot—we must not—live in isolation from our world. What was a prophetic expression of simplicity in one generation may become only quaint in the next. Time changes issues and we dare not close our eyes to that fact if we hope to be redemptive.

And most dangerous of all is our tendency to turn any expressions of simplicity into a new legalism. How quickly we calcify what should always remain alive and changing. How soon we seize upon some externalism in order to judge and control others. How much we like these nice easy ways to determine who is in and who isn't, who has it and who doesn't.

Is it any wonder that we struggle and strain in an attempt to express exterior simplicity? Unquestionably, this enterprise is fraught with many pitfalls and dangers.

But we must not shrink back from our task. We must risk the danger of legalism, because to refuse establishes a legalism in defense of the status quo. Until we become specific we have not spoken the word of truth that liberates.

The writers of Scripture repeatedly took the risk of being specific. Over and over they fleshed out the meaning of simplicity with frightening precision. The difficulty with such precision is obvious: the specific application to one culture and time is seldom transferable to another culture and time. Peter forbade braided hair and wearing of robes because in his day those

things were signs of ostentatious elitism (I Pet. 3:3). Few today would bat an eyelash at the rather ordinary practice of braiding hair, and no one even wears the lavish Roman robe. We understand that he spoke to the particular issues of his day; our task is to discern what constitutes ostentatious elitism today, and speak to that situation.

The Old Testament forbade the charging of interest on loans because it was viewed as an unbrotherly exploitation of another's misfortune (Deut. 23:19). In a world of soaring inflation, the question of unbrotherly exploitation could just possibly go the opposite direction—the person who gives a loan without interest may be the one being exploited. Be that as it may, the issue we must struggle with is how we can care for one another today without exploitation.

The law of gleaning was a compassionate piece of legislation appropriate for the Palestinian agrarian culture, whose principal source of livelihood was small family-owned farms. A tender, gracious command, but totally irrelevant for today. The poor are concentrated in our cities and could not possibly get to the farms to glean the grain. Who would want to legalistically attempt to enforce this divine command today? No, we understand that it was a specific and appropriate application of the law of love in that society. Our task is to discover specific and appropriate ways to care for the poor and defenseless today.

Therefore, let us dare to be specific and at the same time always remember that the exterior expression we give to simplicity today may not be appropriate tomorrow. Our task is to walk the narrow path of precision without legalism.

Accommodation without Compromise

The second principle that will guide our journey into outward simplicity is practical accommodation without ethical compromise. We are dealing with the ancient tension of being in the world without being of it. And this tension has extremely practical implications.

We *are* in the world. The truth of the matter is that our lifestyle is affected by the culture in which we live. We may dislike that, chafe under it, but we cannot get around it. For

example, I take the bus to work. To do so costs 50 cents per ride or \$1.00 a day. That computes to \$5.00 a week or approximately \$250.00 per year. Hence, the single decision to ride the bus to work amounts to more than twice the annual income of one-third of the world's people. The point is that, while you may shout at me that the average annual income in India is \$200.00 or that 900 million people in the world subsist on less than \$75.00 a year, you have not helped me much except to increase my guilt. I simply cannot live on \$200.00 a year. The very fact that I live in a particular society necessitates a certain economic accommodation to that society.

Now I know that these words go down very hard with purists. They would argue strenuously that we must never accommodate ourselves under any circumstances. They would respond to my little bus illustration that I should live closer to my work, or ride a bicycle to work, or quit my work. I, of course, need to take these counsels seriously, but seldom do people get around the problem. In fact, I find that even those who take a vow of poverty make rather substantial accommodations to the culture in which they live, and I mean that in no derogatory sense at all. Accommodation is part and parcel of what it means to be in the world. And there are many practical, economic ways in which we accommodate ourselves to our society: swimming lessons for the children, some new books for Mom, a power saw for Dad.

But we can come to the place where right and necessary accommodation crosses over into wrong and unnecessary compromise. We are not to be *of* the world. And the main problem in the church today is our failure to see where proper accommodation leaves off and where compromise begins.

To know the distinction is admittedly a difficult task. We are vastly different people, with vastly different circumstances, and vastly different needs. Obviously we will never find a clear line of demarcation, but that must never stop us from attempting to help one another know when we are crossing over the line.

This task is enormously complicated by modern media propaganda. When taken as a whole, the media commercials constitute a world view, a rival religious philosophy about what

constitutes blessedness. We are told by television that the most idiotic things will make us insanely happy. They may well make us insane, but it is genuinely doubtful that they will ever make us happy.

The purpose of all this media bombardment is to increase desire. The plan is to change "That's extravagant" into "That would be nice to have," and then into "I really need that," and finally into "I've got to have it!"

We are taken in, duped, brainwashed. But it is done in such subtle ways that we do not realize what has happened. We think we are wise because we can easily see through the childish logic of the commercials. But the ad writer never intended us to believe those silly commercials, only to desire the product they advertise. And sure enough we buy, because the commercials accomplish their goal of inflaming our desire.

And most diabolical and manipulative of all is the way in which the same company will manufacture competing products. They know that consumers feel they have power if there is a choice, and that feeling of power will cause them to buy, buy, buy. We love the power of refusing to buy one detergent with its stupid brightening crystals, and instead choose another. The choice, however, was really no choice at all, since both brands were made by the same corporation and were basically the same anyway. The apparent cutthroat competition is usually nothing but a phony war to make us think we are getting a better buy. The intention of advertising is not to persuade the viewer to buy a particular brand of this or that, but to create a consumer mood. More luxurious gadgets, more comfortable sofas, more prestigious cars, more . . . more . . . more. The goal is to increase desire.

We need to make firm concrete moves if we ever expect to counter this massive assault of materialism. To obey St. Paul's command "Do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2) takes deliberate and sustained effort.

We understand the need for a certain adaptation or accommodation to be in the society in which we live, but we want to grow in our perception of when that turns into conformity or compromise. We seek to be in the world without being of the world.

Voluntary Poverty

Serious consideration should be given to voluntary poverty as an important beginning step into external simplicity. "Why," you ask, "would you list poverty as a potential first step into simplicity? Certainly it is the last, most radical step one would take, certainly not something for the beginner." Quite to the contrary, voluntary poverty can be the easiest step of all. Drastic measures are often less painful, a little like tearing off the Band-Aid quickly rather than peeling it back slowly, painfully. This drastic step can sometimes lance the ugly infection of covetousness more readily than anything else. Nothing can strike at the heart of the love of money quite like severing a relationship with money.

In many other respects it is less difficult. The break with possessions is clear and clean-cut. Gone is the struggle about this or that—all of it is forbidden. You own nothing. How much easier, how much simpler than our world of endless decisions between acquiring and not acquiring. Think of young Francis of Assisi throwing away everything and walking naked down the road. Joyfully he tramped the earth, trusting in God and begging for his food. He was free from any need to work through the knotty problems of stewardship of goods. He had no bothersome budget, bank account, or income tax report. In many ways, poverty is the easiest step of all.

