

How

to

Un-hurry

Welcome

Hello friends.

Welcome to *How to Un-hurry*, the companion to my book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*.

If you've already read my book, you know that a core conviction of mine is that the way of Jesus is exactly that: a way of life. It's not less than a faith made up of theology and ethics, but it's certainly more. It's a whole new way to be human; a set of values, dispositions, relational dynamics, and habits. And it's by these—our habits in particular—that the ideas of Jesus become a reality, not only in our minds, but in our very bodies.

That's why it's not enough to simply read a book, or even read the Bible. If we want to enter the kingdom that Jesus opened to us; we have to also “follow” or “apprentice under him” into its reality. Hence, his ongoing invitation to “Come, and follow me.”

In the late modern West, we're a bit more familiar with reading a book or listening to a podcast than we are to following a rabbi. We've grown accustomed to reading a book full of ideas, setting said book into the shelf, and then moving on, without *doing* much of anything about it.

Buckminster Fuller, the architect who invented the geodesic dome, later became a futurist and systems theorist. In his book *Critical Path*, he came up with the “knowledge doubling curve.” He estimated that if you could measure the cumulative knowledge of human civilization, from the year of Jesus birth, it took 1,500 years for it to double. But from there, it doubled again by 1750. From there, it doubled *every hundred years*, up until WW2. After the war, it doubled in 25 years. By the 80's, it was every 12 months.

Some current estimates put the number at *every twelve hours*.

So, if you were born the same year as Jesus, it would be a millennium and a half before the cumulative knowledge of the human race would double; if you're born today, it's doubled twice before dinner.

Hence the moniker for our era—“the information age.” And yet, while we have more information than ever before, we don't seem to actually *live* much better. In fact, many of us feel more anxious, scattered, and distracted than just a few decades ago.

The cultural critic and professor of media at NYU, Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, widely considered the seminal work on the effect of TV on our culture, coined the phrase “low information-to-action ratio.” By that he meant, we're overloaded with information, so much so that we rarely *do* anything with what we learn.

He said it this way:

“The tie between information and action has been severed. Information is now a commodity that can be bought and sold, or used as a form of entertainment, or worn like a garment to enhance one's status. It

comes indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, disconnected from usefulness; we are glutted with information, drowning in information, have no control over it, don't know what to do with it."

To sum up:

1. We have more information than any other generation in human history.
2. In fact, we have so much information we often feel overwhelmed as vast terabytes of "news" constantly assail us via our phones and devices.
3. This creates a paralysis in us. We then grow accustomed to this paralysis and live with it as our default. We're used to hearing new information, even being *moved* by such information, and then *doing absolutely nothing* about it.

This simply won't do for following Jesus of Nazareth, who ended his Sermon on the Mt. with a stark warning about those who "hear these words of mind and don't put them into practice."

So, with the simple goal of moving from the "idea" of the ruthless elimination of hurry, to the *practice* of it – getting it from our mind into our muscle memory itself – I've designed this companion to take you, step by step, deeper into each practice.

In the book, we set out four practices for un-hurrying your life:

1. Silence and Solitude.
2. Sabbath.
3. Simplicity.
4. Slowing.

In my community in Portland, we have this saying: "Practice, not performance." As you read this, please keep that in mind. The point of these four practices isn't to "do it right," much less to curry God's favor. It's simply to un-hurry to the pace of Jesus, and tap into his life-flow of love and joy and peace.

The last thing I would want is for you to read *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, and come away with a stressed-out soul, ten-page to-do list, guilt complex, or sense that there's no hope for you. But *neither* would I want you to read it, and walk away inspired, but ultimately unchanged.

Hence, this companion.

Use this as you see fit. Use all of it, or part of it. Follow it to the letter, or adapt and improvise to your heart's content. There's rarely a "right" way to do these practices, simply time-tested wisdom that we're wise to pay attention to.

The point is: we don't just want to hear Jesus' call to take up the easy yoke, we actually want to *follow him* into it.

To that end, enjoy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JMK' with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

John Mark Comer
Portland, OR

Silence and Solitude

Review

The most radical, and many would say, the most difficult of all the practices of Jesus is silence and solitude. A working definition is: intentional time in the quiet to be alone with God, and our own soul. It's the space we make for God to love us, and to transform us into people of love.

There are two dimensions of silence – external and internal. External is when we get away from all the people and noise and stimuli and let our body come to quiet. Internal – which is harder to do – is when we calm and center on our mind on God, we come to a kind of mental and emotional rest in God.

Before you begin

Identify a time and place that works well for you.

- Time: For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is when the kids are napping, on a lunch break, after work, or before you go to bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit for your personality and stage of life.
- Place: Find a place that is *as quiet and distraction free as possible*. A comfortable chair by a window is a favorite for many. Try covering yourself with a blanket to calm your nervous system. Or lighting a candle. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are ideal.

