

SIMPLIFY



Burden

Chris Cook

When we first became believers in Jesus, many of us started following him with gusto. . We burned our bridges behind us and dumped the clutter from our lives with joyful abandon. One young believer took all the money he had, --- six hundred dollars --- and just threw it away, let it blow in the wind. Old habits went, expensive clothing, CD collections, stereos, extra cars.

And with this slashing and cutting away of all these things came a wonderful sense of freedom. It was great to discover how many things, how many old practices we could live without. We didn't need this stuff because we were totally fulfilled by serving the King.

We were in the world but not of it. In fact, we were hardly in the world at all...and that was the problem. The chap who threw away his money eventually discovered that his shoes wore out and he had to buy new ones. And someone had to be paying for his food. Life in this world kept getting complicated.

- There were jobs to go to or schools to attend.
- Many young believers got married ... babies were born.

Some years passed...Jesus still hadn't returned. What once seemed to us to be a season of bright vision and radical commitment to Jesus began to appear in retrospect to be just a passing fanatical phase.

- We'd been carried away.
- We'd been immature and unstable.

And now, when we hear about someone who just threw away his money or who gave up a good job to spend her life in some kingdom Vineyard, we smile to ourselves and say,

"Yea, I went through that too."

But what we need to ask ourselves, now that we are again tangled up in so many encumbrances, now that our hearts are weighed down with so many useless distractions, is whether those misguided efforts at radical commitment of a few years back were not more pleasing to God and more beneficial to us than our present cluttered state.

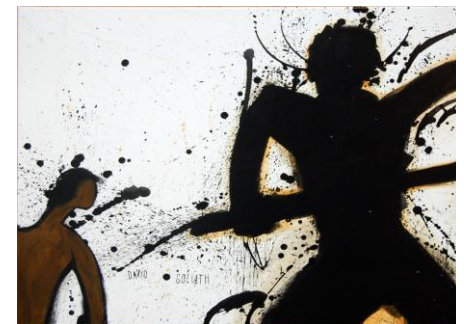
Even if we did some stupid things in the past, and even if we can see the folly of other people's fanaticism, we still need to ask ourselves whether the lives we are now living have anything left of the presence of God in them. These present lives of ours, are they not in need of some serious pruning and trimming?

And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him and killed him. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."

And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!" Then Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a helmet of bronze on his head, and clothed him with a coat of mail, And David girded his sword over his armor, and he tried in vain to go, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them." And, David put them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in his shepherd's bag or wallet; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. (I Samuel 17:32-40)

This principle appears all through scripture. You cannot clothe yourself in the armor of God and the armor of this world at the same time. To go forth in the armor of God we have to lay aside the armor of man, like David laying aside Saul's armor.

And the Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. And when the Philistine looked, and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, ruddy and comely in appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field."



David and Goliath

Chris Cook

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down, and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand." (I Samuel 17:41-47)

All through his life David was at his best when he was free of the armor of man...clothed only in God. And he was at his worst when his life was cluttered ... whether it was the clutter of Saul's armor or the inward clutter of needless distractions. David would never have taken that detour into sin with Bathsheba if his heart hadn't become so flabby and cluttered.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," he cried afterward, "Help me, O God, to get the cumbersome armor out of my heart. Help me to get the clutter out of my heart."

The mistake we made when we first tried that shortcut to radical commitment was that we busied ourselves tossing out the externals, getting rid of this and getting rid of that. We may have to get rid of these things, and a lot more, but the removal of distractions begins not with the externals but with the heart.

Ah, but how do you do it? How do we get rid of this cumbersome armor weighing down our inner lives? We have to start to simplify our inner lives. When David took off that clumsy armor, it was to simplify things. He didn't want to be tangled up in anything that wasn't really helpful for what he was about to do.

Inwardly, we need to simplify things. What a difference there will be in our lives when we no longer have to stagger under the weight of armor we don't need and a sword we don't need. What a wonderful freedom when we're out from under all this needless weight,

- so that our hearts can will God's will,
- so that our minds can think,
- so that our bodies can move.

1. We need to simplify the heart so that it can move freely in God.

"But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare..."

Luke 21:34

It's our responsibility to make sure that our hearts don't get weighed down. When the heart is weighed down, it's like David in Saul's armor.

- It can't move freely.
- It can't perceive what's going on in the world around it, especially the Spirit world, the Kingdom world.

So we have to keep throwing off these things that weigh down our hearts.

"Maybe I can get rid of dissipation and drunkenness, but how can I throw off the cares of this life?" someone says.

"My child is sick. I have financial problems. The furnace isn't ready for winter: How am I supposed to throw these things off?"



Do Not Worry

Chris Cook

"But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man."

Luke 24 34-36

- Praying for strength to pass through the trials.
- Praying for strength to keep standing before the Son of man.

The heart is kept simple by concentration, prayer toward the Lord, even to the point of taking the cares and anxieties and rolling them over on him. When Jesus says,

"I am the Vine, you are the branches ... abide in me," the union of the branch in the vine is always simple... never complex! ***"Abide in me...."***

If you need a computer and fifteen handbooks for other activities in life, you don't for this:

"I am the vine, you are the branches ... abide in me...Keep your relationship with me simple."

2. We also need to simplify each day so that we can move in God.

"Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust; cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee." (Psalm 143:8)

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is," (Psalm 63:1)

How do we simplify these complicated days we have to live through?

By beginning them with God.



Faithful

Chris cook

***"Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning;
for in thee do I trust.***

***Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk,
for I lift up my soul unto thee."***

When the wheel is out of balance it bounces all over the road. But when the wheel is perfectly centered it turns at high speed without a vibration of any kind.

Each day is a wheel. To simplify our day is to center it on God right from the start.

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee."

When we've come into the presence of God, this day, then we will be able to walk through the pressure and the confusion and the evil and the absurd injustices of this day and not be beaten down by them... we will still be free in God.

3. Finally, we need to simplify our view of our own death so that we can move toward our death; through our death, and beyond our death freely in God.

"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me..."

Queen Esther simplified her view of her own death when she decided she had no choice but to go in and appeal to the king on behalf of her people, knowing that if the king didn't raise his scepter she would be executed.

"I will do it..... If I perish, I perish."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego simplified their view of their own death when they refused to bow down to the golden image, knowing it meant the fiery furnace.

"God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. And he will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But if not, even if we die, we won't bow down to the golden image."



With us In the Fiery Furnace

Chris Cook

Jesus calls us to follow him to a cross ... to a death.

If we are willing to face that death and embrace that death, trusting in him...

... our life on this side of death will be freedom...the freedom of those who are no longer afraid to die.

That old armor of Saul which has been hanging over our hearts for so long was supposed to protect us from death. But instead it was death.

It was bondage we couldn't move.

May God help us to throw off that old armor of Saul, simplify our lives, clothe ourselves in Jesus only.

"I am the Vine, you are the branches...abide in me!"

God help us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.



Bared Soul

Chris Cook

Lord, God, I confess that I have been anxious and troubled about many things, and missing the One Thing Needful.

Lead me beyond the clutter of my fretful life into the simplicity that is Jesus, my Lord.

REB...Unknown Date

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WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN