



Accents & Issues

Simple Lifestyle

Why should we practice a simple lifestyle? Culture suggests that we are not truly happy, never quite fulfilled, unless we have a job that allows us to buy the latest and best products and to gain the admiration of our friends and colleagues. The Church sometimes reflects this thinking of the world. “Love Jesus and get rich and famous” is a promise we hear even from pulpits and religious media.

A simple lifestyle is most often tied to the accumulation of money. Yet, our use of time is also an enemy of simplicity. Phones, computers, and texting devices demand our time. Time and money are both important issues related to simple living.

The example and teachings of Jesus are helpful for simplifying our lives. Jesus’ lifestyle was characterized initially by his birth in a manger. In his ministry Jesus could claim that he had no place to lay his head. He called his disciples to leave everything and to follow him. He taught that it was difficult or even impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven. He elevated poor and humble people to positions of spiritual significance — the widow who gave two coins, the boy with the loaves and fishes, the child set up as an example for Jesus’ disciples.

Because we are Jesus’ 21st-century disciples, we translate his example into action appropriate for our lives and time. Some Christians do this by listing activities that do or do not conform to a simple lifestyle. While that may be helpful, we can also focus on principles for determining a simple lifestyle established in the Bible.

A simple lifestyle conforms to God’s will and seeks his Kingdom first and foremost (Matt. 6:33). With that attitude at the center, other aspects of life fall into proper perspective. This principle does not automatically condemn persons with riches, providing that wealth is at the service of God’s will and Kingdom. Moreover, the principle of giving God’s Kingdom priority condemns persons with few possessions who unduly treasure the little they have and covet what others possess. For both rich and poor, powerful and powerless, simple living calls us to be sensitive to the Spirit of God so that we will not be dazzled by the material and superficial — large houses and expensive cars or influential jobs and powerful positions. Rather we will use our money, possession, time, and influence to advance the Kingdom of God.

Simple living places value on human dignity. Christians measure the worth of persons, not by the things they possess or the jobs they perform, but by their creation in God’s image. We are all equal in God’s sight — the rich and poor, the powerful and powerless. Lazarus was a nobler person than the rich man from whom he begged (Luke 16:19-31). To measure worth by wealth, expensive possessions, or influential jobs is to take away from the dignity of being created in the image of God. A simple lifestyle affirms our acceptance of that truth.

A simple lifestyle embodies stewardship. Christians receive so they can give. Our houses, bank accounts, professions, and indeed all we have are not ours but God’s. To hoard our money, to exploit our land, to turn work only to our own advantage is to abuse the gifts God has given us. Rather, we have our wealth, possessions, and power to support those in need (Eph. 4:28).

A simple lifestyle understands that we are part of an interconnected world. The consumer lifestyle of many affluent people contributes to the poverty and hopelessness of many people in disadvantaged countries. Followers of Jesus recognize how their lifestyles relate to the millions of people who lack the means to live healthy, productive lives. The apostle John asks: “If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but

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has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you?” (I John 3:17). Simple living allows us to share with our poor and powerless brothers and sisters throughout the world.

A simple lifestyle recognizes that our needs are minimal. We are conditioned to want much, and our wants quickly become needs. Yet, true joy and blessing is not in the accumulation of things and satisfying desires, but in Jesus. We affirm with the apostle Paul, “I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances” (Phil. 4:11-12). Those words take on added meaning when we realize that Paul wrote them in prison.

A simple lifestyle avoids the dangers of affluence. Jesus said worries and wealth choke out the word of God (Matt. 13:22). Our money and influence give a false sense of power, leading us to think that we are in control of our lives. That is why Jesus said that we cannot serve God and money at the same time (Matthew 6:24). Followers of Jesus serve God rather than themselves.

A simple lifestyle values beauty and happiness. Paintings on our walls, books on our shelves, and music we listen to are means for enriching our lives and glorifying God. Jesus feasted in homes of the rich, he did not condemn the woman who poured expensive ointment on his feet, and he undoubtedly admired the beauty of the temple. Paul set the correct tone for us when he said, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Spiritual renewal has often been accompanied by a call to a simple lifestyle. That call comes to us as we consider how we may become worthy followers of the One born in a manger.