Then set a modest goal.

- Beginners: It's better to start small and work your way up. I recommend you start with ten minutes, 3-5 days a week.
- Intermediate: If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.
- Advanced: If you already practice silence and solitude daily, consider upping your time (ideally to 30-60 minutes), or giving your time a new level of focus.

A few things to remember as you practice:

1. Start where you're at, not where you should be. If you can only do five minutes, great, start there and gently move forward. Beware of idealism, perfectionism, or overreaching. We grow through small, incremental acts that in time become habits that eventually become character. This happens over years, not days.
2. You can't "succeed" or "fail" at this practice. The goal is simply to show up. Resist the urge to say, "I'm bad at this," or, "This isn't for me," or, "I don't like this." Be patient with the practice, and with yourself.
3. If you're an S on the Meyer's Briggs (more of a doer than a thinker), and sitting still is just death for your personality, you might want to try these exercises while doing something with your hands or body, like walking or stretching or even folding laundry, while your mind comes to rest in God.

Here's a few exercises for your time...

Exercise #1: Breathing Prayer

Overview

In silence and solitude, we attempt to quiet both external noise, and internal noise. But internal noise is by far the hardest to quell. Often, when we come to quiet, our mind just runs wild, as Henri Nouwen once said, “Like monkeys in a banana tree.” In this first exercise, we focus on our breathing to calm our mind, and let it “descend into the heart” in God.

1. Put away your phone and any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable. You may want to take a short walk first, or light a candle, or stretch, as a way of easing your soul into a new mode.

2. Watch your breathing.

- Sit in an upright, but relaxed position.
- Close your eyes.
- Take slow, deep breaths
 - Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
 - As you inhale, breathe all the way in until your stomach distends (this fills your brain with clean, clear oxygen).
 - As you exhale, shape your lips like you’re breathing out through a straw, and push all the air out with your stomach muscles (getting all the carbon dioxide and toxins out of your system).
- Feel the sensations in your body – stress, heartrate, tightness, calmness, pain, lightness, etc. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and it’s a good gift. By becoming present in our body, we become present the moment, and eventually, in God himself.
- Just “watch” your breath enter and exit your body. Pay attention to it and nothing else.
- Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do’s, and distractions. That’s okay. It’s used to constant chatter, not stillness. Don’t judge yourself, feel like a failure, or give up. Just let each thought go as quickly as it comes. When you notice your mind start to wander, just re-center with a quick prayer, like, “Father” or “Jesus” or “Peace” or the ancient, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,” and come back to your breathing.
- Let the Spirit generate from deep within you a compassionate heart toward yourself and each thought that you gently release.

3. Pray.

- This isn’t new age, hypnosis, or magic; it’s just a way of resting in God’s love, being present to him, slowing down to let Jesus set the pace and agenda of our day.

- Once you settle into a rhythm, begin to turn each breath into a prayer. One breath at a time, imagine yourself breathing out:
 - Anger
 - Sadness
 - Anxiety
 - Despair
 - Fear
 - The Need To Control
 - Discontentment

- And then imagine yourself breathing in its opposite:
 - Love
 - Joy
 - Peace
 - Hope
 - Trust
 - Detachment
 - Contentment

4. Abide.

- Before you end this exercise, spend a little while just “abiding in the vine;” simply sit in loving attention on God. Watch God watching you in compassionate love. This is the core of all transformation into Christlikeness. Through resting under God’s loving attention toward us by the Spirit, we are transformed.
- As St. John of the Cross once said, “What we need most in order to make progress is to be silent before this great God... for the language he best hears is silent love.”

Note: In the beginning, just 2-3 minutes of this is a win, and 10 minutes is a home run. Like many practices, at first you may well feel awkward, or even anxious, but give it time. It will likely come to feel deeply enjoyable in time.

Exercise #2: Feeling and Listening Prayer

Overview

Emotional pain isn’t something to avoid or deny. Rather, emotions are a place to meet God and open ourselves up to him in new ways. Emotions are the language of the soul. Often, they are God’s way of coming to us with direction or discipline; or they are our way of drawing near to God, meeting him in our aches and pains.

1. Put away your phone and any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable. You may want to take a short walk first, or light a candle, or stretch, as a way of easing your soul into a new mode.
2. Let yourself feel.

- What emotions rise to the surface of your heart, big or small? You might feel joy, gratitude, sadness, emptiness, fatigue, worry, guilt and shame, conviction, anger, lust, optimism – any number of positive or negative emotions.
- Don't run away from your "negative" feelings. In the Father's presence, face each emotion head on, the good, the bad, the ugly. And don't just *think* about what you are feeling. Rather, let yourself feel each one, deeply.
- Name each emotion and then let it pass through you.

