

Holy Simplicity: Clearing Away What Distracts, Burdens, or Falsely Defines Us So We Can Live More Freely (In the Home & In The Soul), Part 1

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Hi, I'm Katie Sciba. Welcome to The Pray More Healing Retreat. In this series, we are going to discuss what I call holy simplicity, the practice of clearing away what distracts, burdens, or falsely defines us, so we can live more freely in our vocation and more deeply in the love of God. When we talk about healing, we often first think of wounds or relationships, or memories, suffering, and rightly so. But sometimes healing also requires us to look at the things that we've allowed to slowly crowd our lives, our homes, and our calendars, all distracting us from who we are and the life God is asking of us.

An Experience To Start Holy Simplicity

These points of needless excess are external signs of an interior reality that point to a soul wearied or overwhelmed. For me, it has been an experience that began with trying to fit our growing family into a small house, but yielded a crystal clear understanding of what the Lord was asking my own soul. Holy simplicity is not about owning or doing less for the sake of less. It's not an aesthetic or a trend, but a divine call. It's about making room for God and asking, "What belongs in my life because it serves my vocation? And what is keeping me from peace, freedom, and love?"

I think you'll find the connection between material excess and spiritual distraction surprisingly tight. And as I said, we were trying to fit our growing family into a small house. In 2012, my husband and I found out we were expecting child number three. We were so excited. We had a family of four in a 1,200-square-foot home in Louisiana, which meant no basement. And our home was also vintage. So that meant that there was very little storage.

When we announced to friends and family that we were expecting, one of the very first questions we received was, "When are y'all moving?" And I immediately panicked because that had not occurred to me. My husband and I at the time had discerned that he would be the primary breadwinner, and I would stay at home with our children. So a move was not financially possible. And so I thought, "If this is the home the Lord provides for us, then we are going to do our utmost to steward this provision." I rolled up my sleeves, and I was fueled by nesting hormones. And I methodically went room by room, steadily ridding each corner of stuff that was just going unused, it was obsolete.

One of the first things I gave away was our microwave. We had this tiny, poky kitchen that also featured the washer and dryer. So that meant our behemoth microwave was taking up prime real estate. We were giving it away. And on the exact day that we were partying with it, my friend and neighbor said that hers had broken, and she needed a new one. I experienced a disproportionately huge thrill in filling someone else's need with something I didn't even

want anymore. I realized concretely the truth that people are for love and stuff is for use, and that God could use me to be a conduit of His provision while I was simultaneously working to steward the home He provided our family.

When I finished going through our home that first time, and I felt, "Oh, man, we are ready for this baby. We're ready to go." Our home felt lighter. We weren't stepping around or over extra stuff. Our children, our toddler boys, were happier and more content. And we began easily parting with things that we had previously kept just in case, or that we were holding onto with too tight a grasp. The goal was to shift a house that was too small into a house that was accommodating and a joy to be in. That became our reference point while I was ridding our lives of excess.

But years later, I learned to weigh acquiring stuff against more important goals, like hospitality toward my own family, peace of mind, and joy in my own space, and even a greater ability to receive and reflect the Lord. Our homes, where we live, hold the potential for being a retreat, a place of peace and restoration, where we abide with God and He with us. They should not be points of tension or places that stress us out. Similarly, holy simplicity is relevant to the soul, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This brings us to our new reference point, something well beyond the already wonderful feeling of a lighter home or a freed-up schedule. In holy simplicity, we keep the Lord's particular will for our lives as a reference point. Whatever distracts from it leaves, while the possessions and time commitments that contribute to it get to stay. This means that God's will takes center stage, and we entrust Him with the whole of our lives, holding all things with an open hand and allowing Him to work in and through us.

Laying the Foundation

As we progress in further understanding and desire for simplicity, we will move through four steps. The first is laying a foundation. We will identify the purpose. What is the purpose of a given space? What is your own identity? In the second step, we will clear the trash. This is the stuff that very obviously has to go and is in clear conflict with our original purpose. Step three is that we are going to remove that which doesn't contribute to the use of the space. And finally, step four is that we cultivate the purpose of this space, or within ourselves, we cultivate our fiat.

So before we begin clearing anything away, we have to lay this foundation from step one, identifying the purpose. The fruit of this step is going to be clarity. In addition to being a speaker, I am a simplicity consultant. Clients invite me into their homes and lives to identify distractions and make way for greater peace and holiness. When I help someone approach a physical space that's overrun with excess stuff, we don't begin by asking, "What should go?" We begin by asking, "What is this space for?"

