

Holy Simplicity: Clearing Away What Distracts, Burdens, or Falsely Defines Us So We Can Live More Freely (In the Home & In The Soul), Part 3

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Hey there. As we begin this third session, let's take a sec to recall where we've been so far. In John 10:10, the Lord said, "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." In Holy Simplicity, we understand that the abundant life starts with less. Less stuff, noise, and more focus on the Lord and His loving call to each of us. Holy Simplicity is the practice of clearing away what distracts or burdens or falsely defines us, so we can live more freely in our vocation and more deeply in the love of God. This work is restorative, practically and spiritually. It can touch every aspect of our lives.

Removing What Does Not Contribute

In the first step, we talked about identifying purpose. When we enter a physical space to clear it out, the first question is, what is this space for? Because once we know the purpose, we can understand what belongs, what helps it function, and what might be working against it. The same is true of the soul. In the second step, we talked about clearing the trash, removing what's broken, expired, or obviously working against the Lord's call in our lives. When we clear away the trash, a room's function and beauty begin to return. When we present ourselves to the Lord in confession, we are made new. But we're not finished yet. Once the trash is gone, we're left with a quieter question and often a more discerning one. What remains here? And does it actually contribute to the purpose of the space? This is where we will begin this third step, removing what doesn't contribute.

Sometimes the things cluttering our homes are not bad. They're items without a proper place. Things we have in excess or belongings from a season of life that is complete. This is where we become more discerning. A stack of important papers may genuinely matter. You might need those, but if it lives permanently on the kitchen counter, it might be working against the efficiency of the kitchen and stressing you out every time you glance at it. A pile of project supplies may represent great ideas and big plans, but if it occupies a space where it doesn't belong, it impedes the purpose of the room. The item itself might be good, but that doesn't mean it belongs there. Imagine you are standing in your kitchen. You've already identified its purpose, preparing food, nourishing the family, gathering conversation. Then you cleared the junk, the expired food, empty packages, the lids that don't match anything. The kitchen already feels better. You can see more of the counter. You can open a drawer more easily. But then comes the next layer.

Now you look at what remains and ask, does this contribute to the purpose of the kitchen? Am I using this? The answer won't be the same for every household. For one person, a large collection of baking supplies might actually contribute if baking is a passion. For a family, the same amount might sit unused for years. For a person, a super abundance of books may

be fitting for his lifestyle. And for another, it may be a monument to an imagined version of himself. The version who intends to read more, but just can't right now. Purpose paired with use is a very telling combination. We can ask, "Does this contribute? Am I using it?" In every room. In a bedroom, the purpose is usually rest, renewal, and peace. The bed contributes soft lighting, beauty, clothing storage. But piles of paper, laundry overflow, a screen that keeps us doom scrolling late into the night, these don't. And when these things live in the bedroom, they speak the language of work, pressure, and guilt in a space that's meant to offer rest.

The unused excess in any space or any soul becomes overstimulating. A cluttered kitchen could convey that you're behind. A chaotic bedroom says you can't really rest. A table covered in piles says there's no place to sit. However, we know our homes are lived in. They're not showrooms. But when a space is so full of things that don't contribute to its purpose, the life meant to happen there becomes harder. It's harder to cook, rest, think.

A Process of Pruning

So step three invites us to look with honesty and gentleness at what remains, free of shame or harsh judgment. And just ask simply, does this contribute? Am I using it? If it does, keep it. If it doesn't, we have options. First, you could put it where it belongs. I'm thinking of the time a client and I found forks in a few bedrooms. They just needed to go back to the kitchen. Another option is to thin out the quantity of the item.

One client discovered eight paring knives in a single drawer and had no idea how he had acquired so many. You could also donate it. One client was holding onto a brand new sweater he didn't even care for. "Let it go," I told him. "That's someone else's sweater." All of these things are a little more easily said than done though. And this is the most challenging aspect of Holy Simplicity, detachment, but it is so life-giving.

A few summers ago, my neighbor's rose bushes grew from a nice landscaping accent to wildly overgrown almost overnight. The lateral canes were sprouting and they were so heavy that they weighed the whole plant down. And blooms were delayed because the plant was stressed and it couldn't produce. When they trimmed the bushes back, two days later, buds were forming. Two weeks later, each bush had exploded in roses. Clinical psychologist Dr. Henry Cloud spoke to this exact thing saying, "It turns out that a rose bush, like many other plants, cannot reach its full potential without a very systematic process of pruning."