3. Pray.

- Get it all off your chest. Give whatever you are feeling over to God - the good, the bad, and the ugly. No filter. The point here isn't to be good, but to be honest. Different emotions call for different kinds of prayer.
- If you're happy – celebrate, sing, dance!
- If you're grateful, express your appreciation to God.
- If you're anxious, give your worry over to the Father and ask for his peace in return.
- If you're sitting in unanswered questions about your life or future, hold that tension before God. Tell him how it feels not to have an answer. Don't force clarity where there is none. Just be patient before God with all that is unclear in your life and unresolved in your heart.

4. Listen.

- The Spirit of God has direct access to your mind and imagination. He's more than able to implant thoughts, images, feelings, and desires into the core of your being.
- Now that you're quiet before him, ask him to speak into your life.
- Here's a few ideas of what to ask:
- Is there anything you want to say to me today?
- Is there anything you want me to do today?
- Is there anyone you want me to bless today? In what way?
- What would be pleasing to you today, Father?
- What lies am I believing? Then, after you wait and listen, ask the follow up question: What is the truth you want to replace that lie with?

- How do you see me, Father?
 - Sit in questions like these before God, and just see what comes.
 - If nothing clear comes to the surface of your mind, simply meditate on a Scripture that speaks of God's compassionate love for you, such as Psalm 23, John 15 or 17, or Ephesians 1.
5. Close with a prayer of gratitude and commit your day (or if it's evening, your rest) to God.

Exercise #3: Lectio Divina

Overview

Lectio Divina (Latin for "spiritual reading") is a way of reading Scripture with the specific aim of hearing God's voice over your life. There are four basic movements (from four Latin words), but the mechanics are not as important as many people think. It's less of a technique, and more of a heart posture and pace.

The basic idea is simply to find a quiet place to read Scripture slowly with your ear open to God's voice through the text. Unlike Bible study (another wonderful practice) the goal is less to hear what he was saying to *them* (the original audience), but to take the next step and hear what he is saying to *you*.

1. Put away your phone and any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable. You may want to take a short walk first, or light a candle, or stretch, as a way of easing your soul into a new mode.
2. Pick a Scripture to read.
 - If you're on a Bible reading plan, just open to whatever is next, but pick a short section of Scripture. One chapter at most.
 - If you're not on a reading plan and nothing comes to mind, here's a few recommendations for Scriptures to start with:
 - Psalm 23 or 37 or 40
 - John 15 or 17
 - Galatians 5
 - Ephesians 1
3. Slowly work through the four movements of Lectio Divina:
 - First, come to quiet. Turn your attention and desire over to God. Feel free to rest for a few moments, as you slow your mind down to the pace of the Spirit. Then...
 - Read/*lectio*: Read the passage slowly and pay attention to each line. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what "shimmers," what words and ideas draw your attention in a special way. When your heart is drawn to a word or phrase or idea, pause for a few moments, and let it expand in your mind.

- Reflect/*mediatio*: After you finish reading the passage, return to the beginning and read it again. On your second time, focus even more on the words or phrases that resonate with your heart, life, or whatever you're wrestling with today. Listen for what God is saying to you through the text.
- Respond/*oratio*: Talk to God about what you're hearing.
- Rest/*contemplatio*: Pause to sit in God's presence before you return to the noise of life. Express whatever is in your heart to God—wonder, awe, joy, hope, or gratitude.
- Some teachers add a fifth movement: incarnate/*incarnatio*—where we ask the Spirit to illuminate our mind with a clear action step to incarnate the passive we've been sitting in.

Exercise #4: Retreat

Overview

Short, daily times of quiet are key to emotional health and spiritual life. But some things just can't be rushed. Relationship with God takes time to cultivate. Retreat is an exercise in which we set aside a longer time—ideally a day—to rest and meet with God.

1. Set a time and place where you can go away for an extended time of retreat.
 - Ideally, give yourself 8 hours away. But again, start where you're at. If all you can do is slip away for 3-4 hours on a Saturday morning, that's a strong beginning.
 - Find a spot where you can be alone and uninterrupted. If possible, go away to a cabin, beach house, park, or retreat center.
 - Do a little research, most cities have retreat centers or monasteries nearby that are open to the public for a small fee.
 - Once you arrive, fully disconnect from all devices, especially your phone.
2. Spend a day alone in the quiet with God.
 - There's no "right" way to spend the day, but here's a recommended template, if it's helpful
 - The night before: Wind down after dinner and go to bed early.
 - 8-9 AM: If possible, arrange your morning so you can remain in silence from the time you wake up. Take a walk, do some breathing prayer, practice gratitude, or whatever works best to calm down and prepare your heart to meet with God.
 - 9-11 AM: Read and meditate on Scripture. Read slowly, taking plenty of time to stop and reflect when God seems to be speaking to you through the text. Write down what sticks out to you.
 - 11 AM-12 PM: Do some unhurried listening prayer. Talk over your notes with God. But spend time calmly waiting for his voice. It will come. Wait until you get his perspective on your life.
 - 12-1 PM: Eat lunch and take a walk, reflecting back on the morning, and enjoying the moment.
 - 1-2 PM: Take a nap.

