

January 2018

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

The Secret to Taming the Crazy Busy Life in 2018

By Jeremy Linneman

Simple is in right now. Simple food.
Simple banking. Real Simple.

And, full disclosure, I'm all in on the Simple Movement. I've simplified my daily routine, my clothing, and our house. But thinking about all this has led me to an eternally relevant discovery: Biblical community simplifies our lives more than anything else.

Too often I think, I don't have time for more relationships. I'm too busy already. But this hasn't proven true. Instead, neglecting biblical community has, counterintuitively, made my life more complicated and needlessly difficult. How does biblical community simplify our lives? It focuses and limits them so we can grow in grace together.

ARE YOU FULLY HUMAN?

Our life rhythms must recognize and reflect a basic truth: We are relational beings made in the image of the relational Triune God.

If you think about it, Jesus was never not in relationship. As God the Son he eternally

existed in the loving fellowship of the Trinity. When he came into this world he entered a normal human family, spent his childhood and early adulthood in obscurity, then started his ministry by inviting others to follow him. On the eve of his crucifixion, he gathered for a meal with his disciples, then led them out to pray with him at Gethsemane. With his final breaths, he instructed John to care for his mother.

On occasion, Jesus left his disciples to pray in solitude, but in general, Jesus did everything with this ragtag bunch of guys. His life and mission demonstrate that even he didn't live in isolation. If relationships have always been essential to the Son of God, shouldn't they be for us as well?

We, like him, exist for relationships. We were created in the image of this Triune God, so to be fully alive means to live in relationships. If Jesus is history's most "fully alive" human, it shouldn't surprise us that we cannot become fully human without community. We were crafted for community...

WHY SO DIFFICULT?

So if we are relational beings, created for community, why are relationships so hard? Beyond the reality that we are sinners living in a broken world, what makes community so difficult? **We are busy, overcommitted, and disintegrated.** The issue is not busyness; it's that our lives are increasingly superficial.

As our lives speed ahead, we sigh, “I’m so busy,” or “Life’s just crazy right now.” Or we say, “It’s just a busy season.” But the seasons last for years, the nominal relationships pile up, and we become a mile wide and an inch deep.

In former generations, people used to belong to a few relational circles: family was one circle, work was another, and church another. In all, a person had five or six total circles, and there was a good deal of overlap between them—perhaps 100 to 200 individuals total, and all within walking distance.

But just think of the circles we try to manage today: Family in town, Extended family out of town, Work, Church, Neighbors, Old high-school friends, College friends, Former co-workers, Hobbies, Kids, and Social media.

And there’s little overlap—each circle is a disconnected grouping of people with just one or two things in common. Not to mention many of these “circles” are actually multiple circles. Many of us have multiple teams we sit on at work. Even our kids have one or more relational circles—school, youth sports, and so on. And social media are like an ever-expanding circle.

The issue is not busyness; it’s that our lives are increasingly superficial. Whereas former generations managed four to six interconnected circles, the average individual today manages 40 to 50 disconnected circles. As a result, we carry the anxiety of managing relationships with 1,000 to 2,000 individuals. How could we possibly live in real relationships with this many people, across dozens of circles? How could we possibly feel our life is simple, integrated, or even manageable?

No wonder our culture is an inch deep and a mile wide. We are drowning in busyness and superficiality.

PURSUE SIMPLE, BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

Because we were created for community, human flourishing—growth in Christ and true

joy—is found only in tight, Christ-shaped relationships. You will never be happy and fully human apart from biblical community.

Think about it like this: No one gets to the end of their life and wishes they had a few dozen more superficial relationships. No one wishes they’d served on one more board or spent an extra 100 hours in the car eating fast food and shuttling toddlers to more soccer practices. No one gets to the end of their life and says, “I should have just mindlessly plowed through more days and months and years.”

No, it’s always: “I wish I had invested more quality time in the people closest to me: my spouse, my kids, my church family.”

Simple, biblical community focuses and centers our lives by honoring our relational design, by limiting how many other activities and relationships we can pursue, and by offering true fellowship and accountability in the context of intentional relationships.

Editors’ note: This is an adapted excerpt from Jeremy Linneman’s eBook *Life-Giving Groups: ‘How-To’ Grow Healthy, Multiplying Community Groups* (Sojourn Network, 2017).

I Couldn’t Call God ‘Father’

An Iranian woman’s journey to faith

In Islam there are 99 names for Allah. Not one of them is “Father.”

I am from a family of six children. My father never showed us love. Whenever I heard of people speak about the love and support of their fathers, I had no idea what they meant. My father was an angry man. He abused us, especially my mother, emotionally and physically. She was beaten several times to within an inch of her life. Yet she put up with this in order to protect us children.

I also remember the day when my father tried to kill my brother, forcing him to run away barefooted into the street.

When I was old enough, I left Iran so that I could be free of my father and have a better life. I ended up in the UK.

