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I tend to have a pretty positive outlook, but several years ago I let the pace of my life spin out of control to the point that I found myself sitting behind the wheel of my car in a grocery store parking lot, admitting to myself the reality I could no longer deny: *I hated who I had become.*

When you stay obscenely busy for as long as I had, eventually it will catch up with you. On this particular day, it smacked me in the face. I was at the end of all my clever schemes and maneuvers: No scheduling magic was going to fix the problem I now faced. I needed more than a calendar overhaul; I needed an overhaul of my soul. So I cried out to heaven for help.

I wonder if you can relate. Perhaps you, too, have let the themes of *hurry, busy,* and *no rest* mark your life for so long that you wouldn’t recognize simplicity if it showed up at your front door. It could be you’ve grown so accustomed to the chaos and resentment inherent in a life lived way too fast that you don’t know where to begin in untangling yourself from “the way it’s always been.” Maybe you’re not even sure you want to simplify; sometimes the noise and motion are comforting, if only to drown out what silence and solitude might reveal.
Only you know what your pedal-to-the-metal life is costing you these days, and only you can decide to lower your RPMs. But if you’re willing to do some honest work in terms of assessing your situation—inviting God’s help and taking action as His Spirit directs—then I promise you’ll begin to shed the layers of madness that are keeping you from a simplified life. Take the ideas I share in these four sessions and build on them; test them out and make them your own. Then, prepare to experience life in all its fullness, as you live it with an uncluttered soul.
Welcome to the *Simplify Participant’s Guide*, a four-session study for small groups, designed as a companion resource to the *Simplify DVD Experience*. This participant’s guide will help you *examine* the core issues that lure you into frenetic living, *eradicate* the barriers that leave you exhausted and overwhelmed, and *establish* the priorities that matter most in your life.

Each session includes seven key components that will help you leverage the principles and practices discussed on the DVD:

**Suggested Reading:** To help you get the most out of the *Simplify DVD Experience*, each session includes suggested reading from *Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul*, by Bill Hybels, to be read in conjunction with this small-group study.

**Introduction:** A brief narrative that sets the tone for each session.

**Conversation Starter:** This ice-breaker question at the beginning of each session will initiate a group
dialogue about some of the key concepts in the *Simplify DVD Experience*.

**Video Notes:** As you watch the video presentations, these outline notes will help you focus on the key concepts and principles discussed in each session. Use the space provided to record anything that stands out to you.

**Discussion Points:** These questions are designed to spark a lively discussion after the group has watched each of the video sessions.

**The Challenge:** At the end of each group session, The Challenge will help you begin to translate into action the principles you’ve learned.

**On Your Own:** This bonus material at the end of each session will help you incorporate into your daily life the fruit of the video content and group discussion. The three segments—*Ponder, Pray, and Practice*—may be completed all at once or spread out over the days between your group meetings.

You may discover that there is far more here than you can accomplish in a four-week group study. Take your time. Untangling yourself from the overscheduled, overwhelming web of your current life entails honest, rigorous work. It’s not for the faint of heart. At the same time, simplifying your life goes hand in hand with discovering new freedom.
to live the life God has called you to live. This participant's guide is content-rich in order to give you a multitude of tools to help you simplify your life. But that doesn't mean you have to tackle it all at once. It doesn't even mean that you have to do the four sessions in four weeks! Your group may decide to make this an eight-week study, for example, with one week for the video and discussion and a second week to discuss what you've learned from the On Your Own exercises and The Challenge. As you prepare to begin, ask God to show you how He wants you to invest in this study at this stage in your life.
Whether you’ve participated in scores of small groups before or this is your first time, this quick, straightforward overview will position you for success.

**WHO SHOULD BE IN MY GROUP?**

This curriculum applies to a wide range of audiences; anyone who would benefit from a slower pace, an uncluttered soul, and a more intentional walk with Christ is a perfect candidate for your group. To determine whom to invite, consider the following three steps:

1. **Pray.** Invite God’s wisdom regarding the people in your sphere of influence who stand to gain the most from a study of this nature.
2. **Think.** Consider the various types of relationships you have—including, perhaps, a spouse and children, neighbors, business associates, or friends at church. Which of these groups are a natural fit for this study?
3. **Ask.** Once you know whom you want to approach, spend a few minutes crafting a thoughtful
invitation. Why are you excited about this study? What do you hope to gain by carving out time for these four sessions? Why do you think other people will also enjoy the experience?

At its core, Simplify is a spiritual study that encourages participants to live in full surrender to Jesus Christ. If your group includes members of other faith systems (or no faith system), be sensitive to the extra processing time that might be required to more adequately explain tenets of the Christian faith that aren’t explicitly covered in these four sessions. You can also suggest other resources by Bill such as Just Walk Across the Room or Becoming a Contagious Christian.

WHEN SHOULD WE MEET?

Most groups find it useful to meet at the same time each week for four consecutive weeks. Poll your group to learn what works. For example, if you all hold nine-to-five jobs, consider meeting over lunch once a week or in the morning before business hours. If you all have young children, you might enlist the help of a trusted babysitter in your community so that group members can focus on the video and discussion.