A kitchen, for example, has a purpose. A bedroom has a purpose, a living room. And once that purpose is clear, it becomes much easier to recognize what belongs, what serves, and what is simply taking up space. This principle reaches more deeply than our homes and also applies to the soul. Before we can recognize what is cluttering our hearts, our schedules, our expectations, or relationships, we have to remember our own identity, who we are, whose we

are, and what we are made to be. Because when we lose sight of that, we lose the ability to discern what truly belongs in our lives. That's where we'll begin this first talk. My clients range from individuals to whole families to clergy.

A Need For A Clear Definition

In one instance, I was working with a family who, in our first session, was giving me a tour of their home. Every room had a job, a purpose to serve that was clear and established, until we reached a space that they presented as multipurpose. This room had become a catchall for books, laundry, keys, shoes, toys, important documents. All of this was on a built-in desk in the kitchen. The husband and wife instantly pointed to this as a pain point, and offered a collective shrug when trying to solve the overwhelm of the space. The problem is that the area didn't have just one clearly defined job.

I'm not the biggest fan of multipurpose spaces. Without clear definitions of function, a space loses true function altogether, eventually failing to be of service and evolving into a space to avoid. Once my clients decided concretely what the objective of the spot was, choosing what stayed and what went from it was easy.

This same reality applies beautifully to the soul. Follow me for a minute. Genesis 1 is the creation of man. The Lord who fashioned all things chose to make humanity alone after His own image and likeness. We indicate God's presence by our very being, and are made for, one, deep connection with Him, and two, to offer Him to others. Not only are we image bearers of the Lord, but also, as St. Paul tells us in Romans, we are adopted sons and daughters. We have received a spirit of sonship, making us co-heirs of God with Christ.

It makes me think of the father and the prodigal son, who says so beautifully, "Everything I have is yours." These two scriptures indicate that we are made to receive God, to be intimately close to Him, and that who we are is inseparable from Christ. Our purpose is to remain as close to Jesus as possible, and to be conduits of His mercy and love. On a closer scale, each of us was created intentionally from infinite love and wisdom to be that conduit in a particular way. St. Francis de Sales said, "God has placed us in this life to fill a special need that no one else can accomplish." And this is true as long as we still have breath in our lungs.

We don't have to wait to do God's will for our lives, nor do we look back and say that, "The great call of our lives is over." The enemy would have us distracted, questioning and doubting this reality. Consider Christ's temptation in the desert. Satan went right after the Lord's identity, stating, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread." He was attempting to get Jesus to question who he is in relation to the Father, right after the baptism in the Jordan, when the Father had just declared from heaven that Jesus was His beloved Son. Satan was also tempting our Lord to become self-reliant. When working against us, Satan will begin with our divinely given identity. He did the same with Eve, telling her that eating the forbidden fruit would make her more like God. But made in the image and likeness, Eve already was like God. Still, tempting her with a thing of this world, Satan went after who Eve was, a tactic he still uses against each of us.

Identifying The Purpose

Think of how much our material possessions or how we spend our time instructs our understanding of ourselves. It's a deeply ingrained habit, to place our value and identity into what we own, what we drive, where we live, so much so that we forget that the truest thing about ourselves is that we belong to God. So what does all of this look like practically?

Taking this first step in holy simplicity is identifying the purpose of both a space and of your own soul. And in so doing, experience the clarity that definition can't afford. The first piece of this is prayer. Pray for clarity to see yourself as inseparable from your own creator, for the grace to recognize that you are deeply known and loved. To offer the love of Christ, we must first receive it. The second is to look to your vocation. Whether you're married, religious, clergy, or even in a place of discernment, your task is to do the best impression of Jesus in the direction of those in your care.

I'm so excited to begin this process with you. And I'm looking forward to the renewal and peace that are just within your grasp. A space cannot be reclaimed and organized until its purpose is identified, neither can a life. Holy simplicity begins by remembering you are beloved by God and meant to love as He loves. And everything in your life is meant to serve that deeper truth.

Next time, we'll begin looking at what clearly does not serve that purpose. We'll talk about clearing the trash physically, spiritually, and emotionally, so we can make room for what is good and true and life-giving. For now, let's ask the Lord for the grace to see ourselves and our lives according to His purpose. Echoing the words of Mary, who praised God for her greatest blessings, let's pray.

Closing Prayer

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day, all generations will call me blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His name. He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation. He has shown the strength of His arm. He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich has sent away empty. He has come to the help of His servant Israel, for He has remembered His promise of mercy, the promise He made to our fathers, to Abraham and His children forever.

Thank you for joining me. Be at peace.