- 2-3 PM: Set goals that emerge from the day's reflection and do any necessary calendar planning.
 - 3-5 PM: Journal a summary of your day and any action steps as you return to your life. End with gratitude and abiding.
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- That said, the above is just a general template, and it's important not to feel any pressure to "produce" an outcome from our retreat. It's great if we come out with vision, clarity, and a short list of next steps, but it's also wonderful to just spend a day resting in God, making space for him to love you, and, like Psalm 23 has it, restore your soul.

Sabbath

Review

Sabbath is a 24-hour time period of restful worship, by which we cultivate a restful spirit in all of our life. A good way to think about Sabbath is through the lens of four translations of the Hebrew word shabbat:

1. Stop—we cease from all working, all *thinking* about working, all worrying and all wanting.
2. Rest—we rest our soul, meaning, our *whole* person. Physical: we sleep. Mental and emotional: we calm down, relax, process the week. Spiritual: we cease our striving, and rest in God’s love for us through abiding.
3. Delight—we pamper our soul with activities that spark joy, wonder, gratitude, and happiness, such as eating good food, walking in nature, spending time with family or friends, listening to music, playing games, making love to our spouse, or just having fun before God.
4. Worship—we index our heart toward grateful praise and adoration of God, and we surrender our life to him, one week at a time.

Before you begin, a few things to note

1. These four exercises are designed to build on each other. Don’t try them all at once, especially if you’re new to Sabbath. Over the course of a month, ease yourself into the rhythm of Sabbath.
2. You can’t “succeed” or “fail” at this practice. The goal is simply to show up. Resist the urge to say, “I’m bad at this,” or, “This isn’t for me,” or, “I don’t like this.” Be patient with the practice, and with yourself.
3. Of all the practices of Jesus, Sabbath is by far one of the most counter-cultural. It touches so many of the tender vulnerabilities of our soul; it’s also a form of spiritual warfare, a kind of assault on hell’s hold over our over busy soul. It’s very hard for the enemy to tempt well rested, healthy, happy people.

At first, it may feel like you’re swimming upstream, or even fighting spiritual realities. That’s normal, just keep at it until you feel a shift in the current, and it’s moving you *toward* rest and no longer away from it.

Exercise #1: The Basics

Overview

This exercise is exactly what it sounds like, the basics. If it’s too elementary for your stage, skip to the next exercise.

1. Mark out a 24-hour time period (or as close as you can) to rest and worship.
- There are three common variations of this Practice:
 - The traditional Sabbath: from sundown Friday night to the same time Saturday late afternoon. This works well for people who are especially busy on Sundays with church activities or other events.
 - The Lord’s Day Sabbath: from waking on Sunday morning (or ideally upon going to bed Saturday night) through Sunday evening. This works best for most people, as Sunday is the calmest day in

most cities, and it's likely you already set aside time to worship with your community, so it's less invasive and builds on a practice you already have in your weekly routine.

- The midweek Sabbath: any day during the week. This works best for people with odd or sporadic work schedules and have a midweek day off.
- I recommend you begin in the evening—with dinner or just before bed, but there's no “right way.” But a celebratory meal can really start your Sabbath off with the right intention. You can also invite friends or family to join you, or cook the same meal each week, to transition your mind from work to rest.
- If at all possible, establish a regular rhythm of Sabbath on the same day each week.

