

Holy Simplicity: Clearing Away What Distracts, Burdens, or Falsely Defines Us So We Can Live More Freely (In the Home & In The Soul), Part 4

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We've come a long way together. When we started, we asked a simple question of our homes and lives. "What is this for?" Because a room without a purpose is just a container and a life without a sense of calling is just a series of days. We cleared the trash, the things that were obviously obsolete or pulling us away from the Lord. In physical space, clutter, and know what no longer belonged. In the interior life, presenting ourselves to the Lord in confession and receiving the grace of a clean slate. In step three, we went deeper. We looked at what remained and asked the harder question, "Does this contribute?" Not just, "Is this good," but, "Does this belong here right now in this life God is asking me to live?" This takes more discernment and, for many of us, more courage than what we expected.

Cultivate The Fiat

So here we are, step four. If you approach this work, really dive into it, something will shift. Life will feel lighter, more joyful. But we're not finished, because clearing a space is only the beginning of a life made new. What we do with that life is where step four lives. Step four is cultivate the fiat. Two words worth sitting with. For cultivate, I want you to think of a gardener. When a gardener cultivates the soil, he doesn't just remove rocks and the weeds and then walk away, he tends the ground, prepares it for growth, and returns to it consistently with intention.

Cultivation is an ongoing practice, it's not a project to check off. The second word was fiat. This is Latin for "Let it be done". You know it from the annunciation. When the archangel Gabriel came to Mary and told her what God was asking of her, something she could not have planned for, something she did not fully understand. Her response was, "Be it done unto me according to Your word." This surrender was an active, chosen trust in a God whom she knew was deeply good. Together, these words describe what step four actually is. Actively tending the life God has asked us to live with ongoing surrender to His will. It's not a one time act, it's a posture. It's a way of moving through life that says, "Lord, I will tend what You have given me and I will trust you with what I cannot control."

There's an old principle rooted in classical philosophy that nature abhors a void. Empty space does not stay empty. It will be filled by something. And this is exactly what happens when we do the first three steps without the fourth. Think about that kitchen counter you finally cleared. You can see the surface again. There's room to work, room to breathe, it's wonderful. And then three weeks later, it's covered. Not because you're careless or a hopeless case, but because life has a way of filling available space. And if we haven't decided what that space is for, something else will decide for us. The same is true of a freed up evening, a stepped back commitment. If we haven't decided what that space is for, something else will decide for us.

And the clutter changes in form but not in nature, which is why we need to take step four seriously. The goal was never an empty space. From the very beginning, the goal has been abundance. "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly." So what fills the space now? Not more stuff or activity. I don't want you to have a reorganized schedule that becomes just as crowded as the one before it.

What fills the space is trust in God and the deliberate ongoing cultivation of what He's actually asking for us. And that looks different for everyone, because every vocation is particular. A mother cultivating the purpose of her home might protect mealtimes as a place of gathering, or create a corner in the living room where her children can pray and read. A priest might keep his rectory simple so he can go to his flock in a state of calm. A couple might guard one evening a week from outside obligations so they can tend to their marriage.

The question underneath each of those choices is the same. "What is this space for, and am I actively tending it toward that purpose?" Spiritually cultivating the purpose means returning to that question regularly, not just once when we completed step one. Life shifts, seasons change, children grow up, jobs end. What belonged in a former season may not belong now, and what is needed now may not have been needed before. Cultivation means staying awake to that. This is why holy simplicity is a practice versus a program. And here's where it gets personal. Cultivation alone without your fiat can become just another form of control, another way of managing our lives with a finer level of precision, which is not what we're after. The fiat is what keeps cultivation from becoming compulsion.

Think again about Our Lady. She was not handed a plan, she was extended an invitation. And the invitation came with no guarantees about how it would unfold and what it would cost. She said yes anyway, because she trusted the one who was asking. Many of us, if we're honest, are willing to release things in theory. We can see the logic. We can acknowledge that the camping gear isn't being used, that the volunteer role might be costing more than it's giving. We can agree that it should go, but then comes the real question underneath all of it. "What if I let it go and nothing fills its place?" "What if I step back from a role and lose my sense of purpose?" "What if another opportunity never comes?" "What if the space remains empty?"

These are human questions, precisely where your fiat is needed. The fiat does not mean that we are indifferent to the outcome. Mary pondered things in her heart. She stood at the foot of the cross. She felt the weight of everything she accepted, but did not reach for control that she had already surrendered. Your fiat means that you trust the Lord not only with what you keep, but with what you release and with what comes after.