The call to voluntary poverty is not obligatory upon everyone, but it is God's word to some. It was this call that the rich young ruler rejected. But there are many who have accepted it and made it their own.

Voluntary poverty provides a crucial identification with the poor and needy. Toyohiko Kagawa made a profound impact for Christ upon Japan; indeed, his witness rose to worldwide fame in Protestantism. A prolific writer, this brilliant young man lived in Franciscan-like love and poverty in one of the worst slums in Japan. His *Songs from the Slums* is an eloquent testimony of one who walked among the poor as poor himself. And in our day, the simple witness of Mother Teresa of India has had worldwide impact. Her compassionate identification with the sick, starving masses of Calcutta has touched us all. And

who could count the untold thousands of faithful servants of Christ that these two examples represent?

On a practical level, voluntary poverty is most easily accomplished in groups, the Roman Catholic orders being the most prominent example. In that way provision is made for the individual by the community, and the individual is freed to fulfill his or her calling without economic considerations. As you know, there are many variations upon this approach by many different groups.

Voluntary poverty does not need to be a lifetime commitment. I know of one couple in Colorado who felt the call of God to give up all their possessions. In a simple act of holy obedience they sold their house and gave away everything. In the process of time they have felt clear about acquiring various possessions, but you can well imagine that their spirit about those possessions can never be the same. Today they own a large house near a state university and rent out most of the house to university students in order to facilitate a ministry among them. We can never know for certain, but it is entirely possible that Jesus' call to the rich young ruler to sell all that he had was exactly this kind of one-time only command.

Never forget that poverty is not simplicity. Poverty is a word of smaller scope. Poverty is a means of grace; simplicity is the grace itself. People can live out all their lives in poverty and never know the grace of simplicity. It is quite possible to get rid of things and still desire them in your heart. But there is also a poverty that can be used of God to throw open the windows of heaven to the fresh life of simplicity. How can we know the difference? We are to live listening, attentive, and open. If the word of command comes, then joyfully we obey.

I would like to give a word of counsel to those who are not called to voluntary poverty: do not despise the call of those who are. In our rush to be prudent and reasonable we can sometimes hinder the word of God. Let us be slow to condemn, slow even to give advice. First let us listen tenderly, patiently. It was said of Jesus that he would "not break a bruised reed, or quench a smoldering wick" (Matt. 12:20). And like him we must be careful lest we trample upon the tender spirit of those who are just learning to hear God, or snuff out their beginning

insights. And so prayerfully we listen to see if they have indeed received a word from God. As we learn to walk with the Lord and know his ways, it is seldom difficult to distinguish youthful idealism from the call of Yahweh. Likewise, those who are called to poverty must not reject those who have not received that call.

Finally, I suggest one tiny experiment in voluntary poverty that many of us could do with genuine profit as God prompts us. We can go through our home, find one possession that we value, and consider, "Am I growing too attached to this object? Is it becoming a treasure to me?" Having examined our hearts before the Lord, let us give it away. We must not rationalize by saying, "But after searching my heart I know that it is clearly not a treasure to me, and so I don't need to give it away." If it is truly not our treasure we will not mind in the least giving it away, and if it has become our treasure we will want to give it away for our soul's sake. Also we will pray for the person who receives our little gift that it will be a blessing, and not a hindrance, to his or her walk with God.

Planned Spending

By now we could well be feeling that all this lofty talk of resistance to the consumer mentality and of voluntary poverty completely misses our situation. To be quite blunt, we are trying to figure out how to pay the monthly bills, not whether we should give everything away. We are deeply moved by the wretched squalor of Brazil's 35 million poor, but feel helpless to respond. It is almost all we can do to make ends meet as it is. It seems like every time we turn around the children have outgrown their shoes. Our teenagers "dollar" us to death—"It's only a dollar." Escalating food prices, gas prices, property taxes; we just can't seem to keep up.

And most frustrating of all, we cannot see for the life of us where it all goes. Always there seems to be more month than money. We wonder how in the world the paycheck can slip through our fingers so quickly. What happens to it all?

And that is exactly where we must begin. We cannot hope to deal seriously with exterior simplicity until we know what hap-

pened to it all. I am constantly amazed that people do not know where their money goes. If people ask us exactly how much we spent on entertainment or clothes or gifts, could we tell them, not in some round figure, but exactly? If not, we need to find a way to know where our money goes. Most of us would be absolutely astonished at how much we spend in certain categories if we would keep a careful record for one year.

This is the most crucial accountability point in a budget. We will design budgets galore, but have no way to see if we actually keep within that budget. So the first ingredient in planned spending is to know where our money goes. There is absolutely no way we can control it unless we know where it is spent.

If we feel this is a lot of unnecessary work, since it involves so little money anyway, we are dead wrong. Forty years of gainful employment times an annual income of \$15,000 would amount to \$600,000 for which we are responsible. And that doesn't include any increase of salary. We are accountable for the stewardship of that money. How dare we even think of handling such a tremendous resource without careful records.

We have a very practical way to accomplish this in our home. In our budget book we have twenty separate expenditure categories.* When any money is spent we record what it was and how much it cost in the appropriate category. Simple. Bother-some? Sometimes, but even this simple recordkeeping can encourage us to make fewer purchases.

The second step in planned spending is the development of a budget. A budget is nothing more than making the decision where our money goes. Without a budget we forfeit the ability to make that decision. A budget merely controls how much goes where. It keeps us honest with ourselves.

Of one thing we can be certain: our wants will always exceed both our needs and our funds. If our own egocentric greed does not ensure that, then advertising will. If we allow our wants to determine our buying patterns, the result will be chaos—and

* Giving, shelter (house payments, utilities, household items, misc.), food, transportation, medical needs, health insurance, life insurance, education, clothing, house improvements, business expenses, gifts, entertainment, savings, income tax savings, investments, vacations, allowances, special needs, miscellaneous.

considerable debt. A friend of mine who is the president of a credit agency tells me, out of considerable experience, that seldom does he find a couple in financial trouble who have been operating with a well-designed budget.

This book is not the place to go into the details of forming a budget; there are many good guides on the market.¹ I would, however, like to make several observations about the task of budget making.

First, it is almost universally true that in the initial attempt to put a realistic budget onto paper, expenses will exceed income. No budget will ever work until the flow *in* exceeds or equals the flow *out*. Something has to change. And I would suggest that you first look at ways to cut back expenses rather than ways to increase income. This is a time for a couple to experience tears and prayer and tenderness. It is not easy to say No to hoped for vacations or Yes to a smaller food budget. But whatever you do, balance that budget.

Second, never go into debt for ordinary expenditures. An investment is one thing, that new tea set you just can't do without is quite another. Remember, deficit spending will work no better for you than it does for the federal government. Perhaps it is permissible to take out a loan to secure a house, but I can hardly think of anywhere else it would be justified, including the purchase of a car. If you need a car, put it in your budget and begin building the fund until you can pay for the car in cash.