2. Pick a ritual to clearly begin and end your Sabbath.

- Much of the Sabbath is about rhythms and rituals that set aside the day as “holy.” Beginning and ending with a marked moment will help you settle into rest, and help you reenter the week with a restful spirit.
- Here are a few ideas of how to begin the Sabbath from both ancient tradition and modern practice:
 - Light two candles (symbolic for the two commands in Exodus and Deuteronomy to “remember” and “observe” the Sabbath). Invite the Spirit of Jesus to come and give your home light, joy, love, peace, and rest.
 - Pour a glass of wine (or grape juice for the kids or the straight edge). Pray a blessing over the drink and give thanks.
 - If you have a family, this is where, traditionally, the father speaks a blessing over the children and the mother. If you're with roommates or friends, this can be a wonderful time to bless each other, with prayers like: May you be happy and full of joy. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May you find rest for your soul. Etc.
 - Read a Psalm, sing a song, quote a poem, or pray a liturgy to center on God.
 - Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to bring a spirit of rest over your life and lead and guide you through the next 24 hours.
 - If you begin at night, share a meal with your family or friends.
 - If you begin in the morning, go to church and worship.
- Here are a few ideas to end your Sabbath:
 - Take a slow, leisurely prayer walk around your neighborhood, nearby park, or nature reserve.
 - Read a psalm.
 - Share a meal with family and friends.
 - Spend some time alone or with your family and friends in prayers of gratitude.
 - Traditionally, the Sabbath ends by sitting on the floor, lighting a special Havdalah candle, and sharing 1) the best part of your Sabbath, and 2) what you are looking forward to in the week ahead, passing around sweet-smelling spices to savor the day, and ending with prayers of gratitude.

3. Spend an entire day in the four aspects of Sabbath: stopping, resting, delighting, and worshipping.

- Fill your day with activities that are life-giving for your soul. Begin to distinguish between recreation and restoration. Begin to transition from entertainment, TV, social media, shopping, and going “out,” to activities that deeply connect you to Jesus and his rest.
- Traditionally there are twelve activities that mark Sabbath practice:
 - Lighting the candles.
 - Blessing the children.
 - Eating a meal.
 - Singing.
 - Worshipping with your Community.
 - Walking.
 - Napping.
 - Making love to your spouse.
 - Reading.
 - Spending time alone with God.
 - Spending time with family and friends.
 - Gratitude.
- This is *not* a “to do” list: there are no “to do’s” on Sabbath! No ought’s or should’s. This is just a list of activities many people find restful and restorative.
- Again, there is no “right way.” Adapt your Sabbath practice to your personality, preferences, stage of life, and however it is you connect with God: time in nature, walking your dog to the park, playing frisbee golf with your kids, getting lost in a good novel, etc. Just take the day to pamper your soul in God’s presence.
- If “how” to do this is unclear to you, don’t feel bad, you’re not alone. Spend a few minutes thinking and praying over these simple questions:
- What about my regular routine would I need to stop to experience the Sabbath?
 - What is *restful* for me?
 - What brings me an easy *delight*?
 - What is a *worshipful* way I connect to God?

Exercise #2: The Preparation Day

Overview

The New Testament writers called the day before the Sabbath (Friday, in first century Jewish culture), the “preparation day,” because Sabbath is a practice, a discipline, and it takes preparation and planning to disconnect from the hurry of the world for an entire day. The day immediately before Sabbath is vital to its success.

1. Make a plan.

- A few days before your Sabbath, sit down and think of what needs to be done before your Sabbath – errands, email, grocery shopping, bills, etc.

- You list makers, write up a “to do before Sabbath” list.

2. Do the hard work of preparation.

- The day(s) before your Sabbath, carry out your plan.
- Here’s a list of common things we need to do *before* we can rest and worship for a full 24-hours:
 - Go grocery shopping and stock our kitchen with (delicious) foods.
 - Pre-make dinner or any labor-intensive meals. Soups, salads, or enchiladas are all great options for Sabbath dinner.
 - Clean your house or apartment.
 - Answer all time-sensitive texts, voice mails, and emails.
 - For those in jobs that require time-sensitive communication, consider an auto-reply so people know you’ll get back them soon.
 - Plan out a rough schedule for your Sabbath. Don’t *over* plan. Take it slow. Give plenty of time to relax at an unhurried pace.
 - If you want to meet up with a friend on the Sabbath, set a time and place.
 - Think of something you can do to make the day special – a special food or desert, a book you read only on the Sabbath, a park you love to visit or friend you deeply enjoy spending time with.
- Don’t let stress ruin the start of your Sabbath. All these details can spike our anxiety. Don’t worry about the “perfect Sabbath,” just get what you can done in your allotted time, and then relax into the goodness of what *is*, without letting it get drowned out by what could be.

3. Spend an entire day in rest and worship.

Exercise #3: Digital Detox

Overview

Digital addiction is real! For many, the idea of turning off all your devices for a full day sounds terrifying. Some people even label it irresponsible or lazy. But there are so many benefits to a weekly digital detox, not the least of which is an increased capacity to encounter God and one another in rest.

1. Make a plan.

- I recommend you turn your devices entirely off for a full day. But you may decide to simply limit your time, or avoid all social media, but still call your mom or FaceTime a friend in another city. If so, I still recommend you put your devices away for the unallotted times.
- Many people choose to set 2-3 times a day to check their phone in case of emergency. Use wisdom and start where you’re at.
- Just remember, there is an *addiction* in most of us to our phones, so we can’t just wing it and hope for the best. And we should expect some “withdrawals” in the first few weeks of detox.

