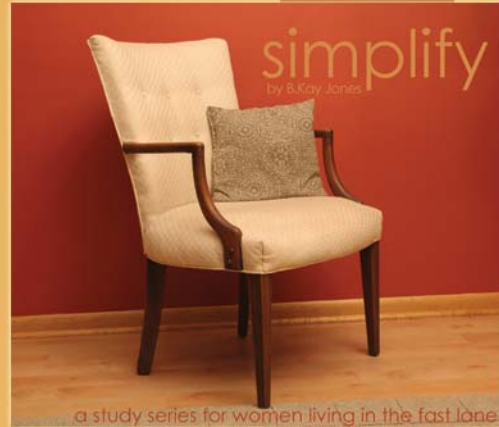


simplify

escape from "me-ville"



"Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV)

Love your neighbor as yourself? Was He kidding? Is there some other interpretation of this scripture? Love people I barely know as much as I do myself? It seems like a mighty big request, yet Christ says that the rest of His word hangs on these two commandments.

It is pretty hard to think of loving someone I hardly know as much as I love my own children, and those I hold dear to me. Love, of course, is fundamental to the Gospel. We receive love from a perfect heavenly Father who freely gave His son to die on a cross for the sins of people who were yet to be born. Therefore, in return, we are to pass on that selfless, unconditional love we received to others... so that they too might come to know God and be transformed by His love.

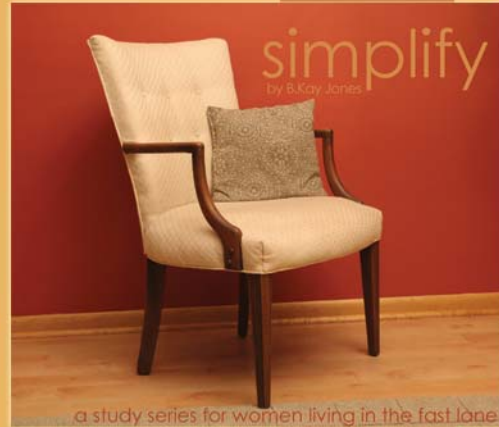
Check out a magazine rack the next time you're in the grocery store. The world is telling us, "It's all about you," "What about Your Needs," "Find Self-Fulfillment by..." "Take Time for You," "Spoil Yourself." So many people are so busy fulfilling themselves, they haven't taken time to look at the needs of others. We are so over-committed that we have no commitment to relationships with others. I've found that I can learn something from everyone I come in contact with.

If we truly believe that our steps are ordered by the Lord, then we need to notice the people He places in our path. I had a speaking engagement in the Carolinas. We had a good time of ministry, but nothing that sticks in my mind like the event when we started home. Our host didn't have time to take us to lunch, which was unusual. My friend and I discussed how strange it was that no one made arrangements for food because WE were hungry. We were only thinking about what we needed...food. We didn't really think about what our host needed to do etc... We

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decided we would enjoy our time alone, use it to reminisce about college days, catch up on family news, etc. Basically, this time would be all about us. We stopped at a restaurant with only us in mind. After awhile, I felt drawn to the waitress. I felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to encourage her and tell her God had a good plan for her life and then the Lord told us to give her some money. That precious girl, that had been overlooked by so many, was in desperate need of a word from God. She was a new believer, a single mom, who was trying to make a new start and had just had money stolen by a roommate. We were allowed to be God's hand extended to her that day. Thank God, that day, we didn't turn a deaf ear to her need for love. She was in crisis and needed to know that God cares. How many times have you and I overlooked a need so simple for us to meet, but life-changing to another? God help us to see the needs of others as easily as we see our own.

"Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle." Romans 12:10 (The Message)

Simplicity Suggestions

1. In what situations are you most likely to be self-centered?
2. Discuss God's ability to change our focus. Give an example from your own life.
3. Is it easier to love people you know, or people you don't know? Why?
4. Discuss the advice in Romans, "Practice playing second fiddle."