

A Simply Beautiful Life

Living Healthy, Responsible, Productive Lives for God's Glory

Voluntary simplicity, or minimalism, helps people reduce consumption and invest in what really matters. Research has established that minimalism predicts higher levels of happiness. This effect seems to be mediated by the fact that as people reduce consumption, they focus on psychological, relational, and spiritual growth.¹

The Bible calls us to voluntary simplicity, or what we might call simple beauty, in three main areas:

- Simply beautiful *dress*
- Simply beautiful *recreation*
- Simply beautiful *diet*

Let's consider them, one at a time.

Dress

God made humans beautiful. The more we can peel away the layers to let that beauty shine through, the better. Yet the fashion industry does what all advertising does—convinces us there's something wrong with us in order to sell us a fix. Commercial fashion instills, and then capitalizes on, a sense of inferiority.

During Isaiah's time, God condemned dressing ornately to lord it over the poor (See Isaiah 3:14-24). What would He think today of the practice of pouring inordinate amounts of resources to keep up with fashion? Clothes, cars, homes—all these things can be presented tastefully and with quality in mind, or with an eye to glorifying self.

Peter said:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 1 Peter 3:3-4

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/traversmark/2021/11/01/a-new-study-praises-the-psychology-underlying-the-minimalism-movement/?sh=1ec6da2c26d8>

Our excess might be shared with the world's poor, and with building up the kingdom of God. Time, energy, and money spent on prideful display are forms of needless consumption. This contributes to what Paul called being "entangled. . . with the affairs of this life" (See 2 Timothy 2:4).

Notice that God commanded the removal of jewelry in response to sin, such as after the worship of the golden calf (See Exodus 33:4-6). This practice was formalized during the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, observed once a year, when all Israel would "afflict their souls," with fasting, abstaining from work, and the removal of jewelry (See Leviticus 23). During this modern Day of Atonement, God calls His children to the putting aside of all distractions and diversions, and the embracing of lives of simple beauty.

Recreation

Another way in which we can simplify our lives is through the wholesome use of free time. Many seem obsessed with finding one diversion after another to fill up the empty hours.

Entertainment addiction is almost identical to substance addiction. It:

- creates predictable, reliable sensations
- becomes the primary focus, absorbing attention
- temporarily eradicates pain and other negative sensations
- provides an artificial sense of pride, power, control, intimacy, and accomplishment
- exacerbates the problems and feelings it seeks to remedy
- worsens functioning, creating loss of relationship.

Unhealthy media produces a "high." For a time, we forget our pain and our problems. But in reality our problems are worsening even as we enjoy the "high." Consider these facts:

- The Monday after the Super Bowl costs employers up to three billion in lost work productivity.²
- In 2019 the World Health Organization recognized "gaming disorder" as a mental health condition. It was added to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) in 2022. Up to 1% of the general population suffers from it.³
- In a study of a mountain village that had no television until cable finally arrived, the populous subsequently became less creative at problem solving, less able to persevere at tasks, and less tolerant of unstructured time.⁴

² <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/01/the-monday-after-the-super-bowl-could-cost-employers-3-billion-heres-why.html>

³ <https://gamequitters.com/video-game-addiction-statistics/>

⁴ Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi,(2003). Television addiction is no mere metaphor. *Scientific American*, February 2002.

- Over 210 million people worldwide are thought to have social media addiction—about 4.6% of total users. The situation worsens to 15% with the 23-38 age range. Seven out of 10 teens who use social media for more than five hours a day have a significantly greater risk of committing suicide.⁵

As a rule these diversions arouse and stimulate, but leave us feeling dissatisfied. Contrast this with wholesome recreation which leaves us feeling invigorated—nature excursions, recreational sports, social interaction, and wholesome hobbies.

The wise man said, “Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble” (Proverbs 15:16). In our fevered pursuit of stimulation, do we have time left for what really matters?

Diet

In recent years the facts about lifestyle-related diseases have gradually trickled into the media. We’ve learned that a high animal fat diet contributes to obesity, heart disease, and cancer. Obesity in turn contributes to these diseases as a separate factor. Excessive sugar correlates with, and worsens, diabetes. Spread across the table, the facts start to look like a spider’s web of sticky primary and secondary causes that entrap the unsuspecting.