Our lives are not any different. Cutting away what weighs us down can be difficult, even painful, but it is incredibly freeing. Many of the things we hesitate to let go of are tied to a weight. Anxiety, guilt, or identities, or a memory, or an imagined future. Step three requires gentleness because we're not just evaluating objects, we're often encountering the reasons why we became attached to them. So let's handle some of these harder questions. In my work as a simplicity consultant, the questions that come up the most often aren't logistical ones, they're emotional ones.

Examples of Objections

People hold something they haven't touched in years and suddenly feel the full weight of what it means to let that go. So let's walk through some of the objections I hear the most. Number one, "I might be able to use this someday." In this process, we're not questioning the goodness of the item. We're asking whether we're actively using it. If the answer is no, but you're still hesitant to part with it, set it aside for a defined period. If it remains untouched after that expiration date, let it go. Your life will feel no different. Objection two, "This was expensive."

We don't owe anything to our possessions. The injustice isn't in the money that was spent, it's in the fact that your home continues to house something that isn't earning its keep. In the beginning of this process, when momentum matters, I encourage giving away even high value items instead of selling them. It is a joy to be a conduit of the Lord's generosity to someone who would appreciate the item far more. The third objection is, "But this was a gift." You can part with a gift while still cherishing the giver. Once a gift is given, it is 100% yours to do with as you will. If you're not using it, continue the line of giving by passing it on. The fourth objection is that "It belonged to someone I love."

When my dad passed away in 2013, my immediate temptation was to keep everything he touched. But in time, I saw that just a few items fit within the scope of my own life. The things of his I keep now are ones I use regularly. A coffee mug, a t-shirt, and then we have on our wall a decorative antique rifle he worked hard to restore. Frequent use of each item prompts me to remember and pray for my dad. And this happens far more than if any of these things were in a box under my bed.

The next objection is, "This represents who I used to be or who I want to be." I once knew someone who had collected an impressive amount of camping gear. Tents, sleeping bags, cooking equipment, backpacks. Listen, camping is glorious. But when he looked honestly at his life, he realized that camping was not something he was actually doing. His work, his responsibilities, the real demands of his vocation didn't leave room for it. The gear was quietly beckoning his mind toward an alternate reality.

So the question became, does this still serve my vocation, my real life before God right now? He gave the whole collection to a family just starting their camping adventures and they were overjoyed. Sometimes we're not holding onto things because we use them, we're holding on because they represent an imagined self. If this sounds familiar, I invite you to recognize the good desire. Release the burden and make room for the actual vocation God has trusted to you. Letting things go releases so much more than material excess. It frees us to accept ourselves and our lives as they are right now.

Reviewing Our Attachments

Let's see how this looks for spiritual matters. Once we remember the purpose of the soul, that we belong to God, that we are made for communion with Him, called to love Him and to love the people He's given to us, we can begin to ask whether the things that fill our lives are helping us live that identity. Or whether they're working against it. This should be approached with tenderness because, just as the things cluttering our homes are not always trash, the things overwhelming our lives are not always sinful or obviously destructive. Very often, they are good things. Commitments we accepted with generosity, projects started with enthusiasm, or dreams that at one point seemed to belong very naturally in our lives. And yet the question is not only, is this good? Sometimes the more honest question is, does this contribute to the life God is asking me to live now?

Something may have belonged in a former season and may not belong with this one. And that could be difficult to admit. A volunteer role might be genuinely good, but if it distracts from a marriage in need of more attention, it could be counterproductive to holiness. A hobby may be good, and yet if it has become an escape from the duties of vocation, it may need to be reordered. A standard I hold for myself may sound noble, but if it's actually driven by pride or fear, it's not contributing to holiness.

Anything that prevents me from receiving the life God is actually giving me can be entrusted back to Him for clarity and courage. The Lord who loves every detail of your life is trustworthy and He sees the whole of your soul. I had a spiritual director years ago who, seeing my attachments pretty obviously, prescribed me the Litany of Trust, which I highly recommend. Just a few lines in, I was literally brought to my knees. Lines like, "From the fear that trusting you will leave me destitute, deliver me Jesus. From the rebellion of childlike dependence on you, deliver me Jesus."