I always had a negative view of men. I questioned why God had given men such power. I tried to be strong, yet I was depressed and tired of life.

One day, alone in my room, I spoke for the first time to the God of creation. I had given up on my religion, which had always made me feel weak and afraid. I prayed to the God I did not know, yet whose presence I sensed in a real way. I wanted to die, but I didn't want to commit suicide, as it would bring shame on my mother. So I asked God to kill me. But he didn't kill me. Instead, He gave me life. Let me tell you how.

FINDING JOY

A week later, I met with an Iranian lady. When I started to share my heart with her, she told me that she had no religion—but that her daughter had become a Christian and had changed. She asked if I wanted to go to her daughter's church. The work of God is amazing: he used a nonbeliever to witness to me.

So I went to the church for the first time, and it was strange. The people had names like Mohammad and Zahra, which are Muslim names. I didn't know that Muslims could become Christians. And the men there were different. It seemed they didn't have unclean eyes.

They were worshiping with joy, in my mother tongue, Persian. I had always wondered why I must speak to God in Arabic, a language I didn't know. Why didn't he accept my mother tongue?

At the end of the sermon, the preacher called everyone to trust Jesus the King.

From that day onward, I had a new faith and a new joy.

LEARNING TO SEE GOD AS FATHER

But there was a great challenge awaiting me. I had to accept God as my Father. In my mind, "Father" was not a word of honor toward the God I had come to know. "Mother" would have felt like a much better word.

But God wanted to reveal himself to me. And he did so with complete patience and gentleness.

As I studied the Bible, I saw the grace and love of the Father. As I prayed, I felt the attention of the Father. As I worshiped, I felt the embrace of the Father.

He healed my past, my present, and my future. He has transformed me. He even enabled me to truly forgive my earthly father.

I used to hate the word "Father," but today I worship God the Father with great love and passion. I worship Jesus Christ as Lord, the One who has saved my soul. And I love to walk in the Spirit, who is always with me.

MY FAMILY RESTORED

I was the first in my family to become a Christian. When I shared the gospel with my mother, she said that at her age of 60 she could not change.

But over time God's sovereign love wooed and won her heart, and today she worships Jesus.

I shared Jesus with my nephew. Today he worships Jesus.

When my sister-in-law had a problem, I prayed for her and shared a Bible verse. Today she worships Jesus.

My sister saw the change in my life. Today she worships Jesus.

One of my brothers was an atheist. But today he worships Jesus.

I saw 11 people come to Christ. But my father did not.

He had left my mother for a woman my age. It inflicted a lot of pain on the family, and for a long time nobody spoke with him. But God put it on my heart to call and talk with him.

One day on the phone, my father told me he had cancer. His young wife had left him. My mother, who had grown in faith, bravely decided to go and care for him on his deathbed.

Three days before my father died, I called and spoke to him one last time. It was difficult, but the Lord put it in my heart to share the gospel once more. I told him about the dying thief next to Jesus on the cross. "Like the thief," I told him, "you can still be forgiven." My mother was there, and held his hand as he smiled and asked Jesus to forgive and redeem him.

HELPING OTHER WOMEN

Muslims do not know God as father. But praise God, he has been working in Iran. And many, many people like me are meeting the

Father in heaven.

Today I have the privilege of being part of Elam Ministries's women's team, and I've had the chance to teach numerous women just like me. I never knew my story would affect so many other lives. I've had the chance to tell hundreds of Iranian women what the Father has done in my life. I speak of the Father's authority, the Father's attention, the Father's generosity, the Father's faithfulness, and the Father's love.

Recently, after sharing my story at a conference for women from Iran, a lady named Haleh approached me in tears. Her father was just like mine. Unsurprisingly, Haleh couldn't see God as Father. But after much conversation and prayer, she was finally able to call on God as her Father. It was so moving to see. The following day Haleh sang a new song to God about his Fatherhood, and like a little girl she danced before her Daddy.

Nadia is one of many Iranian women touched by the liberating and restoring love of Christ. Today she is a leader serving with Elam Ministries to reach and disciple other Persian-speaking women through women's ministry programs.

FUNNIES

A nephew broke an old vase at a rich uncle's house. The uncle was extremely angry and yelled: "Do you even know how old the vase was? It was from the 17th century!"

The boy breathed a sigh of relief, and said, "Oh, good, then it wasn't new."

Bob (walking up to Jim): "You'll never believe this, I just fell off a 30 ft ladder."

Jim: "No way man, are you okay?"

Bob: "Yeah, luckily I was just on the first step."

What did the Judge say when he went to the dentist?

Do you promise to pull the tooth, the whole tooth, and nothing but the tooth?

Mother: "So what have you been doing at school today, Johnny?"

Johnny: "I don't really want to talk about it mom. You'll see it later on the news, anyways."

A prisoner is finally released, after many years in jail. He stands at the pavement, yelling, "I'm free! I'm free!"

A little kid walked up beside him happily and joins in, "I'm four! I'm four!"