Third, build accountability into your budget. Our system is simple: in our budget book I treat each of our twenty budget categories as if it were a separate bank account. At the beginning of each month I record the allotted "deposit" and then deduct expenditures as they are made. For example, our monthly family budget for clothing is \$50.00. The first of each month I record a \$50.00 deposit in that category. Then, when the question arises as to new shoes for the kids or whatever, the answer is easy: if there is a sufficient balance in the clothes budget, go ahead; if not, wait. The same holds true in all other categories as well.

Fourth, if you exceed your budget don't be discouraged. At least you know where your money is going and are beginning to

have some control over it. You will get better and more realistic as you go along.

Fifth, put the giving of money to Christ and his Kingdom in a different financial frame of mind from other budget items. What I mean is this: most budget items we hope to hold down, but our desire is to see giving increase as much as possible. I have one friend who has a financial goal to always give away more than he spends on himself. So we are to work to decrease our operating budget and increase our giving budget.

Unplugging from the Consumptive Society

The Madison Avenue hucksters are working day and night to squeeze us into their mold. They have launched a concerted effort to capture our minds, and the minds of our children. Christian simplicity demands that we break free of this "thingification." But how do we do it? Here are some suggestions. They are not meant to be rules, for some will speak to your condition and others will not.

First, join the joyful happy revolt against the modern propaganda machine. We need to greet with sarcastic laughter all those patently phony television commercials. In unison the family should shout, "Who do you think you are kidding!" List obviously dishonest ads and boycott their products. Write the networks and companies and let them know what you think of their ads. Help your children to see the attempts of commercials to identify status and prestige with their product. Pray for your children and for yourselves to be protected from the subtle drive to always acquire more. Resist obsolescence. Trinkets are added to products to make you unhappy with the old model. Who in the world needs a new model automobile every single year? Significant safety and efficiency changes occur much less frequently. Why not make a car that would last for the lifetime of the owner? Let the industry know you don't want the costly new design every single year, and urge them to put their money into more meaningful tasks.

Use postage paid envelopes of direct mail advertisers to object to unscrupulous ads. Reject any junk mail you can. Resist all those contests that promise free vacations and dream homes

to the winner. Nothing is free! All the people who are buying that product are paying for that \$200,000 home and all-expense paid trip to Tahiti, plus the multimillion dollar costs of the contest. How much better to dispense with the contests and have less expensive products that the poor could afford. If enough of us saw the evil of them, we could put a stop to those contests. The only reason companies have contests is that people respond to them. What would happen if next year they had a fifty percent reduction in response to their silly games? At any rate, Christians should have no part in this greedy madness. In every way we can, we must do all we can to refuse to be propagandized.

Second, I propose an exercise which many have found liberating. When you decide that it is right for you to purchase a particular item, see if God will not bring it to you without your having to buy it. I have a close friend who needed a pair of gloves for work. Rather than rush out to the store to buy them he gave the matter over to God in prayer. Although he had not spoken to anyone about this need, in a couple of days someone gave him a pair of gloves. How absolutely marvelous! The point is not that he was unable to buy the gloves; he could have done that quite easily. But he wanted to learn how to pray in ways that might release money for other purposes.

Literally dozens of experiments can be made in this realm. Even the rich can do it. Once a decision is made to secure a particular item, hold it before God in prayer for perhaps a week. If it comes, bless God; if not, reevaluate your need for it; and if you still feel that you should have it, go ahead and purchase the item.

One clear advantage to this approach is that it effectively ends all impulse buying. It gives time for reflection so that God can teach us if the desire is unnecessary. Another obvious benefit is the way in which it integrates the life of devotion with the life of service. The supply of our material needs becomes an exciting venture of faith. What better way to learn to pray for daily bread! One small counsel: it is probably wise to give the money you would have spent on the object to the poor in order to avoid the slightest thought of this as a means of material gain.

Third, stress the quality of life above the quantity of life. Refuse to be seduced into defining life in terms of *having* rather than *being*. Cultivate solitude and silence. Learn to "listen to God's speech in his wondrous, terrible, gentle, loving, all-embracing silence."² Develop close friendships and enjoy long evenings of serious and hilarious conversation. Such times are far more rewarding than all the plastic entertainment that the commercial world tries to foist upon us. Value music, art, books, significant travel. If you are too busy to read, you are too busy. Discover prayer as an evening entertainment.

Learn the wonderful truth that to increase the quality of life means to decrease material desire; not vice versa. Close your ears to the ads that bellow their four letter obscenities, "more, more, more!" Listen instead to the life-giving words of St. John of the Cross, "Let your soul turn always not to desire the more, but the less."³ Richard E. Byrd recorded in his journal after months alone in the barren Arctic: "I am learning... that a man can live profoundly without masses of things."

Turn your back on all high pressure competitive situations that make climbing the ladder the central focus. The fruit of the Spirit is not push, drive, climb, grasp, and trample. Don't let the rat-racing world keep you on its treadmill. There is a legitimate place for blood, sweat, and tears; but it should have its roots in the call of God, not in the desire to get ahead. Life is more than a climb to the top of the heap.

Never put happiness at center stage. It is the by-product of a life of service, never the chief end of life. Happiness is not a right to be grasped, but a serendipity to be enjoyed.

Fourth, make recreation healthy, happy, and gadget-free. You don't need an expensive jogging suit to run around the block. Walking, jogging, and swimming are among the best forms of human exercise and they require a minimum of equipment. Get close to the earth with hiking, camping, and backpacking.

The bicycle is a wonderful form of transportation that uses renewable energy. The faddish and expensive sports models are unnecessary, and often too complicated for us to repair. I finally got wise and quit seeking after the ten-speeds and asked God for a sturdy, work-horse model. Now I am as delighted as a

child with a new toy. Ride together as a family in the evenings.

Repudiate "spectatoritis." The modern spectator sports programs are obscene in their waste of human and material resources. Sports conglomerates know they have Americans trapped, and so they boldly extend the season with pre-season games, and bowl games, and super bowl games, and post-bowl games, and all-star games! Enough is enough. Don't get me wrong, it is a joy to watch some games; but abject slavery is another thing altogether. Many couples have constant fights because one spouse prefers Monday night football to live conversation. Can you imagine?

Encourage cooperative games and play. Why must winning *always* be uppermost? It is quite possible to have fun without winners or losers. Western society has been seduced to believe that competition is the only way to play. Competition has its place; but cooperation also has its place. Balance is what we need.

Fifth, learn to eat sensibly and sensitively. Reject products shot full of poisonous chemicals, artificial colors, and other questionable means used to produce engineered food. Eliminate pre-packaged dinners. Become sensitive to the whole bio-food chain and eat foods that do not do violence to that balance, such as fruits and grain. Grain-fed animals are a luxury that the bio-food chain cannot sustain for the masses of humanity.

