

Chapter 8 - Live Simply

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on the story.
 - A) While first-century Jewish culture may look simple to us, we know from Scripture that people then still cluttered their lives with the things of this world. Think about some of the ways that life in the 1st and 21st Centuries are different or the same.
 - B) Growing up in a priest's home would have given John a ringside view of religious life of his generation. How do you think this affected his decision to withdraw from the formal practice of Judaism and resort to what we would see as a rather primitive life in the wilderness?
 - C) John became "a voice crying in the wilderness" as God's spokesman to the nation from the ruling class to the common people. Consider how his unconventional ways strengthened or detracted from the power of his message. How would you feel about being a "social misfit" for God?

2. Reflect on your own life and think about the things that are most important to you. Most Christians quickly learn the "right answers" to give about what's most important, but our lives betray us. Using "time spent" as an indicator of the level of significance of things in your life, make a list of the top half dozen or so things in your life. (Don't include sleep and work hours.)

3. We can all think of people who have more complicated and more simple lives than ours. Without using these fine folk to justify or condemn you, consider some of the things that are taking "too much" out of your life. Jot down some of these things and your thoughts about them.

4. We all have the tendency to have a few things which we value far above other things. Yet these things change over time as our priorities shift and we pass through different life stages. Possessions, relationships, education, careers, can easily compete with our "spiritual calling" (what God wants us to do with our lives). Jot down your thoughts about this tension in your own life.

5. Much of what complicates our lives (material possessions, obligations, pleasures) has little or nothing to do with our spiritual calling. Try to identify the bare essentials that you feel you really need to do to fulfill God’s calling on your life.

6. Simplicity offers several benefits. Assuming that you are willing and able to find at least one way to simplify your life, what is the one benefit you would most enjoy experiencing?

7. In this chapter of *Refresh*, I mention cultural messages like these bombard us: “You need this.” “You deserve that.” “Get a new ____ to replace your old one.” “Don’t be left behind.” Think about your own susceptibility to these messages. Jot down at least one thing you could do to reduce the impact of this propaganda on your buying habits.

8. There are two basic ways to approach making purchases. The first is to “go shopping” and buy things that appeal, that you think you need, or that give you pleasure in one way or another. The second is to make a list of things that you observe that you need as you go through your daily life. (From a jar

of peanut butter to a car.) After you've confirmed that this purchase would be of maximum benefit and minimum detriment, you research the product and buy the best one at the best price. Write down a few thoughts about these two models in terms of their contribution to a life of simplicity.

9. In response to this chapter of Refresh, write down your personal manifesto about how you will view and treat material possessions from now on:

For Group Leaders:

This chapter cuts close to the bone. Some of us are seriously addicted to stuff. At the same time, others are much less concerned with material possessions. As a leader, exercise wisdom as comments are shared. The purpose of this study is not to identify the spiritual superheros of the group, but to be more like Jesus. Avoid judging comments and attitudes.

One idea to start a lively discussion is to consider the factors that dictate the most important things in our lives (peers, media, habits, etc).

As with many of the issues raised in *Refresh*, some will prompt a genuine desire for change in some of your group members. Help them to see concrete things they can do and provide some accountability structures to help them achieve their goals. Others won't be ready to embrace the lifestyle modifications which are suggested. For them, gently underscore the value of taking small steps as they forward in deepening their life with God.

Pray with the group for humility and godly motives in the pursue of a more simple life.