Those lines hit me right to the heart. This is where the Litany of Trust becomes so powerful, this whole prayer, because so many of the things we're afraid to let go of are rooted in fear. If I let go of this opportunity, will God provide another? If I step back from this role, will I still matter? If I stop trying to control every outcome, will God really take care of what I can't? The litany of trust gives language to those hidden fears. It helps us pray not only, "Lord, help me let go," but, "Jesus, I trust you with what comes after." The real struggle is rarely with an object itself, the commitment itself or the dream. It's with entrusting the future to God.

We may be willing to release something in theory, but we want a guarantee first, to know that God will give in its place, that the sacrifice will make sense. And that the empty space won't stay empty. Holy Simplicity asks us to trust the Lord, not only with what we keep, but with what we release.

Two Priests And Baseball

One of my favorite examples of this is what I call a tale of two priests. Both men grew up with baseball as their first love, from childhood years well into adulthood. Each in turn heard God's call to the priesthood and in answering needed to detach from baseball in order to fully submit to their vocations. This was a call for radical trust in a loving God who gives and takes according to his infinite wisdom.

Father Martin gave baseball over to the Lord completely, letting the door close on games and following stats and a handful of ESPN subscriptions. Weeks later, he was called to anoint a parishioner in the hospital. Making conversation, the patient asked about the World Series. But Father Martin had been so happily invested, so steeped in his work as an associate pastor that he didn't even realize the World Series was going on. And he was at peace. Father Masters also handed over his love of the game, fully accepting that he might never be involved in baseball again.

The Lord accepted that sacrifice, blessed it and returned it. Father Masters became the Chaplain of the Chicago Cubs, ministering to the souls of players from a place of deep understanding for baseball. On the surface, these seem like opposite outcomes. One priest got to keep baseball while the other one let it go. But what happened was the same. Each man entrusted the entirety of his heart to the Lord, baseball included, and in return received life-giving peace. Holy Simplicity is very personal because many of the things we carry are tied not only to our schedules or possessions, but to our identities.

Sometimes without realizing it, we can build an entire life around something other than our vocations. Holy Simplicity interrupts that, but gently. It begins with identity and purpose. And then asking, does this help me live the life God is actually asking of me? If it doesn't, we ask the Lord for the grace to let it go. Sometimes that means repentance and confession. It might mean making a boundary, stepping back from a commitment, or allowing an old dream to be entrusted to God. Sometimes it means forgiving someone or grieving something honestly, instead of continuing to carry it in a hidden and heavy way.

Asking The Lord for Clarity

This is one of the reasons Holy Simplicity is so connected so deeply to healing. What we hold onto usually tells us something about what we're afraid to face. Control is usually fear in disguise. Perfectionism is just the dread of being criticized. Over busyness can be a way of avoiding silence or what silence asks us to experience. And sometimes the stuff and the commitments and the versions of ourselves we can't seem to let go of, these are held in place by a misplaced identity.

When we begin to receive our identity from the Lord, we begin to release what does not belong. So in this third step, we ask the Lord for light, to show us what contributes to the purpose of our lives and what doesn't, what helps us live our vocation with love, peace, and freedom. And then we ask for the courage to remove what prevents our rosebush from blooming. The Lord said, "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly."

Holy Simplicity helps us ask with honesty and hope, what is crowding that abundant life? What am I keeping that doesn't contribute to the life God is inviting me? And as we begin to remove those things, little by little, we begin to see the shape of our vocation and the beauty of the life God is actually giving us. As we close this third step, let's return to the heart of what we're doing. We're seeking right order and asking God for restoration.

We entrust our homes, our time, the entirety of our lives to him, and ask for the grace to accept and love the life he entrusted to us. In our next session, we'll take the final step, giving what remains a proper place, making room for what truly serves the purpose of the space and the soul. For now, we ask the Lord for the grace to continue this work with courage and trust.

Closing Prayer

Let's pray. Lord, give us the grace to recognize what belongs in our lives and what does not. Help us to release what you are not asking us to carry. Teach us to order our homes, our hearts, and our days toward your love. Amen. Thank you for joining us. Be at peace.