Get in on the joy of a garden, even if it consists of pots in a window sill. Can, preserve, dry, and freeze your foods. Thanks to the faithful efforts of my wife, our children eat dried fruit all winter in place of candy, and like it just as well. With several dwarf fruit trees in a back yard you can have fruit fit for a king.

As much as possible, buy more locally produced foods to save the energy required for transportation. Explore producer and consumer cooperatives. Compost all the garbage you can. Recycle all the items you can. Grow all the fresh food you can.

Eat out less. When you do, make it a celebration. An apple and milk is faster than the fast-food "restaurants" and much tastier, not to mention more nutritious. Go without food one day a week and give any money saved to the poor. Have joyful potluck meals with friends. Buy less food rather than more diet pills.

Sixth, know the difference between significant travel and self-indulgent travel. To begin with, refuse to be conned into believing that you have missed half your life if you haven't seen all the glamour spots of the world. Many of the wisest and most fulfilled people in the world never traveled anywhere, including Jesus Christ. If you do travel, give it purpose. Go beyond the splashy travel brochures with their sights of tinselled affluence, and get to places of anguish and pain and human need. Stay in places that identify with the common people of a country. When Albert Schweitzer visited America, newspaper reporters asked him why he traveled in the third class section of the train. He answered, "Because there is no fourth class!"

Become as acquainted with people as you do with places. Make a genuine effort to communicate; you will be enriched by the experience. Why must we always view folks from other cultures as oddities to be examined? I once saw a man grab the camera of someone trying to take his picture and angrily smash it on the ground shouting, "I am a man, not a picture!"

Seventh, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status. In building or buying homes, thought should be given to livability rather than to how much it will impress others. Don't have more house than is reasonable. After all, who needs seven rooms for two people? Do you live alone after raising a large family? Rather than leaving your spacious home, filled with its wonderful memories, consider inviting another single person or some college students to join you. It just might once again fill the rooms with laughter and ordinary squabbles, and help to ease the loneliness you feel.

Consider your clothes. Most people have no need for more clothes. They buy more not because they need clothes, but because they want to keep up with the fashions. Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need. Wear your clothes until they are worn out. Stop trying to impress people with your clothes and impress them with your life. If you are able to, learn the joy of making clothes. Have clothes that are practical rather than ornamental. John Wesley declared, "As for apparel, I buy the most lasting and, in general, the plainest I can."⁶

Now I know that this matter of fashion is much more difficult for teenagers than for adults. Most adults have come into a

measure of inward security, and are no longer so vulnerable to the opinions of others; hence they are free from the need to impress them unduly. Teenagers (and some teenage adults), however, have not yet developed this inner sense of place, and feel keenly the need for acceptance and love. Correct fashion is, of course, a cultural means of inclusion and exclusion. And while we must always be cognizant of the potential evil in this superficial form of judgment, neither should we force our children into positions that will mean unnecessary ridicule. These are matters which we must work through with one another in tenderness and love, teaching and encouraging each other.

Furniture can have beauty and usability without costing the world. There is not a thing wrong with the styles of "early attic" and "late basement." Be creative. Your furniture should reflect you, not some stuffy showroom. Build furniture or refinish good used pieces.

Learn to find bargains. Shop at garage sales and Salvation Army Stores. One caution: sales can be cancerous and inflame a covetous spirit. To acquire an unneeded item at a ridiculously low price is no bargain. Pray for inner detachment before ever venturing out into this world of auctions and sales.

One final word needs to be said. Simplicity does not necessarily mean cheapness. Simplicity resonates more easily with concerns for durability, usability, and beauty. Though I built the beds for our children, we purchased the mattresses, and we chose ones that would last for as long as the boys would live in our home. (And I can bear witness that they were not cheap!) Many items should be chosen to last our entire lifetime and beyond, and should be chosen with great care.

Our task is not easy. Often we will wonder what to do in a given situation. We will struggle for integrity as we feel pressures from all sides. Most likely the greatest and most constant pressures, however, will be to ever acquire, ever possess. As we labor to know what to do in each situation, we would do well to keep before us the astute observation of Mark Twain, "Civilization is a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities."⁷⁶

8. OUTWARD SIMPLICITY: LONGER STRIDES

To have what we want is riches, but to be able to do without is power.
—George MacDonald

Simplicity is the new necessity of the modern era. Our little planet simply cannot sustain the gluttonous consumption of the wealthy West. Mahatma Gandhi said once that the world has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed. It simply is not a matter of somehow raising the standard of living of the poor of the world to that of the affluent West. America has 6 percent of the world's population and consumes 33 percent of the world's resources. If the rest of the world were to attempt to live on our level of consumption, it is projected that all known world resources of petroleum, tin, zinc, natural gas, lead, copper, tungsten, gold, and mercury would be exhausted in ten years.¹ Even if we made a generous allowance for scientific breakthroughs, we still must confess that our planet simply cannot support the overload were the starving masses raised to our level of consumption. Put simply, the earth cannot afford our lifestyle. No, the answer is clear: we must cut back our standard of living if there is ever to be anything approaching a just distribution of the world's resources.

But that is not all. The imperative of simplicity is further heightened when we couple the call for justice with a compassionate concern for evangelism. Precious lives all over the face of the earth are living without hope. People hungry of heart and weary in spirit are longing for the word of Truth. Two-thirds of the people of this earth have not heard the wonderful news of Christ's liberating Gospel. Are you not moved with the desire to do more than ever before to reach out to help? This is

no time for business as usual. Nearly two and one-half billion people stand culturally outside the reach of a Christian witness. These "hidden peoples" will never be reached through the Church as it now stands. No Christian is within their cultural sphere of influence. We must find new creative ways to reach out to the hidden peoples if we ever hope to fulfill Christ's commission to disciple all nations. Such a task will demand vast outlays of time and resources.

The Covenant that came out of the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelism held in Lausanne, Switzerland, states, "The goal should be, by all available means and at the earliest possible time, that every person will have the opportunity to hear, understand, and receive the good news." Our hearts resonate with this high and holy goal. But it will never be realized without drastic and sacrificial lifestyle changes. The Covenant continues, "We cannot hope to attain this goal without sacrifice. All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple life-style in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism."

Ecologists and economists shout out to us that simplicity is a new necessity. The great host of hidden peoples shout out to us that simplicity is a new necessity. Will we hear their cry?

The Gift of Giving

Wealth is a dangerous thing. The entire biblical tradition underscores that truth. Therefore, I know that the proposal which I will now make is a risky one, but one which is also deeply rooted in Scripture. There are those who are called to the ministry of money. The gift of giving is a vital and valid spiritual gift, and essential to it is the task of using money for the common good. Jesus told us to make "friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9, KJV); that is, make Kingdom use of material goods. It is a much needed ministry among us.

