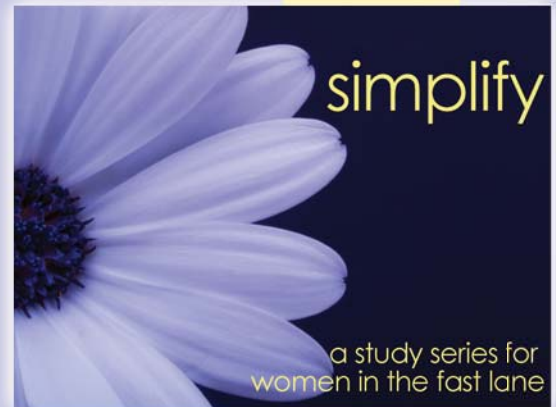


# simplify

*from a distance*



As we study the scripture where Jesus simplified the commandments, in Matthew 22:34-39, we are learning how to love our neighbor as ourselves.

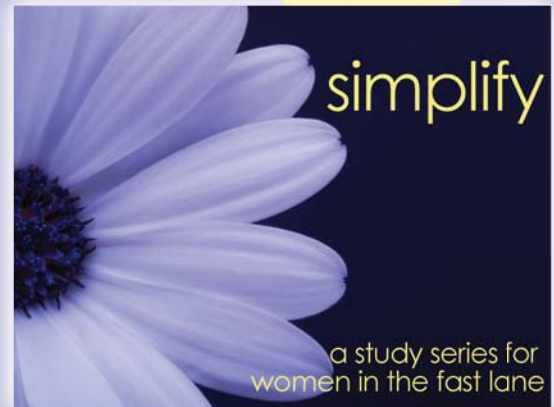
I spent many years trying to love people that really didn't want my love. I thought if I could just love them enough they would come to a place of wholeness. Surely I was the one that could make the difference. And so I worked, encouraged, and tried to break through with certain ones. I grieved when they consistently rejected my love, or tried to twist my intentions toward ill-will. One day I was crying over a lady who had been abused and thus become an abuser when God spoke so clearly to me. *"Don't you think I can handle her without you?"*

The truth was simple, but difficult to see... I needed to release her to God. It was prideful to think that her only avenue to God was through me. People come to Jesus through the drawing of the Holy Spirit. Until they are ready to open their hearts to love, they can't receive it. Love is precious and we need to plant it in lives where it will make a difference.

Another lady once said, "You know you are wasting your time on me. I'm a gaping hole. No matter how much love you give me, it will never be enough." After many years of extending love, I realized she was right. Her inability to receive love came from her unwillingness to let God deal with her heart issues. Sometimes the best we can give people is to walk away and trust God to do his work in the seed we've planted.

It is okay to love at a distance. We need to understand that. I still love these people very much. They are just not the ones whose lives will be changed by my love. After several years I realized I was overlooking people who were hungry for my love because I was consumed with people incapable of receiving love. My eyes were blinded to the people around me that were crying out for help. I had allowed the others to drain my time and energy while many were hungry to be discipled and loved.

Jesus spread love everywhere He went in Scripture, but you never see Him begging people to take it. Mark 10:17-22 is the story of the rich young ruler. He was asking Jesus what he could do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all he had and follow Him. The young man was not willing to do what it took to follow Jesus, so Jesus kept moving. Did He still love him? I'm sure He did, but he would not allow that one young man to consume His time and thoughts. He loved him at a distance.



We can choose to love people as much as we love ourselves but, with some, we must draw boundaries to help our lives and our short time on earth to be used efficiently. The people that are not willing to move toward God or that pull you back are not the ones who need to be the focus of your energy. Find a child that needs your love. Volunteer in a homeless shelter. Help tutor at a school. Volunteer to help a single mom and give her a break. Visit a nursing home and change a life. There are people all around that need your love. Invest the majority of your love in places where it will flourish.

## Simplicity Suggestions

1. Discuss a time when you poured time and energy into a person who wasn't willing to change.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the places where your love can make a difference as well as the places where you are being drained.
3. Look at your own heart. Are you willing to receive the love of Jesus, or is He being forced to love you from a distance? How can you begin to change that situation?