

simplify

52 weekly devotions

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Introduction

My life changed because of two teachers and one term paper. In the first semester of my first year of college, Professor Robin Johnston was teaching our class. All the freshmen guys were sitting there with starched white shirts and brand new briefcases. We were just one phone call away from preaching NAYC, and we wanted everyone to know it. The young ladies were dressed like it was the last night of youth camp. Every day could have been picture day during our freshman year.

All of us guys wanted to preach. We wanted to change the world through preaching. And preaching does change the world. But Professor Johnston said, “If you want to impact a generation, preach; if you want to impact generations, write.” That’s when I realized I wanted to preach and to write. But I didn’t know how to do either. Good thing I was in Bible college.

Four years later, I was in the last semester of my last year of college. We weren’t starching our white shirts as much, and I hadn’t seen my briefcase since sophomore year. I was writing a term paper for Hebrews class. Thanks to such a powerful book in the Bible and to a heavy dose of Mountain Dew, I

finished my paper on-time and handed it in. Just like my other classmates, I waited and worried to see my grade to be sure I was going to pass the class and graduate in just a few short weeks.

Professor Brickle called me in to talk to me about my paper. What did I do wrong? Did I accidentally write my Hebrews paper on Psalms? Did I forget my works cited page? Maybe I didn't use punctuation. Did I write the paper in wingdings? When the teacher wants to talk to you about a paper, it usually doesn't end well for the GPA. I swallowed hard and asked him what I could do. I was ready to rewrite.

He told me he wanted to submit my paper for publication to the *Forward* magazine. I was speechless. I stood there, mouth agape, thinking *Why would anyone read what I wrote?* But if he needed my blessing, blessing blessed. He submitted the article, the *Forward* graciously published it, and that was my first taste of writing.

That taste of writing gave me a love for writing, which brings us to this book, my first book. Within these pages, you will find fifty-two weekly devotions to encourage, hopefully inspire, and even challenge you in your relationship with God and with others. You will laugh, maybe cry, but I hope you will think. Think and pray as you read about how you can live out what you are reading. Each devotion begins with a Scripture verse or passage for you to read and apply to your life.

Since some of the devotions are arranged in calendar order, this book is best read beginning in the first week of the year. That way you will be reading about Easter in the spring and Christmas in the winter. I hope you enjoy reading as much as I enjoyed writing.

Thank you for inviting me to walk through the year with you as you walk through the year with God.

Week 1

Simplify

Matthew 11:28, KJV

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.*

I've got my notepad out. Got my name at the top right. I've numbered the list from one to five. Now I've got to fill in the blanks with my new New Year's resolutions. And this year, I've really given this a lot of thought. I thank God for last year, but I want to make this year a better year for my family and me. To do that, I've decided to try to make better resolutions this year than I did last year.

I was sitting at my desk a few days ago, thinking, mulling, pondering, wondering what I should resolve when it hit me like a ton of paper clips. As I stared at the flashing cursor on the bright white screen, something caught my eye. It wasn't even on the screen. It was beneath it.

A few months ago, my bride bought me a wooden, one-word placard that simply reads, “Simplify.” I had set that placard prominently on my desk, just below my computer screen. For months, that one-word placard has preached at me, but I ignored it. While it silently called me to simplify, I kept adding responsibilities like a bricklayer adding another layer of bricks. Despite my stubbornness, that placard faithfully called me to the altar of simple. And for months, I saw it, smiled at it, and then rushed out the door to cram more into my day than I had time to get done.

I went about to multitask, starting one project before finishing another, working before and after time to work, working at work, working at home, in the car, at the red light. And scheduling more on the calendar than there was space on the calendar. After all, isn’t that why the good Lord created margins?

But dare I say, not this year. At least, not in the first two months. And by the grace of God, He will help me keep this one resolution for the entire twelve months. For years, I’ve prided myself on being able to work on more than one thing at a time. But Reverend Simplify is calling me to simplify. One thing at a time.

I used to sneak in some work emails at home, but Reverend Simplify is calling me to simplify. Give him my laptop and give my family my attention at home. There have even been times I’ve left the prayer room at church or my prayer closet at home to do some “important” church work. But Reverend Simplify is putting the kibosh on that, too. It’s not just Reverend Simplify, though. It’s really Jesus.

I used to convince myself that doing my Father’s business

was as important as spending time with my Father, but God is helping me realize that's not true. Not even a little bit. So to draw closer to God this year, I'm going to simplify. I'm going to make sure I spend the time to walk with God before I spend the time to work for God.

I know what some of you are thinking. I know how resolutions work, too. Make them in December, keep them in January, forget them in February, and hope for the best next year. But in order to keep this one simple resolution, I'm going to need your help. If you see me trying to get more done than there is time to get it done, simply tell me, "Simplify." If you see me working when I should be resting, simply tell me, "Simplify." And if you ever see me doing my Father's business but ignoring my Father, please remind me of what I wrote and resolved. Remind me to simplify.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the privilege to start anew every day. Thank You for Your mercies which are new every morning. Help every one of us to simplify our lives. Help us to be good stewards of our time and to give our best to You and to our families. Give us the wisdom to know when to rest and the courage to rest. And may our best rest be found in Your presence. In Jesus' name, amen.