Simplicity always calls us to a simple lifestyle, but it does not always call us to a reduction in income. God calls some to increase their income in order to use it for the good of all.

Again, I emphasize the danger of this ministry. We are dealing with dynamite. Wealth is not for spiritual neophytes; they will be destroyed by it. Only the person who has clean hands and a pure heart can ever hope to handle this "filthy lucre" without contamination. Gluttony, pride, greed, covetousness, and avarice can slip in unawares. This path is fraught with great frustrations and temptations, and those who walk it have to face perplexing decisions and tragic moral choices that most people will never have to consider. In many ways our life will be immensely more complex, though it does not need to be complicated. We will need the prayer and support of the people of God who must stand by us, counsel us, guide us. We will be living close to hell for the sake of heaven.

The most subtle and dangerous aspect of the ministry of money is the false sense of power it gives. We begin to feel in control. Others begin to seek us out, not because of who we are, but because of what we have. They begin to look to us in spiritually destructive ways. In one important sense money is power, and we have the power to determine the future of this project or that cause, and they know it. And most destructive of all, we know it. Spiritual pride rears its ugly head as the thought seeps in that we are in charge, we call the shots. The degenerative slide continues until a new pseudo-saviour has been born.

Only veteran soldiers can take up this work successfully. Only those who have been disciplined under the Cross qualify. That is why I waited for this chapter to discuss the ministry of money. This is no beginning step, no easy work. Only one skilled in spiritual warfare should ever attempt it. A person is needed who can receive \$50,000 from the hand of God one day, and at the divine prompting give it all away the next. (I did say *all* of it, not just a tithe.)

I would never ask anyone to take up this important and hazardous ministry without the aid of spiritual guidance. Clement of Alexandria counseled that the wealthy servant of God should never attempt to work out his salvation alone, but rather should seek advice of a spiritual director. I concur wholeheartedly.

Choose someone or some small group with whom you can share intimately, someone wise in the things of the Spirit—a

person who is not impressed by money, and able to speak the word of Truth with tenderness. Seek his or her counsel and advice. Share your spiritual goals, including a detailed accounting of your financial goals. Be open, listening, teachable. If he or she detects in you a spirit of possessiveness and shares that with you, do not become defensive. Listen eagerly to these words of life. You desperately need this help. The work you have undertaken puts you in constant spiritual danger. It is entirely possible to become disqualified from this high holy work.

But it is a wonderful work. Immense good can come of it. I think of innumerable servants of Christ who quietly and unpretentiously have been the channel through which huge sums of money have flowed. Released from any need to hold on to or control it, they have been able to freely receive and freely give.

The historically rich building in which I write this book was constructed in 1886 as Garfield University. Massive stonework and beautiful turrets give it a castle-like appearance that can be seen for miles around. But in 1897 it was empty and deserted. It was then that James Davis read the advertisement offering the defunct campus for sale, and said to his wife, "Anna, I believe this is our chance to give a college to the world."³ That is exactly what he did. He bought the magnificent building and then gave it to the Quakers for the development of a Christian university. Think of the thousands of lives that have been enriched simply because one man was free to make Kingdom use of material goods! And think of the innumerable places this story can be retold, with a thousand variations, throughout the world, wherever faithful people advance Christ's Kingdom through the ministry of money.

Does it sound to you as if I am speaking only of the wealthy, who out of a vast financial store underwrite great enterprises throughout the world? They have their place, to be sure; but the ministry of money is more often expressed in more simple ways. This work is usually engaged in by ordinary people with limited budgets. The requirement is not great resources, but a humble willingness to be an unhindered channel.

Here is one simple "wineskin" for this ministry. Together the family prayerfully decides on the budget for that year. It is

lean, trim, realistic. Provision is made in the budget for retirement and other similar concerns. Included in the budget is a tithe on the budget. Then any money which comes to us in excess of that budgeted figure is given in its entirety to Kingdom purposes. In this way God can trust us to be an unimpeded conduit. We can be the joyful channel for God's resources. The money may come through salary or it may come in completely unexpected ways. We will marvel that God is using us, trusting us.

As a young man, John Wesley calculated that twenty-eight pounds a year (about \$65) would care for his own needs. Since prices remained basically the same, he was able to keep at that level of expenditure throughout his lifetime. When Wesley first made that decision, his income was thirty pounds a year. In later years sales from his books would often earn him fourteen hundred pounds a year, but he still lived on twenty-eight pounds and gave the rest away.⁴ Wesley, of course, was single much of his life and never had children, so he did not deal with the financial problems engendered by a family; but the idea is a sound one. We can do the same thing. Obviously we have to make adjustments for growing children, savings for college, and inflation, but the principle remains firm.

Here is another wineskin. If both the wife and the husband desire to work, discipline yourselves to live on one salary and give the other away. In this way, one couple could potentially support an entire missionary family. Why not? What better investment opportunity could there be than that? Think what would happen to the worldwide missionary enterprise if each Christian couple would determine to give every second salary to missions.

Try still another model. Take a careful look at your income. Are there ways to so simplify your lifestyle that you can live on half of what you make? If so, rather than quit your job so that your earnings drop to half, plan to give away half of your earnings.

Here is still another approach. Rather than just giving the money away, invest it for the Kingdom of God. It is usually best to set up a separate checking or savings account. Money put into this account is to be used entirely for Kingdom causes.

Then, as you are led, invest the money in ways consistent with Christian principles. The total earnings are either reinvested or given away. At all times hold firm to the policy that the money, including any and all earnings, belongs entirely to God.

Investments consistent with Christian principles can be a terribly complex matter. I am not just referring to items that are obviously unchristian. The deeper issues of justice, ecology, and violence must be considered. What about real estate investments that have little regard for a proper stewardship of the earth? What about a company's tie to the military industrial complex? What about corporations who have links to repressive and unjust regimes abroad? Some companies oppress the poor, others pollute the environment, and on it goes. As I noted earlier, the ministry of money is fraught with complexity.

