

allsaintsworcester

—
Practising the
Way of Jesus



SEASON 3

SIMPLIFYING & SLOWING DOWN

exercises to you integrate
these practices into your life

In the third talk of Season 3 we moved from a diagnosis of the problem of busyness and hurry to a prescription, a solution. We were introduced to two new practices that come together: *simplicity* and *slowing down*.

The practice of simplicity is about intentionally prioritising the things that really matter by removing from our lives anything that distracts, diverts and distorts us in our attempts to be faithful to the way of Jesus. It's choosing to intentionally live with less, doing less, and simplifying life in order to make more time and space for what we most value – God, people and a life of love.

The practice of slowing down attempts to help us live at a healthy pace in the midst of our world with all its busyness and hurry.

It's an alien concept in a secular world that is obsessed with time and efficiency but has no vision of eternity.

These practices need to affect how we live at every level, not just the number of "things" in our home, but also our activities, our schedule, our budget, and how we spend our time.

Both practices help us create margin in our lives so we can better love others and live the way of Jesus.

Richard Swenson

"Margin is the space between our load and our limits."

To help people embrace them and implement them into their lives, we have collated several exercises to help.

Look at the exercises below and take time over the next few weeks to work through them.

Start with the one that most appeals (if any!) and implement some immediate changes.

Ideally, find people you can talk and pray about this with (and join a midweek group!).

EXERCISE: POSSESSIONS AUDIT

This is a simple exercise but one that takes time to really complete if you're serious about auditing *all* your possessions! So be realistic and do it in chunks. Perhaps schedule some time each month over the year to systematically review the contents of each room.

Start with what is in your living spaces before you tackle the attic/shed/garage! This will have the biggest impact on your lives and will may well motivate you to then declutter these other spaces (you might even end up putting your car in the garage at night!).

Remember the key question is this – “does the item *add* to my life in Christ?”. If not, review it. It may not add much but be essential (every kitchen needs a bin right?).

1. For the room you're focusing on (or just a bookcase/wardrobe etc in the room), review every item. Some will be easy and obvious (you need to keep the sofa, and probably don't *need* a new one). But others will be a little harder.
2. Go through the following simple process for each item (or group of things):
 - Keep? You need to be able to say why!
 - Giveaway? Be generous!
 - Sell? Realise its value and give the money to church or a charity.
 - Recycle (or if necessary, take to the tip)?
 - Wait? If in doubt, wait until you're sure.
3. Be decisive and follow through. Go straight to the charity shop, or text a friend to offer them an item. Don't leave a pile of things in the corner!
4. Reflect as you go on the process – how it makes you feel and harness the benefits!

EXERCISE: RELATIONSHIPS AUDIT

A word before you begin. This is not easy and requires you need to be as objective as possible. Some people find this harder than others. Remember that you're not saying someone is *not* important by saying someone else is *more* important. This is about getting a sense of priority when it comes to which relationships you invest in at what level. Be careful who you show this to.

