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**Connection: Simplicity
Uncluttering Your Mind**

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**By Dr. Matthew J. Hook
2 Corinthians 11:2 - 4**

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You know what the lie is, that you and I have been following? You *can't* be close to God. You *can't* have a deeper spiritual life because of who you are. Or what you've done. You've seen too much. You've done too much. Or the opposite. You can't have a deep spiritual life because you haven't done enough. You haven't seen enough. But it doesn't have to be this way. You see, that's not *God's* voice. Because God is jealous for you. God desires for your attention. It sounds weird to say it takes discipline...

A month ago people in our church wrote down in church their biggest barrier to claiming friendship with God. The number one barrier? Not belief. Not fear. Not guilt. Time. If time is our biggest barrier to connection with God, it means that something other than God has become #1 in our lives. You know, in youth ministry, about twice per year we would ask kids to commit their lives to Christ or recommit their lives to Christ. But I learned that if you need to *recommit* your life to Christ, it means that something else got in the way. Something *else* became number one in their life. We would ask them to name it and write it down. Then, they could put it back in its place. Church, if our number one barrier to friendship with God is TIME, it simply means something else has gotten in the way. Can you name it in your own life?

Spiritual disciplines are God-given ways to stay on course, like the sail of a sailboat. No matter which way the wind is blowing, the set of your sail can let you go anywhere. Spiritual disciplines are not hitting people over the head. They're not an escape. They're not easy. The wind can blow hard. But spiritual disciplines are the set of your sail, and they are going to take you closer to your goal of being close with God.

So we're looking at spiritual disciplines God has put into place so that we can say "God is God, and I am not." Why do we need this discipline? Because every single person in this room is one decision away from marital, spiritual, and financial ruin. There is so much at stake. And God is jealous for you. He wants you. He doesn't want to share you with anyone, or anything else, because He loves you that much. There is a place in God's heart only you can fill. And because anything else that takes that place diminishes not just your relationship with God, but you. Have you ever tried to have a relationship with someone who had so many irons in the fire, so many distractions, that you could never get close? Listen to what God says through Paul's second letter to the Christ followers in Corinth: "*I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he*

who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted -- you may well put up with it!" 2 Corinthians 11:2—4

There's so much in this passage. Let's look at it. *"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

Remember, Christianity is not some religion that replaces all the stuff you put on yourself with more stuff that God puts on you. It's not a religion; it's a relationship. And God loves you so much He sent His Son, that you could be joined with Him. If a bride isn't fully sure if her fiancé's really the one, I would counsel her don't get married. And leading up to his marriage, a groom-to-be will not tolerate a rival. Nor should he. There's a godly jealousy there.

3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Paul's afraid for these people. Their relationship is in jeopardy. Their minds can be so easily led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!" These people will put up with anything. In this case, it was some superstar "apostle's": great orators who were marvelous to look at and listen to who promised all kinds of blessings, enlightenment, and special knowledge to those who follow their Christ. And Paul's jealous. He said *"you may well put up with it!"* Another translation says *"You bear it beautifully!"* Ouch! Today, *we* bear it beautifully when it comes to allowing ourselves to get dumped on. We pride ourselves in being able to be open, taking it all in. Allowing our schedules to be strangled. Allowing our families to jump to everyone else's priorities rather than our own. We need Paul's godly jealousy more than ever today. My mom just told Leigh this story. My dad pitched in the majors, and one time at an away game, my mom was at the game. And a player from another team who was watching the game came up to my mom not knowing who she was and started hitting on her. My mom said *"YOU BIG CREEP! I know who you are, and I know your wife and your kids too!"* I love that the best she could come up with is *"YOU BIG CREEP!"* You could say she was filled with a "godly jealousy." ☺ But she didn't *"bear it beautifully."* And personally, I'm so thankful. She called it for what it was. For her own good, for her own family's good, and for the good of that other poor sap's family. Church, *we've* got to do that with *our* devotion. With our closeness to God. With anything—ANYTHING, that would seek to come between us and God; with anything that would seek to mess with our relationships. And it doesn't have to be just people. It can be "hobbies," or addictions, the TV, or simply your priorities.

For crying out loud, be honest. We have to make *God* our determined purpose. That means major changes. That means naming what stands in our way. Here are some sources of mind clutter that seek to sidetrack us:

1. Saying yes to too many things. Lewis Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary used to say "Much of our activity today is little more than a cheap anesthetic to deaden the pain of an empty life."
2. No time for leisure and rejuvenation. Might sound funny talking about discipline. But we're so out of control we fill the spaces between activities. We're addicted to being entertained. We can't stand silence. But listen: avoiding overlapping activities isn't planning. So the result is we're a hassled, short-tempered, horn-blowing, step on the gas society perpetually commuting between poorly planned activities that add very little to our well-being, let alone anybody else's. When was the last time you wrote on your calendar: "rest"?
3. Rarely experiencing the joy of accomplishment. *"A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul."* Proverbs 13:19. With too much to do, we dash off to the next activity, often without finishing the previous one

or taking time to savor a job well done. No wonder so many people today struggle with meaninglessness.

4. Most people living in wealthy countries Owe more than they can hope to repay. “*The borrower is slave to the lender.*” Proverbs 22:7. Our beautiful shiny credit cards are brilliantly disguised shackles. Have you ever stopped to think that by whipping out the credit card, you may be denying God the opportunity to meet that need in His own way? Or the opportunity to show you how nonessential that expense really was? Next time, wait.
5. Most of us fool ourselves into Looking to technology to simplify our lives. Of course technology is a gift from God, bestowed on all humanity for no other reason than His great love for us. We’re more tied down than ever.