2. Make any social plans ahead of time.

- Include this in your preparation day. Schedule times for coffee, brunch, or your picnic at the park with family or friends, so you can stay offline as much as you want.

3. Put your devices away.

- Whether you completely power off all devices, or just choose to limit your time, either way, put them *away*—in a box, drawer, or closet. Out of sight, out of mind.

4. Spend an entire day in rest and worship.

Note: If you think this is legalistic or far too impractical, *I simply encourage you to try it for a few weeks*. Ideally, try it for a full month, as it takes a while to get over the dopamine addiction we have to technology. If after a month, you don't feel a marked increase in love and joy and peace in your emotional health and spiritual life, feel free to try something else.

Exercise #4: Cultivating Intimacy with the Daily Office

Overview

The Sabbath is a day for rest and *worship*; it's not simply a day to relax and sleep, but also to connect with God. The aim of this final exercise is to cultivate intimacy with God through a variety of practices, but specifically through the what ancient followers of Jesus called the "daily office," a simple practice of pausing at set times throughout the day to set your heart on God in prayer. Traditionally, there are three offices: morning, noon, and night.

1. Begin your Sabbath morning in awareness.

- Immediately upon waking, do something to set your heart upon the goodness of your life in God.
- Here's a few recommendations:
- Read a Psalm (like Psalm 23, 37, or 92) or favorite Scripture.
- Give thanks. Be specific, leisurely, and genuine.
- Step outside and (depending on where you live), breathe in fresh air, listen to the birds, plant your feet on the ground, and appreciate the goodness of God and your life in his world.
- Praise God. You can do this with or without music, alone or with a community, simply set your attention and adoration on God and his goodness.

2. At some point in the day, spend leisurely time reading Scripture, and listening to God's voice over your life.

- Think of Sabbath like a mini-retreat day once a week. See the previous exercise on retreat for ideas.
- Depending on how tired you are, you might want to save this exercise for the latter half of your day, after your soul has had time to catch up to your body and come to peace.

3. Practice the daily office 2-3 times throughout the day.

- After your morning time, pause a few more times to come back to the moment, and savor the goodness of your life in God.
- Here's a few recommendations for how to do this:
 - Take a prayer walk.
 - Read a psalm, poem, or liturgy.
 - Do some spiritual reading, something devotional that warms your heart to God's goodness.
 - Put on a worship song.
 - Practice breathing prayer, listening prayer, or any other kind of contemplative prayer that comes easily for you.
 - List your gratitude's out to God in prayer.
 - Think about how you connect with God, and just do that.

4. End your Sabbath in awareness.

- Find a ritual or tradition that you love and engenders grateful worship of God in your heart. End your Sabbath in thankfulness to God.

Simplicity

Review

Simplicity (also called minimalism) is a way of life where we intentionally prioritize the things that really matter, by cutting out all that is ancillary, and stripping our life down to make abiding the center of everything. It's a life of focus in a cultural moment of distraction. It's intentionally living with less, to make space for *more* of what we most value before God.

Translation: less clothes, less stuff, less things we don't need, less hobbies, less options, and more prayer, more joy, more peace, *more* loving relationships. Many judge minimalism as a kind of nuevo-legalism, but really, it's a form of freedom.

Since simplicity is a lifestyle, it affects how we live at every level, not just the number of "things" in our closet or home, but our activities, our schedule, our budget, and how we spend our time.

To begin, make four piles (most people find it easiest to use bags or boxes):

1. Give away—stuff you can give to family, friends, or those in need. We often have too much, and people we're in relationship with have too little.
2. Sell—stuff you can/want to sell secondhand to generate a little income.
3. Throw away or recycle – stuff you just need to get rid of.
4. Wait—stuff you're not sure about yet. Usually, it's things you're emotionally still attached to. This pile is *key*, as most of us don't realize just how emotionally connected we are to our stuff. Just stick any emotional items you're not quite ready to get rid of in this pile, and then stick it in a closet or garage for 3-6 months. If at any point, you want to get an item back out, go for it. But more likely, you won't think about it until you reopen the bag or box, at which point, it will be much easier to get rid of, should you decide to.

Once you have your piles, you're ready to start a four-week process to minimize your life. This process may take you much longer. That's totally fine, don't rush it. Remember, we're unhurrying our life for what really matters...

Exercise/week #1: Clothing

1. Take *everything* out of your closet(s) and throw it in a giant pile.
2. Sort your giant pile into five smaller piles:
 - Keep.
 - Give away.
 - Sell.
 - Throw away/recycle.

- Wait.