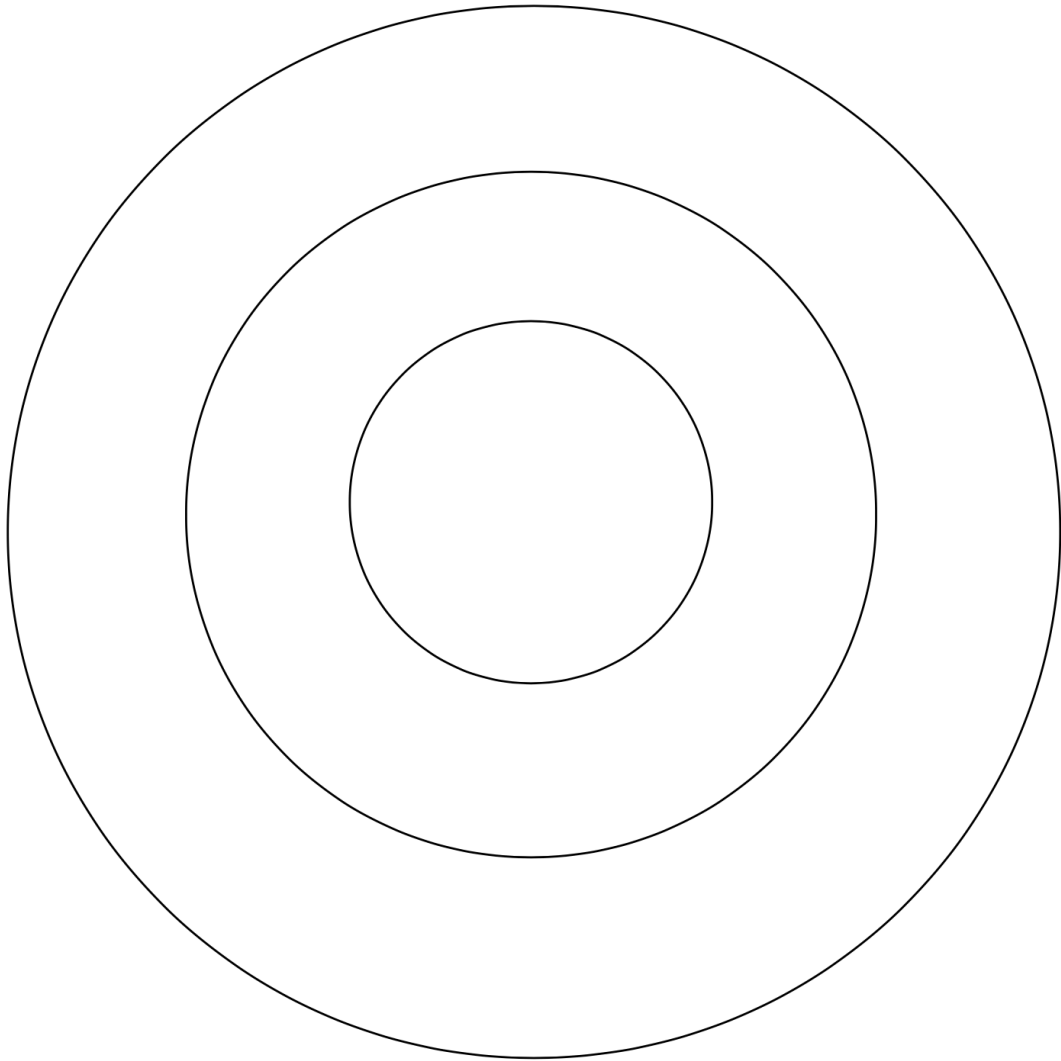
1. List all the relationships that you have with people you spend time with (beyond work*) on a regular basis – i.e. every so often, frequently or whenever possible. Include family, friends, people you lead or serve alongside in our church family, neighbours and acquaintances. Include God.
2. Go through that list and allocate each entry a score of 1-4.
1 = most important, 4 = least important.

1 = immediate family and closest friends (the ones you're "do life" with over the long haul – they may not be in Worcester)
2 = *some* wider family perhaps, your good friends and other key relationships in and out of church
3 = *other* wider family and *some* in our church community, plus perhaps neighbours or colleagues
4 = everyone else!
3. Write each entry on your list into the circles on next page (use initials if easier). Those you scored "1" go in the inner circle (hint: God likes to go in first), any "2"s go in middle circle and "3"s go in outer circle. Anyone marked with a 4 goes beyond the circle.
4. Get a coloured marker or felt tip pen and draw a circle around the inner and middle circle.

The relationships inside this coloured circle are the ones you are saying are the most important and need to take priority in your lives.

Those in the outer circle should take lowest priority.
Those outside the circles may not be a priority at all!

5. Reflect on your diary for the past 6-12 months. Does it reflect the completed circles?



EXERCISE: SCHEDULE YOUR PRORITIES

This exercise is all about reviewing how you spend the most precious, and yet finite resource you have – your time. Most of us are not sufficiently intentional about how we allocate our time and ensuring that our schedules reflect our priorities and values.

Experts suggest that the best way to review and/or rethink our schedules (we all have one, the question is just how intentional we are with them), is actually to start from scratch.

