

# *A*polo*gia*: Get Disciplined—Simplicity

By Gabe Kasper

## *Introduction*

The average American teenager spends \$150 a week. Over half of the world lives on less than two American dollars a day. The amount of consumption in our culture is alarming. How does a Christian respond to it? What do youth workers teach their students about how Christians live in a consumer society? These are important questions for Christians to wrestle with. This short study cannot fully answer these questions, but it will offer a spiritual discipline that can help you reevaluate your consumption, in light of the generous Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## *Scripture Connect*

“Simplify, Simplify,” the words of Henry David Thoreau are easier said than done. We live in a culture where “keeping up with the Jones’s” is not only expected but encouraged. Is consumerism a system that Christians support?

In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Where is our treasure? Where are our hearts?

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus goes on to say, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

The good news of Christ’s death and resurrection frees us from slavery to the old systems of sin and death, and through His Spirit we are empowered to live new lives that respond to the Gospel.

In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus reminds us that we are not to worry about these material things, but to trust in God as our provider and to spend our days seeking first His kingdom.

But, How can we do this? How do we actually trust God with our possessions? How can we avoid the traps of consumerism and trust in God as our provider?

Well, throughout church history men and women of the faith have developed spiritual practices that help Christians to more faithfully live their lives in light of the Good News. One such discipline is “Simplicity,” or “Simple Living.” What does it mean to live simply? The simple answer is to live life with only the things one absolutely needs (clothing, food, water, and shelter). However, there are varying degrees of simple living. For example, when I graduated college and went off to seminary it dawned on me that I had too much stuff. So, I went through everything I had and I decided that I could keep 100 possessions; everything else I had was donated.

So, the trick with simple living is to evaluate what you have vs. what you need. I think 100 possessions is enough, but see what works for you and then donate the rest to a needy family or your local thrift store. The real trick to simple living is to continually live simply. Don’t get rid of possessions so you can spend more money to buy new things. Seek first the kingdom.

## *Doctrinal Quotation*

The beauty of simple living is it takes our eyes off ourselves and turns them to the needs of our neighbor, and to God as the provider for all we need. So often we look at everything we have and we think it is ours or that we earned it, or that we deserve it. This quote from Francis Pieper reminds us that God is the ultimate source of all we have:

“The sustaining power of God, and this alone, insures the continued existence of this world... If God would withdraw His presence from any part of the world, that part would cease to exist.”

Living simply and reducing our consumption remind us that God is in control of the world and the very fact that we exist is thanks to his grace for us.

## *Application*

Perhaps this study has been a bit much for you to swallow all at once. Don't worry. Consumerism is a cycle that is extremely hard to break. Fear not! Here are 5 simple steps you can take towards a simpler life.

1. **Pray:** Ask God to show you how to reduce your consumption, how to simplify your life, and help to lean on him more and more as the provider of all things.
2. **Read:** Dig into God's Word. He has a lot to say about what we do with our possessions. I suggest starting with Matthew Chapter 6. Read through this chapter every day for a week. Let God's Word shape your life.
3. **Don't Do:** Don't buy new things you don't need. Does your current cell phone still work? Don't buy a new one. You don't need it. Do your clothes still fit? Don't buy new ones. These are a few examples. Think of more on your own. Think of creative ways that you can use your extra cash to serve others.
4. **Do:** Get rid of your excess. Look at all you have. What can you get rid of? Donate it to a thrift store, or a needy family. Or maybe get your friends together and have a rummage sale and donate the proceeds to someone in need.
5. **Enjoy:** Living a simple lifestyle can be hard at first, but simple living can free you to enjoy the simple pleasures that God gives. Freed from your need to consume you can more greatly appreciate God's creation, or the relationships He's given you in your family and friends.

Not only is simple living a great way to remind us of God's providence, it also testifies to the truth that is found in the good news of Jesus Christ. In his book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, Ronald Sider points out that, “To Christians this should be no surprise. We should be the first to reject this rat race in which everyone is trying to surpass the other guy. Knowing that material goods are not what bring ultimate happiness, we should be the first to experiment with simpler lifestyles. As we reduce our demand for dwindling resources that pollute the environment, we witness to others that happiness is not found in material possessions.”

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.