3. Place the “Keep” pile back in your closet in an organized manner.

4. Pick a level.

- Here’s a few ideas, with varying levels of intensity, depending on how serious you want to get about minimalism:
 - Idea 1: just do the five-pile exercise above, keep as many items as you want.
 - Idea 2: “Project 333,” a minimalism fashion challenge to dress with 33 items or less for 3 months. See <https://bemorewithless.com/project-333/>
 - Idea 3: the “Ten Item Wardrobe.” Limit your wardrobe to ten items (not including socks, underwear, umbrellas, etc.). This doesn’t mean ten outfits, as you can mix and match to come up with a surprising number of outfits with only ten items. See



- Idea 4: The uniform. Steve Jobs made this famous with his signature black turtleneck, jeans, and New Balance running shoes. But honestly, creatives, intellectuals, and elites have been doing this for hundreds of years, to give more mental space to their work. People who do the uniform usually have several copies of the same items, for laundry, cleanliness, wear and tear, etc. A more realistic version of the “uniform” for most people is to pick out 2-3 outfits per season and wear them consistently.
- As you explore these ideas and more, remove unnecessary guilt from your decision-making process. Remember: this is about *freedom*.

Exercise/week #2: Stuff

1. Go through your apartment or home room by room and do the above exercise with your *things*.
 - Place the contents of each room in five piles:
 - Keep.
 - Give away.

- Sell.
 - Throw away/recycle.
 - Wait.
- Carefully put the “keep” pile back in an organized manner.
 - A good place to start is your linen closet or bathroom, as there’s very few sentimental items, and they are small and easy to do. Save major projects like the garage, and any sentimental items, for last.
 - The living area is an easy next step, since you feel an immediate relief, and there’s rarely closets involved.

2. Navigate by a few basic principles.

- Here’s mine, but feel free to come up with your own:
 - Avoid duplicates. We rarely need two of anything. Including sheets, towels, brooms, etc.
 - Avoid collections. Do you really need a coffee mug from every city you’ve ever been to? Your DVD’s from 1995? Every Star Wars Happy Meal toy? Usually just a few will do just fine, if we need them at all.
 - Hold each item and ask a few questions: Does this spark joy? (Marie Kondo’s question) Do I need this? Does somebody *else* need this? Do this prayerfully and with zero guilt.
 - And again, save sentimental items for *last*. This process is far more emotional than most people realize.

Exercise/week #3: Papers

1. Go through all your papers and files and do the above exercise, but this time using some kind of a digitizer.
 - You may want to buy or borrow a digital scanner, or simply use your smartphone.
 - A surprising number of things around the house can be digitized, such as:
 - Photos/photo albums.
 - Most of what’s in your filing cabinet.
 - Much what’s gathering dust on your desk.
 - Almost all of what’s sitting in your “junk drawer.”
2. File or organize what you can’t digitize.
 - Pick up some filing cabinets, and/or plastic bins, and find a way to sort the leftover items you can’t digitize.
 - This can be a tedious, time-consuming process, so you might want to give yourself more than week.
3. Remember to recycle.

- I'm from Portland; I can't not say that.

Exercise/week #4: Budget and schedule

1. Create a fixed-hour schedule.

- Get out a blank sheet of paper or daily calendar.
- Put in your sleep time. Yes, set a bedtime and wakeup time of your choosing. Remember, most people need more sleep than they think.
- Put in your spiritual disciplines—morning prayer, Sabbath, church, etc.
- Put in your core relationships—family dinner, a weekly meal with your community, coffee with your mentor or best friend.
- Put in your daily habits of health—exercise, mindfulness, reading, play, family movie night, basketball on Saturday mornings, etc.
- Put in your key work habits—day planning, deep work, meetings, set times for email, etc.
- Make sure there's room in your schedule for margin. Just write in "margin" or "free time" or "rest."

2. Create a budget.

- Get out a calculator, spreadsheet, and pay stub.
- Calculate your tithe, and/or a set giving goal for each paycheck.
- Use whatever method you prefer to make a budget. I recommend using the template in *Free* by Mark Scandrette. Many people have benefited from Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University.
- Do everything you can to live *under* your means, not *at* (and definitely not *over*) your means. This will give you *less* stress, and *more* breathing room for generosity, justice, and your most precious commodity—time.

3. Commit to your schedule and budget for a set time.

- Pick a time, I recommend a minimum of thirty days.
- Share your schedule and budget with a friend, roommate, spouse, or somebody you trust to hold you to your commitment. A level of accountability to both how you *intend* to spend your money, and how you actually *do* spend your money is very wise and helpful.

4. Adjust as necessary along the way.

Slowing

Review

“Slow down your body, slow down your soul”—this is the motto of slowing, an emerging practice in the Western world. While you still won’t find it on any of the standard lists of spiritual disciplines, it still fits the definition of a practice based on the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus was never in a hurry. His slow, deliberate pace, created room in his life for the interruptions that became the stories of the four gospels.