The ministry of giving is a good context in which to consider the tithe. While tithing is not a New Testament measure for giving, it can sometimes be a helpful starting point from which to begin giving. In the early days, the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., struggled with the place of the tithe as one of their corporate disciplines. They sought the counsel of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who suggested that they commit themselves not to tithing but to "proportionate giving, with tithing as an economic floor beneath which you will not go unless there are some compelling reasons." As a result, the discipline to which they all now agree reads, "We covenant with Christ and one another to give proportionately beginning with a tithe of our incomes."⁵

This approach has one wonderful advantage: it has a minimum discipline which is not intended to become the standard. All members know the starting point, but understand it to be only the beginning of the journey. Individually and corporately they must wrestle with what it means to give proportionately. That is no small issue. Elizabeth O'Connor has stated the difficulty well when she writes:

Proportionate to what? Proportionate to the accumulated wealth of one's family? Proportionate to one's income and the demands upon it, which vary from family to family? Proportionate to one's sense of security and to the degree

of anxiety with which one lives? Proportionate to the keenness of our awareness of those who suffer? Proportionate to our sense of justice and of God's ownership for those who follow after us . . . ? The answer, of course, is in proportion to all of these things.⁶

With all of its difficulties, this grace of giving is a happy ministry. So much good can be done. So many lives can be helped. Stanley Mooneyham tells of his visit to the small village of Singhali, in India, a village suffering from a severe drought that plagued that region. He spoke with one Moslem landowner whose well was nearly dry. Though this man was facing disaster himself, he continued to share his water with Moslem and Christian alike. When Stanley Mooneyham told him that through World Vision's relief funds his well would be deepened, his speech stopped in mid-sentence, and he stood with mouth open. "No words came, but his soul spoke richly through the pools which formed in his eyes. With no attempt to wipe them dry, he just stood there and sobbed. He clutched my hand and would not let go. In his eyes I saw the response to love—and his response was love also."⁷

The Gift of Service

A simple lifestyle can also open to us vast new areas of service. It becomes possible to cut back our needs drastically so that we can devote time to important tasks. John Woolman cut back his business ventures in order to give attention to a traveling ministry. He said, "A way of life free from much entanglement appeared best for me, though the income might be small." Though he had several business offers, he refused them all because of the "outward care and cumber" that would divert his energies. Remember, Woolman was not a professional minister in the sense of being free from the concerns of the marketplace in order to preach. He was a businessman, and that was how he earned his living. He simply determined to "live on a little" in order that "nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the true Shepherd."⁸

Many do the same today. One professional carpenter I know

supports his family by working two days a week. The rest of the week is then devoted to the cause of justice for the poor in the city. A citrus rancher friend of mine sold his ranch at such a profit that he and his wife were able to serve for many years on the mission field without any expense to anyone. (They did this later in their lives, after the children were grown.) Many teachers keep their needs pared down enough so that they do not have to earn money in the summer, and can devote their time to ministry among the poor and needy. Many families engage in extensive weekend ministries at considerable expense to themselves in both time and money. And on it goes.

The possibilities are limitless. Many opportunities open up when we believe they are possible. Some situations do not allow us this flexibility, but many more than we think will. We are close to a family who gave this idea a try. The husband is a construction superintendent, and they have the normal responsibilities that come with four children. Over a period of time they began to sense the call of God to give help to a Christian work in New Guinea. Prayerfully and tactfully, the husband was able to arrange for a two-month leave of absence. To be quite honest, the venture involved a considerable expenditure of their personal money in order for the family to be involved in this two-month ministry. And yet the value for all concerned was enormous, well worth the investment, they told me. They are now listening to God to see if they should involve themselves more extensively in the New Guinea work.

One does not need to go to New Guinea, of course. Free time for service is desperately needed anywhere there are people. Crisis centers, counseling services, hospitals, all need our help. The ordinary ministry of local churches could be greatly enhanced if numerous members were free to invest their lives in the work. In one metropolitan city a small fellowship was able to find homes for some 350 homeless children. But to do such things demands a substantial investment of time, and some of us need to find ways to release ourselves. In our day many need to rearrange their lives in specific ways if they hope to engage in the ministry of service.

However, we must not concentrate exclusively upon the financial aspects of service. It is commendable to pare down our

needs in order to release time to serve, but Christian simplicity adds another important ingredient. With self-interest rooted out, we have become free to serve as servants. Self-righteous service is banished. We do not have to lord it over others or make them feel indebted to us. Service can be rendered freely and without manipulation. We can joyfully surrender our own rights for the good of others. This is a great liberty in the work of service. It gives us the ability to prefer one another in love.

I would like to give one specific word of counsel in the context of the ministry of service. I think it is important that we find specific ways to serve our neighbors. We need to experience the ministry of small things for those who live near us.

Why would I mention such an insignificant matter? The answer is that it is far from insignificant. To be content with a life of simple goodness among our neighbors demands a total reorientation of values. It involves a whole restructuring of our perspective about what is important in life. Only the grace of simplicity can inform us with that perspective.

To value our neighbor does not put us in the headlines of any publication. It does not give us any advantaged position at work. It is not even valued in many churches, simply because it takes time away from important ministries there. To rake our neighbor's leaves, to babysit their children, to take the time to visit with them is the stuff of service to our neighbor. And until we learn to live in simplicity we will find it hard to believe it is an important ministry. John Woolman spoke of being "weaned from the desire of outward greatness."⁹ Without that weaning process we will not know simplicity, nor will we find much place in our lives for our neighbors.

The Gift of Sacrifice

There is a need today for what I call prophetic simplicity. We need voices of dissent that point to another way, creative models that take exception to the givens of society. Obviously, prophetic simplicity runs the risk of excess; but the danger is no greater than the excess of the status quo.

Often these men and women speak to us in hyperbole and exaggeration. We label them hopelessly utopian and idealistic.

All the same, we need their word to jar us loose. Our consciences need to be pricked by their sharp barbs. We need to understand the relevance of their impossible ideal.

Prophetic simplicity is often expressed in ways that make many of us uncomfortable: models that are certainly not obligatory upon all Christians at all times. And yet they are not in opposition to the way of Christ either. They become open windows and swinging doors onto new options, new possibilities. They are participants in the ministry of sacrifice.

Our temptation to reject prophetic simplicity out of hand must be held in abeyance. After all, John the Baptist *is* in the Bible. And although Jesus did not go in much for animal skins and wild honey, that does not mean we shouldn't. At the word of God Elijah lived by a desert stream for three years, and we may be given a similar call. At the heart of prophetic simplicity is self-renunciation for the cause of Christ.

Some have chosen the single life in order to advance the Kingdom of God. In our day many have faulted the Apostle Paul because he urged the unmarried to consider the single life as a genuine option (I Cor. 7). They miss the profound wisdom in his counsel. Marriage of necessity divides one's loyalties. To be faithful to the marriage covenant, the husband and wife must concern themselves with a whole host of personal and financial matters. The single person can concentrate with abandon on the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Every married person with any kind of sensitivity understands very well that this is the case.

Paul was not against marriage, but he did insist that people should count the cost. No one should enter the covenant of marriage without understanding the immense amount of time and energy involved in making that relationship work. We need to face the fact that we cannot do many of the kinds of things which Paul did and be married.

One of the great tragedies of our day is the number of Christian leaders who have given themselves unselfishly to the cause of Christ, but have destroyed their marriages and their children in the process. And it was all so unnecessary. Many of them simply needed to understand that their sense of call was incompatible with the responsibilities of marriage, and to choose the

single life. Paul's caution has the ring of practical wisdom. Jesus Himself said that some have become eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 19:12).

We do people a disservice when we fail to proclaim the single life as a Christian option. Marriage is not for everyone, and we should say so. A single person can venture into forms of simplicity that are closed to the rest of us. By word and deed the Church should encourage these faithful servants of Christ. They should never be looked down upon or viewed as somehow odd. We should do all that we can to be with those who have chosen the single life, because they need our friendship and we need their wisdom.