Some think of spirituality as separate from earthly, physical existence. But true spirituality embraces our physicality, managing it responsibly. John said, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2). Notice that our spiritual life and our health grow in proportion to each other.

The apostle issued a very severe warning against self-destructive habits: “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). We have been “bought with a price,” (vs. 20). God calls us to self-care as an act of stewardship and worship.

The good news is that the simple health care plan laid out in Scripture will, if followed, tend to shield us from popular “plagues.” God promised the Israelites, “I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians” (Exodus 15:26). That promise applies to us today.

The Bible says that our bodies are the “temple” of the Holy Spirit—that God’s Spirit actually inhabits us (See 1 Corinthians 6:19). If a dignitary came to your home, would you clean it? How much more if God Himself came to visit in the Person of the Holy Spirit?

Here is a boil-down of God’s counsel regarding what we put in our body-temples.

⁵ <https://www.searchlogistics.com/grow/statistics/social-media-addiction-statistics/>

Eat Plants

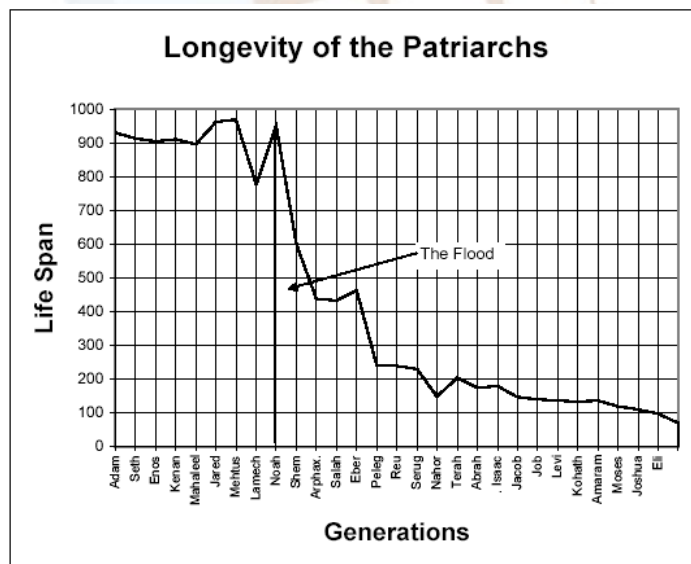
When the prophet Daniel and his three friends entered the courts of Babylon as student-slaves, King Nebuchadnezzar supplied them with Babylon’s luxurious food and wine. Daniel, we’re told, “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8). The young Hebrew arranged with their supervisor to provide a vegetarian diet. Then he was to observe their health and strength. After 10 days, King Nebuchadnezzar interviewed the young men, finding them to be the magna cum laudes of their graduating class, with “knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom” (Daniel 1:17).

This breakthrough was possible because of a plant-based diet!

Those Jewish boys knew God’s Edenic diet. It included “herb that yields seed” and “fruit [which] yields seed” (Genesis 1:29). This is basically a diet of fruits, nuts and grains. After the fall, God added “the herb of the field” (Genesis 3:18). The addition of sodium-rich vegetables was necessary because labor after the fall produced “sweat” (vs. 19).

How does a plant-based diet affect health? Ask your bowels. Humans’ long, convoluted digestive track indicates a need for a high-fiber diet that moves food along efficiently. Because of its length and the millions of villi that cover its surface, it calls for a less concentrated diet than carnivore animals, who have very straight, stovepipe-like bowels.

It was only after all the vegetation had been washed off the face of the earth by the flood that God said, “every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” (vs. 3). Meat was given as an emergency diet for a non-agrarian people. But notice that the life span decreased radically after the addition of meat. This confirms the findings of contemporary science, which indicate that high animal food consumption causes heart disease, cancer and other lifestyle-related diseases.



