

# Renewal Through Simplicity

In the rhythm of life, there's a profound cadence in the seasons that echoes the Creator's wisdom—a cadence of dormancy in the gray shades of winter leading to renewal painted in the hues of spring. As we witness nature shedding its deadening shell of winter frost and embracing the warmth of new life in spring, we are drawn into a parallel narrative of our own inner renewal of spirit. There is a spiritual significance to the seasons that reminds us that just as winter is critical for spring, so is the necessity of death for life.

## DEATH LEADING TO LIFE

As rightly as we might associate winter with death, we would do well to remember that it doesn't have the final word – the story doesn't end there. There is a purpose to it - it is leading somewhere. The death of winter leads to the life of spring. Much like the death of a seed is necessary to the blossoming of a flower (*John 12:24*), it's in the very act of letting go, in the surrender to a form of death, that life bursts forth in abundance. We can read plainly that Jesus' invitation to anyone who would become his disciple was precisely this, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*" (*Matt 16:24-25*) In Jesus's view, it is dying that leads to life that is life indeed.

C. S. Lewis is one of the voices that remind us that the invitation to die is really the invitation to life. Consider what he says about self-denial in the opening words of his famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory":

If you asked twenty good [persons] today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you had asked almost any of the great Christians of old [they] would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has a lot to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself.

Enter the teachings of the Apostle Paul, who beckons us to a transformative liveliness through "*putting off the old and putting on the new.*" (*Eph 4:22-24*) Here we see again the cadence of spiritual renewal prescribed as we heed Paul's call to shed the old, not so we can be proud of our selflessness, but in order to create space for newness of life lived in love towards God and love towards others. We must face an inward winter – an inward death – to experience a spring awakening – an outward life of love.

But here's the problem, more than at any point in history, we are living in a society filled with distractions and desires that would certainly hinder one's ability to prioritize and live in alignment with Jesus' call to pick up our crosses and follow him. We must find ways to effectively deal with the overwhelming burden of a life entangled with the multitude of distractions presented to us in today's culture.

## UNDERSTANDING SIMPLICITY

Here's where the spiritual discipline of Simplicity can be especially helpful. Through simplicity, we follow the model set by our Lord, refraining from consuming our resources—be it time or money or goods—in ways that merely satisfy our cravings for status, glamour, or luxury. Practicing simplicity leads us to stay within the boundaries set by wise discernment, ensuring that our decisions resonate with what is considered necessary for the life into which God has led us.

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By embracing this discipline, in cooperation with the Holy Ghost, we “put to death” the various, suffocating distractions that keep us from a renewal of life. Simplicity is the winter to the awaiting spring helping us to focus more fully on essential aspects of our calling before God such as “*doing justice, showing mercy, walking humbly with God*” (*Micah 6:8*), and concentrating on the “*one thing needful*” referenced in *Luke 10:42*, living at the feet of Jesus.

## **PRACTICING SIMPLICITY**

Simplicity is not merely owning less or adhering to a minimalist life but it’s about a deliberate removal of the many distractions that clutter our lives, blur our focus of what really matters, and inhibit communion with God.

Below is a list of just a few ways to practice simplicity. These are not commands but are simply meant to be used insofar as they are helpful in your walk of faith.

- Simplify your schedule. Have a close look at the various things and activities that add unnecessary difficulty, complexity, and confusion to your life. With the help of your close Christ-following community, discern which of these can be laid aside.
- Prioritize relationships. First, invest time in your relationship to God, and then, focus on building and nurturing meaningful relationships that flow from loving God above all else.
- Downsize your belongings. Assess which possessions help you to love God and others more fully, and which inhibit that. Sacrifice the things that steal you away from God and other people.
- Buy less. Practice intentional and responsible consumption. Consider how your purchases align with your goal of growing in Christlikeness or splinter your attention to that goal.

Through the discipline of simplicity, we strip away the unnecessary, then clarity emerges from the fog of life, focus sharpens like the first rays of spring sunlight, and love, unburdened by distractions, flows freely toward God and others. Simplicity becomes the pathway to a profound springtime in our souls as we create space for a deeper connection and confidence in God.

## **SIMPLICITY IN COMMUNITY**

But anyone who has followed Jesus for very long knows that we cannot do it alone. The same goes for following Jesus in his lifestyle of simplicity. As we practice simplicity, we will stumble and fall badly, and we will need others to pick us back up, remind us of our purpose in life, and guide us towards what is true and good. We need to surround ourselves with people who have dedicated their lives to learning to love God and love people (as themselves) above all else. Then, in fellowship with them, we find role-models, counselors, and mentors who will be able to help us live out consecrated, simple lives as we pursue our renewal in God.

## **SPIRITUAL SPRING**

Just as the earth bursts forth with life in spring, our spirits blossom when we shed the old and embrace the simplicity that brings a focus to our lives lived before God in every aspect. And this sort of life, yielded to God alone, is one where the transformative work of the Holy Ghost conforms us to Christ to display his love and generosity to the world around us (*Rom 12:2, Gal 2:20*).