The Litany of Trust

I mentioned in our last session, the litany of trust, which my spiritual director had asked me to pray. I pray it still because it names the exact fear that keep us grasping. From the fear that trusting You will leave me more destitute, deliver me Jesus. From the rebellion of childlike dependence on You, deliver me Jesus. What strikes me about those lines is that they take the fear seriously, they don't dismiss it. They bring it directly to the Lord and ask him to meet us in it. This is the foundation of our fiat. Let me bring this back to the ground for a minute because step four is not only spiritual, it has very practical expressions.

In the physical space, once a room has been ordered, keep it that way intentionally. Give things a home and return them there. When something comes into your home, you purchase a gift, something borrowed, ask the step three question before it even lands and settles in. Does this contribute to the purpose of this space? It is far easier to prevent clutter than to clear it. Periodically, seasonally, perhaps, walk through your home again with fresh eyes and ask whether it still reflects the life God is asking you to live.

And let's talk about your schedule. The commitments you may have stepped back from created space. Guard that space with intention. Protect time for prayer, not as a luxury but as the foundation everything else is built on. Guard time for rest, for the people entrusted to your care, for the quiet in which God can actually speak. When the calendar starts to fill again with things that don't belong, just bring it back. No big deal. For the interior life, I want you to cultivate the habits and the sacramental life that keep you close to Christ. Remember, this is the whole point. Confession, prayer, receiving the most Holy Eucharist. Spiritual direction, if that's available to you. These are not additions to an already full life, they are the purpose life is ordered around. Everything else is meant to serve them, not compete with them.

Now, there is a subtle enemy to all of this. Drift. Drift is what happens when intentionality relaxes. It's just a slow, almost imperceptible return to old patterns. A yes said out of guilt to something that should have been a no. An afternoon prayer practice that becomes occasional, then rare, then gone. Drift happens in small increments, until one day we look around and realize the space we cleared has filled again with things we passively chose. Cultivation is the antidote to drift and helps us return to our fiat.

Now, I want to be very clear about something. These four steps are not a checklist. They're a cycle, it's a rhythm you return to as your life changes, as your vocation deepens, and as seasons shift and new ones begin. Every significant transition is an invitation to ask again with an open heart, "What is this space for now? What belongs now? What needs to be cleared? and what needs to be cultivated?" This process was never about achieving a perfect home or a perfectly ordered soul, which none of us will have on this side of heaven. It's remaining available to God and His will. That's the whole of it, really. Available. Unencumbered enough to hear, uncluttered enough to respond. In a minute, we will close with Lectio Divina.

And as we end, not just this session, but this whole experience of healing through holy simplicity, I'm praying for you. This work is so deeply good and worth it. Remember, the Lord does not require perfection. He asks for a willing heart and an open hand. For your fiat repeated, feebly or boldly.

Lectio Divina

So here's my invitation. Take one small step this week. Tend one space, return to one purpose. Ask the question once, "Does this contribute?" And trust what the Lord shows you. That's enough. He will work with it. Let's pray.

Lectio Divina is an ancient practice of the church, a way of praying with scripture rather than simply reading it. There will be four movements, I will read a passage and you can meditate on it. Then we'll pray and rest. I will guide you through. First, find a comfortable position. Take a deep breath in and out through your nose, and be here. Listen the way you would listen to a letter written specifically for you.

"As Jesus was setting out on His journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him and asked Him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone. You know the commandments. Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'

And he said to Him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him and said to him, 'You lack one thing. Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.' At that saying, his countenance fell and he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God.' And the disciples were amazed at his words.

But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' And they were exceedingly astonished and said to Him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.'"

I will read the passage once more. This time, let a word or phrase find you. Not one that you simply choose, but one that rises. Hold it gently and let it rest.

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Notice what stirs and notice what Jesus does before He speaks, before He asks the hard thing. He looks at this man and loves him. The love does not leave when the man walks away. Take a moment to respond to the Lord now. Do you have gratitude, resistance, or a question? Something from our time together that the Lord has brought to the surface. Speak to Him from wherever you actually are.

Now we simply remain with Him the way you would sit with someone you love, without needing to fill the space. You are here, so is He. Take a breath and come back slowly. The disciples ask, "Then who can be saved?" The Lord does not soften it. "With men, impossible, but not with God."

That is the whole of holy simplicity. It is a life we receive by loosening our grip, by trusting the one who loves us, by offering again and again our fiat. I am so grateful to experience this process with you. God bless you, and be at peace.