Be sure to allow enough time prior to your first meeting for group members to complete the reading for session 1, which includes pages 1–54 in Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul.
WHAT DO WE NEED IN ORDER TO BEGIN?
Before your first meeting, be sure each group member has his or her own copy of the following three books:

- *Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul* by Bill Hybels
- *Simplify Participant’s Guide*
- a Bible

Also, your group will need to secure access to each session’s videos (four total), either on DVD (*Simplify DVD Experience*, available wherever books are sold) or via online streaming (www.rightnowmedia.org).

WHO SHOULD LEAD?
Many groups find that by sharing the leadership or facilitation responsibilities, each member has a greater opportunity to become invested in the content. Consider assigning each of the four sessions prior to your first meeting, so that these leaders will have plenty of preparation time.

When it is your turn to lead, keep in mind the following three big ideas:

1. **Be prayerful.** The best preparation for leading is prayer. Thank God for the opportunity to meet and to learn. Surrender your plans to His leadership. Invite His divine intervention in each group member’s life. Pray often and pray sincerely, as you set your mind and heart to the task of facilitating your group.
2. **Be ready.** There tends to be a direct correlation between the leader’s thoughtful preparation and the liveliness and depth of the group’s discussion. Before you show up to lead, be sure you have worked through the entire session’s content yourself, including prescreening the video session that the group will watch. Sort out how many minutes you plan to spend on each element of the session (see the general guidelines below) so that the time doesn’t get away from you during your meeting.

3. **Be aware.** As group leader, it is your responsibility to create a respectful environment. Here are three simple tips: (1) start and end on time; (2) keep conversations on point; and (3) ensure balanced input, both from the talkative and the pensive ones in the group.

**HOW DO WE SPEND OUR GROUP TIME?**

The four sessions in this curriculum have been designed for meetings that each last about **ninety minutes**. Here’s a suggestion for how to divide the time, but feel free to adjust as needed for shorter or longer sessions:

- Opening Prayer: 5 minutes
- Conversation Starter: 5–10 minutes
- Video: 20–25 minutes
- Group Discussion: 50 minutes
- The Challenge: 5 minutes
- Closing Prayer: 5 minutes
When it’s your turn to lead, be mindful of how the discussion unfolds during each portion of the meeting. If the conversation is useful to the entire group, make accommodation for it to continue by shortening other elements; if the conversation is only between two or three people and can best be had offline, take the initiative to suggest that arrangement. The goal of the group discussion is to give everyone an opportunity to express his or her views and to hear the views of others.

**WHAT DO WE DO BETWEEN GROUP MEETINGS?**

Participants are encouraged to take time between group meetings to complete each session’s On Your Own segment, in order to personalize what they’re learning. This includes The Challenge that appears after each session’s Discussion Points. **Before dismissing each session, read The Challenge aloud** and make sure that everyone understands what to complete on their own before the next meeting.

If you’re able, when it’s your turn to lead, check in with each member prior to facilitating your session to see what questions they have, and to discover how you can be praying for them throughout the week.

**KEEP IT SIMPLE**

The goal of these four sessions is to lessen the chaos in your life, not add to it. As you and your group engage with this material, be sure to keep this “main thing” the main thing at every turn. If you discover ways to simplify either the logistics or the group-time dynamic, seize them! Consider this your official permission to do so.
Your schedule is causing you to become someone.
Is it causing you to become
a workaholic dad,
a chronically exhausted mom,
a distracted employee,
the “heavy one” in the room . . . ?

Or is it causing you to become
a devoted follower of Christ,
a responsible financial steward,
a formidable prayer warrior,
a faithful friend?

Your schedule is causing you to become someone.
The question is, what do you think of who you’ve become?
SUGGESTED READING
Prior to meeting with your group to discuss session 1, read pages 1-54 in *Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul*, which includes the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: From Exhausted to Energized: Replenishing Your Energy Reserves
- Chapter 2: From Overscheduled to Organized: Harnessing Your Calendar’s Power

INTRODUCTION
It’s a familiar illustration, featuring three simple materials: a handful of walnuts, still in the shell; a quantity of dry rice; and a jar.

The instructions are straightforward: Fit everything into the jar. The assumption, of course, is that everything will *fit*. As we set about our task, we pour in all the rice and then realize there's not enough room for the nuts. So we empty everything out and start over, this time placing a few nuts in the bottom and then some rice; a few more nuts and a little more rice; and then the rest of the nuts and the last of the rice. But that last quarter-cup of rice overflows the jar, and we realize we’ve failed again.

Third time’s a charm: This time, we put all the walnuts in first. Then, as we add the rice, we gently shake the jar so that the rice fills in all the gaps and every last grain fits. Miracle of miracles, everything has its place.
And so it goes with our lives. When we get the biggest-ticket items firmly in place first, everything else finds its niche.

**CONVERSATION STARTER**

*What is the best part of your day, and why is it so enjoyable for you?*

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**VIDEO NOTES**

*Replenishing Your Energy Reserves*

“Are you going to be away again tonight?”

- Exhausted, overwhelmed, overscheduled

- Living with a full bucket

- Living with an empty bucket
The goal of this section is to help you incorporate the video content and group discussion material into your daily life. The three segments—Ponder, Pray, and Practice—may be completed all at once or spread out over the days between your group meetings.

**Ponder**
Set aside time before your next group meeting to reflect on the following questions. You’ll find additional space for journaling on pages 18–21.

How full is your “bucket” these days? Are you satisfied with your honest answer here?

When you hear the words *exhausted, overwhelmed,* and *overscheduled,* what thoughts come to mind? How well do these words describe you?