



Part 5: Simple Spirituality

APPETIZER: The Complexity of Religion

SIMPLE SPIRITUALITY:

God is with us.
Live like it.

God is “with” us in two ways:

- His presence *surrounds* us.
- His heart is *for* us.

All religion is predicated on getting this fact wrong.

Genesis 3:1; Matthew 18:20; Matthew 28:20; Acts 18:9-10

TAKE OUT: “Don’t be afraid...”

Like Joseph welcomed Mary,
don’t be afraid to welcome this good news into your life.

DINE IN: Emmanuel – God with us

Matthew 1:18-25

Five lessons from Joseph...

1. He is committed to following *what God says*.
2. He is committed to following what God says *in Scripture*.
3. He is committed to following what God says in Scripture *as interpreted by the community of faith*.
4. He is committed to following what God says in Scripture as interpreted by the community of faith *in the most loving way possible*.
5. He is committed to following what God says in Scripture as interpreted by the community of faith in the most loving way possible *while being open to fresh understanding*.

HOMEWORK: *Daily Meditation & Prayer*

- Set your daily alarm just ten minutes earlier. Then rather than reaching for your phone or any other device first to catch up on social media, news, or email, reach for your Bible.
- READ & MEDITATE on **Matthew 1:22-23**.
- Take time to think about some of the events and interactions of your day ahead and imagine God’s presence around you during these times. Let yourself really *feel* the difference God’s presence can make, knowing God is with you, and really “with” you, wanting what is best for you. See how long and how often you can carry this awareness into your day.
- (For extra help: Leave yourself reminders of God’s presence in strategic places – car, TV, computer, fridge, desk, etc. You can just write “Emmanuel” on cards, paper, or post-it notes.)

Psalms 130:7-8

Home Church Questions

HANGOUT [Warming Up to the Topic – in one Large Group]

1. After reviewing Sunday's message, talk about what most encouraged, convicted, or perplexed you. Take your time here – there's lots to discuss!
2. Have you followed through on your homework? What difference, if any, has it made for you?

HEAR [Listening to God through Scripture – in Discussion Groups]

3. Read **Matthew 1:18-25**.
 - a. What verse or idea stands out to you? Why?
 - b. Joseph was faithful to what he knew – via the Bible, via the community of faith, via the principle of love, and via spiritual experience. Which way do you learn and live best? What strengths and weaknesses does that give you?
 - c. The original prophecy about "Immanuel" in **Isaiah 7** did not appear to be about the Messiah, but about a sign to King Ahaz about his victory in battle. How would you respond to someone who said, "Matthew is making up connections that don't exist. Matthew is reading a prophecy about Jesus back into this Old Testament story in order to make it look like a miraculous prophecy."?
 - d. Catholics believe Joseph and Mary never had sex and she remained a perpetual virgin. How does the wording of **verse 25** work against this theory?
 - e. God is with you (his presence is with you) and he is *with* you (he likes you and is for you). How do each of these truths impact your awareness and emotional experience? Can you share examples from the past week?

HUDDLE [Making It Personal and Praying Together – in Huddles]

4. Use your regular huddle questions to talk about your lives and to prepare you to pray for each other. (If you haven't already, remember to exchange contact information and arrange a time to talk, in person or on the phone.)

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Quotes

Welcome to our year-end series about decluttering our souls.

Today's message:
Part 5: Simple Spirituality.

Simplified living requires more than just organizing your closets or cleaning out your desk drawer. It requires uncluttering your soul.
~ Bill Hybels

Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free!
- Old Shaker Hymn

In Jesus, God is now with his people personally.
~ Michael J. Wilkins

At Christmas, God became a naked baby. You can't get more vulnerable than that.
~ Matt Woodyly

The idea that God, if there is a force of Love and Logic in the universe, that it would seek to explain itself, is amazing. Love needs to find a form. Love has to become an action or something concrete. Love must be made flesh.
~ Bono

There is no greater truth than this – God is with us.
~ Robert Bilmont

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").
~ The Apostle Matthew

I am with you always.
~ Jesus