The Bible specifies that only clean animals should be eaten (Leviticus 3:17 & 11:47). Contemporary science bears out these restrictions, carefully listed in the Mosaic law, showing that the biblically unclean animals indeed carry more disease. For instance, the law says that animals with fins and scales are clean. Dr. Bruce Hallsted from Loma Linda University was asked by the government to do research for the military to determine which fish were safe for shipwrecked and stranded servicemen. After his research, Dr. Hallsted said that the “rule of thumb” for safe fish could be found in Deuteronomy 14:9, “These you may eat of all that are in the waters: you may eat all that have fins and scales.”

Drink New Wine

We’d all be better off if no one drank alcohol. Half of automobile accident fatalities and homicides involve alcohol. The Centers for Disease Control blames 140,000 deaths per year on alcohol,⁶ greater than the number of deaths than from all illicit drugs combined.⁷ The reason alcohol is so much more harmful is not because it is inherently the most addictive or destructive drug. Crack cocaine and methamphetamine top that list. But alcohol use destroys more lives simply because it is legal and socially accepted, therefore more prevalent.

Please don’t say you need wine for your heart. You can get all the heart-protecting resveratrol you need by simply drinking a glass of purple grape juice, called “new wine.”⁸ God provides all the benefits we might receive from alcohol in an abundance of fruit.

While moderation is preferable to excessive alcohol consumption, a moral case can be made easily for the teetotaling life. Alcoholism is a disease, the tendency of which is genetically and environmentally inherited. Perhaps we don’t have the tendency and will be able to avoid alcohol addiction. But we may set an example for someone who is far weaker, and that person may succumb. We must also consider that with each drink, we contribute to an industry that is bringing untold devastation upon the world. We are told, “Rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).

Artificial stimulation of the brain causes compromised function in the frontal lobe of the cerebral cortex. The forebrain houses the conscience, reason, and spirituality. It is the avenue through which God reaches us and communicates His message of love. Once we compromise that forebrain, we can’t hear His voice to us. The deceitfulness of alcohol makes it necessary for God to speak in very plain terms about it, and this is why He says, “Thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:10).

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/features/excessive-alcohol-deaths.html#:~:text=Excessive%20alcohol%20use%20is%20responsible,years%20of%20potential%20life%20lost.>

⁷ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/202205.htm

⁸ See <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/food-and-nutrition/AN00576>

Breath Fresh Air

What about smoking? While medical science has proven beyond a doubt that it is deadly, tobacco is still one of the leading causes of preventable death in our world today. Smoking causes over 480,320 deaths of the 2,854,838 deaths from all causes. That's well over 15% of all deaths!⁹

God created our lungs for pure air. Yes, pollution fills our skies, but God has mercifully installed an efficient filtration system in the trees, which remove particulate matter from the air. We do well to find a park in which to exercise several times a week. Walking for half an hour, posture erect, shoulders back, swinging the arms, exercises every muscle in the body.

Another fresh air hack is deep, slow breathing. When we become anxious, we breath fast and shallow. Slowing and deepening our breathing reverses our stress sequaleae and calms the brain. Daily meditation incorporating deep breathing can improve brain function and emotional regulation. When stressed, take a few deep breaths!

The Takeaway

In making healthy changes, God has promised to, “work in [us] both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Through the grace and power of Jesus we can simplify our dress, recreation, and diet; we can eat, drink, and breath to the glory of God. Thus our lives will be simply beautiful.

Quiz

1. Another word for minimalism is voluntary _____.
2. God calls us to simplicity in _____, _____, and _____.
3. God's people would lay off their jewelry during the _____.
4. Another way in which we can simplify our lives is through the wholesome use of _____ time.
5. The wise man said, “Better is a _____ with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble” (Proverbs 15:16).
6. The ideal diet is _____-based.
7. Half of homicides and half of traffic fatalities involve _____.
8. Smoking causes over _____% of all deaths.

⁹ https://www.drugpolicyfacts.org/chapter/causes_of_death#overlay=table/deathtable

Answer Key

1. Simplicity
2. Dress, recreation, and diet
3. Day of Atonement
4. Free
5. Little
6. Plant
7. Alcohol
8. 15