John Ortberg defines this practice as “cultivating patience by deliberately choosing to place ourselves in positions where we simply have to wait.” It’s a fun, playful way to slow down our body, in order to cultivate an unhurried soul.

Exercise #1: Pick 1-2 “games” to slow down your life

1. Pick 1-3 neo-spiritual disciplines from my list, or your own imagination, and commit to them for at least a week.

- Here’s a few of my ideas from the chapter:

- Drive the speed limit.
- Get into the slow lane.
- Come to a full stop at stop signs.
- Don’t text and drive.
- Show up ten minutes early for an appointment, sans phone.
- Get into the longest line at the grocery store.

2. See what it does in your soul. Pay attention to the difference in your body as the days go by. Keep whatever is helpful.

3. Practice presence through art.

- There’s a myth that we can pay half-attention to life during the “boring” moments—email for work, running errands, mowing the lawn—and then save our full attention for the “really good moments”—i.e., play, days off, time with friends. But attention doesn’t work like that. It’s less a switch we turn on and off as we so choose, and more of a muscle we exercise, or let atrophy, all day long via our habits of both mind and body.
- The more that we multitask or daydream through the mundane tasks of everyday life, the less capacity we develop to fully enjoy and experience the sacred moments.
- One way to train this muscle is to pick a medium of art that is calm, deep, and beautiful and give it your full attention. No phone. No distractions present.
 - Watch a film. If you want, invite some friends to join you and discuss it after, without reading any reviews online, simply by noticing its effect on your soul.
 - Read a novel in several long sittings. Resist the urge to get up or check your phone should it get “slow.”

- Listen to an entire album in one sitting, doing nothing else. Not as background noise, or a mood-uptick, but as art you experience with God.
- Let art re-teach you not only how to be present, but how to *enjoy* being present, in the many moments that join together into a life.

Exercise #2: Cut 1-3 things out of your schedule

1. If you don't have a schedule, start there. Draw up a week/month in the life of yours truly.
 1. Then delete a few things.
- Here's a few easy targets that eat up heaps of time for many people:
 - TV.
 - Social Media.
 - Time online.
 - Video games.
 - Extra social obligations.
 - This exercise requires a clear vision of your life before God, a basic sense of his call on your life, and a sense of values. It should force you to ask, what really matters to me? What are my priorities? What relationships do I need to give my energies to? What activities are honestly a waste of my time? These are all great questions to sit in the tension of.

Exercise #3: Turn Your Smartphone into a Dumbphone

- Feel free to adapt as you see fit, but here's the basic idea (note: for my fellow Luddites who are technically challenged, a simple Google search will show you how to do any of this):
 - Disable the email function on your phone.
 - Delete all social media apps your phone; switch to desktop.
 - Disable your web browser.
 - Delete all notifications, including your text alerts.
 - Delete news apps, or at least news alerts.
 - Delete every single app you don't need or that doesn't save you time. Keep all the wonder apps that make life so much easier—maps, calculator, Alaska Airlines, etc.
 - Consolidate your remaining apps into a few simple boxes and move them to your second screen, so your home screen is free and clear—basically, a phone with a nice photo in the background.
 - Set your phone to grayscale mode. You can set your phone so an easy triple click will turn the color back on, for photos and such. Then triple click again to go back to black and white.

Exercise #4: Parent Your (Dumb)phone

1. Turn your devices off of an hour before your bedtime.
 - If you want to level up, don't turn them back on the next morning until after you've spent time in the Scriptures and prayer.
2. Get a real alarm clock.
 - For those of you who use your phone as an alarm clock, stop by Goodwill or pop online and buy a "real" alarm clock, as in, one you have to plug in next to your bed.
3. Read and pray with your phone put away.
 - For those of you who read the Scriptures off a phone app, consider switching to an actual, hold-it-in-your-hands Bible.
 - Whenever you pray, put away all distractions, such as phones, TV, or extra noise.
 - Best practice: spend time with you mind upon God (breathing prayer, Lectio Divina, etc.) first thing upon waking, *before* you touch your phone.
4. Do some deep work.
 - For those of you who work in the creative class or knowledge economy, you may want to consider turning your phone and email off to do some of what Cal Newport calls "deep work."
 - Set daily or weekly time(s) for this kind of work.

In Closing

With all four of these exercises, you're not committing to anything long-term. View them as short-term experiments in living a quieter life. Play around with them. Watch the undercurrents of your heart as the days and weeks go by. Incorporate into your permanent lifestyle any that you find helpful.

More in-depth practices, and practices designed for small groups, communities, or house churches, found at practicingtheway.org.

Here's to a slower, simpler life in the way of Jesus.