This exercise focuses on helping identify the best *weekly* schedule. In reality, we have a number of rhythms when it comes to time over the course of a year, partly reflecting our circumstances and stage of life – e.g. if you have children and they are of school age, you have a termly rhythm to your year that is largely enforced on you. Others of us might have a monthly rhythm with our work or seasonal variations.

But start with a *weekly* schedule since much of life happens on this rhythm. You can then evolve your thinking to reflect the nuances and complexities of your particular circumstances.

1. Write a list of the things that have to go into your schedule – either by necessity (reality or conviction) or out of choice (priorities and passions).

To get you started, we would suggest that the following should automatically make it on to your list, *in this order*:

- sleep (start here... you need more than you get)
- spiritual practices (daily and weekly... include your sabbath)
- core relationships (those inside the coloured circle on your relationships audit)
- habits of health (exercise, hobbies, things that bring you life that are also holy and healthy – i.e. not Fortnite)
- work commitments (this really shouldn't be first)
- margin (plan for spontaneity – build in margin to your life)

2. Map it to the template on the next page. Schedule *everything* (when are you going to tackle your Inbox?). And be realistic (include travel time, groceries shopping, cleansing etc).
3. Highlight the time you have left (your margin). Not much left hey? Be wise with the time left to you. Allocate some of it to "I'll decide on the day".

What you will most likely have realised is that you really don't have as much time as you thought.

Which explains why you're busy and hurried so much of the time.

4. Note what you can't fit into this new schedule. Welcome to reality. What needs to be dropped? What needs to be factored in somehow? How will you do that? Some of us may be able to outsource some things – e.g. do an online supermarket shop, pay for a cleaner. But all of us will need to recognise that something has to give.
5. Try your new schedule for a few weeks. Be disciplined. Don't say yes to something you don't have time for.
6. Review after a month or so. What worked, what didn't? What gave you life? What are you missing which needs to be added? And what didn't you miss (Facebook?)?
7. Keep tweaking and reviewing regularly. It will change as your circumstances and life stage changes.

TAMING YOUR SMARTPHONE

Anyone who is seriously trying to practice the way of Jesus has sought to tame their phone to some degree or another. The incredible device in our back pockets has the power to massively add to our life, but untamed, the power also to massively distract us and fuel busyness and hurry in our lives.

You will need to be honest about the extent to which your phone controls or distracts you at the moment.

Here the top 10 *essential* things that we must implement around our phones if we really want to live freely and lightly under the easy yoke of Jesus:

1. Turn off all notifications, including text and news alerts. Every time our phone pings and we stop what we're doing, we lose up to *15 minutes* of focused attention on something more important. No wonder we don't feel like we get much done.
2. Audit your apps. There are some that add to our lives (can you imagine life without Google Maps?) but many (most) take away from our lives. Delete every app you don't use regularly and need to make life easier – especially those apps that distract you and steal your time. Be ruthless.
3. Use the "screen time" function to limit how much time you can give to certain apps on any given day – particularly social media. And be brutal (ask someone else to set your password if you want to remove temptations to push past your chosen limits).
4. Give your phone a home at home. Make it your habit to *leave* it there unless you're using it. Phones do not live in pockets. Create a "docking point" in your home for all devices and put it there when not in use.
5. Put your phone "to sleep" at least an hour before you go to bed. Research shows that phone use just before bed massively reduces your quality of sleep and hinders more helpful use of that time (prayer? reading?).
6. Don't ever take phones upstairs or wherever your bedrooms are – don't use it as an alarm clock (buy one!). Otherwise your phone will get priority first thing in the morning at the expense of God and others. And before you've even got dressed your living life beyond your home.
7. Turn your phone off when you are spending time with God. Kind of obvious this one. Use a paper Bible.

8. No phones at the table. Ever. Really.
9. Discipline yourself not to reach for your phone when you're waiting for something (a meeting, the school gate, traffic). Leave it at home whenever possible. Take a book instead. Pray instead. Anything but more Instagram.
10. Make use of the "Do not disturb" function a lot. Or always.

There is an even more radical approach that we can point you towards if all this feels too easy.

Expect about 3-4 weeks of pain as you detox from your digital addiction. And then enjoy the freedom!