Others who are married have voluntarily chosen to go without children. To be sure, some have made the decision from purely selfish motives; but others have done so in order to be free to care for the children of the world. I am very close to a couple who have consciously chosen not to have children so that they may have a more effective ministry among teenagers. Their home is open to young and old day and night. Although one night in their home is enough to drive me crazy, I must confess that their ministry is an extraordinarily effective one.

A couple must be in covenant unity with one another in any decision of this nature. This is no place for a husband to try to exercise some kind of "headship" over the wife. Such a decision takes time. The feelings of each spouse must be given full expression. At no time should there be conveyed a sense of spiritual inferiority if children are desired. This is a matter of calling, not spirituality.

Most couples will want and should have children, but again we should know the commitment that entails. We must be prepared to pay the financial and emotional price.

Perhaps some will remonstrate, "I wish that I had counted the cost, but I didn't. I now have a family, but still feel called to a ministry that does not have time for marriage and family obligations." I answer that your calling is now to your family. You are to fulfill the covenant made with your spouse. To jump into some kind of ministry that ultimately would be destructive to your marriage is sin. Be content to invest your life in your spouse and your children. If the ministry is important, God will

either raise up others to do it, or in his time will arrange your situation so that this work is compatible with your family responsibilities.

Another aspect of the ministry of sacrifice is in the area of Christian fasting. Many have advocated a weekly fast as a means of releasing funds for the world's hungry. This practice is in every way commendable, but I want here to deal with fasting on a deeper level.

Fasting helps to give us balance. It makes us more keenly sensitive to the whole of life, so that we do not become obsessed with our consumer mentality. It is something of an inner alarm to help us hold our priorities straight, to give us a sense of spiritual sensitivity.

Fasting reveals the things that control us. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things come to the surface. The first truth that was revealed to me in my early experiences in fasting was my lust for good feelings. It is certainly not a bad thing to feel good, but we must be able to bring that feeling to an easy place where it does not control us. So many attitudes strive to control us: anger, pride, fear, hostility, gluttony, avarice. All of these and more will surface as we fast. It is a blessed release to have these things out in the open so that they can be defeated, and we can live with a single eye toward God.

The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity. Remember, there is nothing wrong with these normal functions in life—it is simply that there are times when we set them aside in order to concentrate. Viewed from this perspective we can see the reasonableness of fasting, and also its broader dimensions. For example, there is a great need today to learn to fast from people. Most of us have a tendency to devour others, and usually we get severe heartburn from it. I suggest that we experience times of fasting from people not because we are antisocial, but precisely because we love people intently and when we are with them we want to be able to do them good, and not harm. Thomas Merton said, "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. . . . Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not what they say."¹⁰

We also need to have times when we fast from the media. It is amazing to me that many people are incapable of going through an entire day concentrating on one thing. Their train of thought is constantly broken by this demand or that interruption. The newspaper, the radio, the television, magazines—everything interrupts their concentration. Some people are so enslaved to television that if it were taken away they would go through withdrawal. Obviously, there is a time for the various media, but there is also time to be without them.

We can also learn to fast from the telephone. This instrument is a wonderful invention, but it controls many people. Some people will stop praying in order to answer the telephone. Can you imagine anything more absurd? I want to let you in on a secret: we do not need to answer that gadget every time it rings. We are not its slave, but its master. When people come to visit us, we should not insult them by interrupting our conversation to answer the telephone. In our home, when we are eating or when I am reading stories to the children, we do not answer the phone. I want my children to know that they are more important than any phone call. People will call back if they genuinely need to reach us.

Earlier I dealt with voluntary poverty, but I now would like to take up one further aspect of it, namely communalism. Communalism is nothing more than the renunciation of private ownership for the sake of the wider community.

~~Throughout history, utopian movements have arisen and disappeared in the same way that many ruthless competitive societies have arisen and disappeared.~~ Permanence is not an important criterion; faithfulness is. Many have attempted communal living and found it terribly complicated; others have found it liberating. As a prophetic model for our day it probably allows for the simplest standard of living. Goods that would normally serve one nuclear family can now accommodate perhaps two dozen people.

Although communal approaches to life have existed for many centuries—the most notable being the Roman Catholic monasteries—there has been a recent surge of interest by Christian groups in this expression of faithfulness. The Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Reba Place Fellowship in Chicago, Illinois, and the Church of the Redeemer in

Houston, Texas, are a few of the better known examples. The reasons for this revival of interest are not hard to discover. The feelings of alienation and loneliness, the concern for ecological responsibility, the desire for a just distribution of the world's resources, and the joyful freedom to share resulting from the charismatic renewal are a few of the causes. We should also recognize that the size and shape of the nuclear family makes communal arrangements more feasible and desirable. It was not so many years ago that large extended families were commonplace. When you have parents with half a dozen children combined with grandparents and another extra person or two thrown in, you have a community of considerable size and complexity. Today's family of three or four often gains a great deal from sharing with others.

Communal arrangements have many difficulties: how to provide for privacy, how to handle money matters, how to discipline children, and so on. And although communalism has a great deal of historical precedence, there is not much biblical basis for it. Perhaps the greatest value of the Christian commune is its symbolic importance. Quietly, it questions society's affluence, and points to another way.

Identification with the Poor

Another way in which simplicity takes outward shape is through conscious identification with the poor and forgotten. Jesus Christ did so repeatedly, and so must we. The exact expression of our identification will have infinite variety, but there is no doubt that we ought to engage in this loving work.

Many of us need to champion the cause of the oppressed, witness to their misery, and call for justice. We are to plead their cause before the powerful. The Christian is to be the voice of the voiceless, the face of the faceless, before authorities. Is this not precisely what Moses did before Pharaoh? When we represent the poor before the powerful, we are ambassadors of Christ. Quakers on the American frontier would often attend treaty negotiations between the federal government and the Indian tribes in order to plead for justice. Jacques Ellul says, "I hold that in every situation of injustice and oppression, the

Christian—who cannot deal with it by violence—must make himself completely a part of it as representative of the victims."¹¹

But a warning is needed here. The Christian must advocate the cause of those who are truly poor and forgotten. So often it seems as if Christians have a particular knack for joining causes that are nearly over and championing issues that have thousands of champions. We must go beyond newspaper accounts (in fact, newspapers are usually a hindrance in this work) to find the genuinely dispossessed. If we desire to identify with the poor we will be concerned to be informed, really informed. Ellul reminds us that Christians "must be so concerned about human misery that they take pains to discover the really lost before it is too late."¹²

This is a thankless ministry. We are seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit to the truly abandoned and defenseless. We will defend the cause of people who are not politically "interesting." We will be bringing before mayors and city councilmen issues that all others would like to sweep under the rug. We will be making people uncomfortable over matters they deem "trivial." But that is what is asked of us if we are to identify with the genuinely poor and forgotten.