SIMPLIFY “Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify.” Thoreau. You may have to admit your life is frittered away by detail. Paul’s great fear is our “*minds will be led astray.*” From what? Simplicity. Purity.

Think only about yourself, not that person you *wish* were here to hear this. The power of reflective thought is great. **Do YOU spend adequate time with God?** Just one on one. Imagine 10 minutes per day. Away from people, TV, radio. In your backyard, or a park, or your car, if you’re desperate! ☺ What about lunch hour? Even as a pastor, it’s not easy, to be alone and silent before God. I’d rather be busy. There’s always a good reason to leave my time with God to do His work...or at least that’s what we convince ourselves of. So, you have to say “no.” to those things. And the more multi-talented you are, the harder it is.

Second, have you become a cluttered person within? Our surroundings often reflect what’s going on inside: my desk, my closet, my car. How many needless extras are you accumulating because you’re not paying attention? It’s normal for anyone who’s productive. No room? If you’re like most people, your mind is just as cluttered. No room, no space, no margin, no time for God. It’s just so littered that simple devotion to your Maker feels like wistful luxury you can never afford. HOW SAD! Sometimes I wonder if God isn’t like that Indian looking over the trashed up, littered highway in the ‘70s commercial against litter, with the tear running down his cheek.

Last January, I started working out with a new friend I met at church: Brian Corcoran. He made a powerful decision I’d like for you to hear about... **BRIAN CORCORAN.**

Brian: “I’m Brian Corcoran. I’m married to Kim and have 2 little girls. I work at Fingerle Lumber. I enjoy coaching and sports. I played college football and professional hockey for a few years. Last November I was thinking about this same thing: spending time with God. We’d been coming to this church off and on for about 3 years but hadn’t really plugged in too much. I made a decision to read through the Bible. I started in Psalms and Proverbs, and then went back to Genesis. I read the first 5 books, and was dragging, so I jumped to the New Testament. Then, when I finished that, I went back and finished the rest of the Old Testament last Thursday. I simply took my lunch hour and read. Before, I would answer emails and phone calls, and sometimes nap. But I gave that up to read. And God really blessed me. He provided me mentors here at this church, and I feel closer to Him. Kim and I plugged in to church, and finally joined, and it’s been great. God sort of boiled it all down for me in Micah 6:8. It really is pretty simple. “*He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*”

Are good things keeping you from choosing God’s best? Remember the verse from last week. “*My determined purpose is that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him.*” (Phil 3:10).

What’s God given you to do that you haven’t done yet, because you’ve been too cluttered?

Remember Jesus said *“I glorified you God, I made you famous on earth, having accomplished the work which You have given me to do.”* John 17:4. That’s an uncluttered life. He could have done so much more, but He kept His ministry simple. And you know what the blessing is? Not more guilt, more contentment. Remember, joy is love completed. Love seen all the way through. Is there something you had in mind when you were young that you wanted to accomplish that would honor God? I know some was naivety, but some of that was good stuff. Can you de-clutter your life and get on with it?

This week, take time to simplify. Be still and know that God is God, and you are not. Are too many material possessions draining your energy? Unload ‘em. Especially the ones that take away your time, energy, and money. Do you own it, or does it own you? Are activities stealing time from those within your home? You’re going to cheat in life. The question is, are you going to cheat your family, or your work? Are you going where you want to go, or are you being blown around by every wind that comes your way? Who are you listening to? Simplify. Create margin in your life...time with God. God speaks most clearly in the margins.

Imagine what we could accomplish, imagine how we could live, imagine the focus we could have, imagine the lives we would touch, starting with our own, if we could master the discipline of simplicity?

Study Guide

Monday: Reread your sermon notes. Read 2 Corinthians 11:2-4. How does it make you feel that God would be jealous over you? Is there some other “Jesus” you’ve just put up with, or accepted into your life? Pray that God would clear away the clutter of that to reveal Himself and your true self.

Tuesday: Read Psalm 1. Notice there are 2 persons. Are you more like the tree firmly planted, or like the chaff: leftovers from the wheat that get blown away by the wind? Reread v.1-3. Notice the progression in v.1, from walking, to standing, to sitting. On your journey, are you moving forward, stopping to consider some choice, or sitting, mocking? Who are you listening to these days? Pray that God would open your eyes and ears to Him.

Wednesday: Read Philippians 3:7-11. Make a mental list of everything good in your life that you’ve considered a “win.” What is the most natural high you have ever experienced? Where were you? What were you doing? What clicked in for you at that moment? Now imagine that those are just the tiniest foretaste of what heaven will be like. Knowing that faith in Christ is how you receive even greater things, would you be willing to give all those things over, in order to know the greater power, fellowship, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Thursday: Reread Philippians 3:10-11. Yesterday we considered sharing in the power of the resurrection of Christ. But Paul also seeks to share in the suffering of Christ, becoming like Him in death. Pray for the suffering you endure for the sake of others. Can God give you perspective on this? Can you consider this a move toward Christ? Can you simplify your life in order to give more of it away? What can you drop right now? Ask God to just make you be done with it.

Friday: Read Revelation 2:1-5. Jesus has come to John, the last of the original 12 disciples, while John was in exile, persecuted for his faith. He has a special message to various churches. In this passage, John is writing Ephesus. They do many things very well. But they lost their first love. When you first discovered Christ’s love for you, what was that like? What happened since? Can you repent of the clutter, and seek Christ first once again? What do you need to drop now, and what do you need to take on now, in order to find the intimacy and closeness with Christ that He desires for you?