Another way we identify with the poor is to be among them. There are some who are led to take this up as a vocation: living among the poor, suffering with the poor, praying for the poor. Albert Schweitzer lived this vocation in Africa as did Toyohiko Kagawa in Japan.

Many of us, however, will be called to be among the abandoned of the earth in less dramatic ways. We will respond to Divine promptings to visit prisons and hospitals, rest homes and mental institutions. We will tutor little ones deprived of basic skills. We will take time to play with the child down the street that sits on the curb alone.

Our children need to join us in this ministry of identification. We do them no favor by hiding them from suffering and need. If we imprison them in ghettos of affluence, how can they learn compassion for the broken of the world? So, let us walk hand in hand with our children into pockets of misery and suffering.

One specific means of identification with the poor is discovered in our approach to education. Do we see a college education, for example, as a ticket to privilege or as a training for service to the needy? What do we teach our teenagers in this matter? Do we urge them to enter college because it will better equip them to serve? Or do we try to bribe them with promises of future status and salary increases? No wonder they graduate more deeply concerned about their standard of living than about suffering humanity.

As we seek to follow in the steps of Jesus, we will be drawn to identify with the poor. As we do, perhaps a valuable question to keep before us is whether we are as willing to evaluate our living standards by the needs of the poor as we are by the lifestyle of our neighbors.

Reachable Handles

It is entirely possible that you have found this chapter extremely frustrating, maybe even irrelevant. Grand ideas of giving and serving, celibacy and communal living, have left you in the dust. You are not certain that you desire those things, let alone do them. I too have felt, and do feel, the same way.

We must not despair that we are still in the foothills. The heights are seldom scaled in a single bound. And so I close this chapter with some practical handles that are within reach of us all.

First, develop a habit of plain honest speech. Strike "I am starved" from your speaking vocabulary. It is not true and obscures the fact that many indeed are starving. When you are hungry say that you are hungry and reserve the word "starvation" for the real thing. Make honesty and integrity the distinguishing characteristics of your speech. Reject jargon and abstract speculation, the purpose of which is to obscure and impress rather than to illuminate and inform.

We have simplicity of speech when our words come from only one Source. Søren Kierkegaard wrote, "If thou art absolutely obedient to God, then there is not ambiguity in thee and . . . thou art mere simplicity before God. . . . One thing there is which all Satan's cunning and all the snares of temptation cannot take by surprise, and that is simplicity."¹³

Second, write out a money autobiography.* Consider the place of money in your childhood. What view of money did your parents have? Did you feel deprived or privileged? How are those influences affecting you today?

Consider your changing attitudes toward money over the years. What influences have affected the change? Have the changes been good or detrimental?

Consider your own feelings. Are you fearful of the future? Is money a security to you? Do you feel guilty about the money you spend?

Consider your personality. Are you a "nothing ventured nothing gained" person or a "better safe than sorry" person? How does that influence your approach to money?

Third, find new creative ways to get in touch with the earth. Revel in the infinite variety of colors around you. Listen to the birds—they are God's messengers. Walk whenever you can. Enjoy the texture of grass and leaves. Grow flowers or plant trees and discover once again that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1).

Fourth, learn to enjoy things without owning them. Possession is an obsession in our culture. If we own it we feel that we can control it; and if we control it, we feel that it will give us more pleasure. The idea is an illusion. Many things in life can be enjoyed without possessing or controlling them. We gain great benefit from "common ownership" of many things: schools, public buildings, parks, rivers, public beaches, roads. Let's learn to enjoy the beauty of the beach without the compulsion to buy a piece of it. Many things can be shared among neighbors or friends. Some cultures even have common ownership of land. Many agricultural kibbutzim of Israel are successful and efficiently run. Give some things away just for the freedom it brings.

Fifth, develop the habit of homemade celebrations. There is an infinite variety of things you can do. It is great fun and draws you closer together. Talk to each other; even little ones can tell the most entertaining stories if we will listen. Read

*The concept of a money autobiography is considered in some detail in Elizabeth O'Connor's *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims* (pp. 28-30). I have taken the idea from that source.

books out loud to each other. Such times together make the entertainment extravaganzas of modern society seem cheap and hollow by comparison, and they are.

Invite neighbors and other lonely folk to join you—they won't bite! And please, do not make such a fuss over having guests in that you drop exhausted at the end of the evening and determine never to do that again. How can you enjoy people if you are always trying to impress them? Genuine hospitality is more simple, more relaxed.

Sixth, teach your children by word and deed about the varied aspects of simplicity, including the use of money. In regard to expenditures, draw clear, hard lines beyond which you will not go. Our culture is training them to desire everything in sight when they enter a store. You do them no favor when you give in to their incessant demands. You must protect them, tenderly, firmly. Spoiled children need discipline, not pampering. It is a terrible disservice to fail to set the limits. Get them what they need, not what they want; and in time they will come to want what they need.

Provide your children the experience of a growing self-government. Our children receive an allowance in order to give them the experience of managing money. (We pay twice their age—the six-year-old gets 12 cents per day, the nine-year-old gets 18 cents per day.) But they have to work for that money. They lose 5 cents for every job left undone, though they cannot go below zero. We also decided that it was important for the boys to have jobs they did because they were a part of the family and for which there was no pay. Each child has three banks—one for spending, one for savings, one for giving away. They are required to save 10 percent and give away 10 percent; the rest we decide together how to spend. Presently I pay for their necessities, they pay for their luxuries. In time I will hike up their allowance and go half with them on necessities; eventually they will pay for everything themselves. As we work to give them a growing self-government, our hope and plan is that by the age of sixteen each boy will be managing all his own income and expenses, except for housing and food. By the time they are eighteen, we hope that they will have had enough counsel and experience to make wise and responsible use of

their money. (And we hope that we will be wise enough to keep our hands off their decisions, refraining even from giving advice unless it is sought.)

We have no ideal arrangement. Even now we sometimes fight over what is a luxury and what is a necessity. We make many mistakes, but our desire is to help them grow in their understanding of money and its proper use.

Seventh, seek to obey the counsel of John Woolman, "Silence every motion proceeding from the love of money."¹⁴ The love of money is a tricky thing—often those who have it the least love it the most. Watch for that rise within that signals danger. When it comes, be still in the power of God until it is defeated. Do not try to argue down the desire; be silent and quiet. Allow the ocean of love and light to overcome the ocean of greed and fear. If you remain hushed and calm in the grip of Christ, you will discover the good rising and the evil receding.

In attempting to hammer out the outward expression of simplicity, we are undertaking no small task. It will be easy to make mistakes in both restraint and excess. Perhaps the counsel of William Penn will help us to cut back our margin of error: "Frugality is good if Liberality be join'd with it. The first is leaving off superfluous Expenses; the last bestowing them to the Benefit of others that need."¹⁵