

## Why Complicate a Simple Life?

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Every year Appalachia-Science in the Public Interest (ASPI) produces its “Simple Lifestyle Calendar” with daily reminders about walking more gently on the earth.

“Take time to get away and be alone,” “Feel good, live simply, laugh more,” and “Put more art in your life” all suggest ways to become more human, more gentle, more spiritual. How appealing: “Sing in the morning,” “Indulge your need to read,” “Listen to silence!”

Unfortunately, many of us need to ponder more deeply the reality presented in the calendar’s May 12<sup>th</sup> date: “Stress can make you vulnerable to disease.” While we recognize the salutary effects of living slower-paced lives, we find ourselves swept along in the rush of popular culture. Maybe we need the ASPI calendar more than we realize: “Limit your email time,” “Disable the envy switch,” “Turn away from consumerism.”

The admonitions of the calendar come from a care of creation theology with a respectful appreciation of earth science. In Genesis God looked over creation and found it “very good” (Gen. 1:31), signifying its inherent worth. God so loved the world that God joined it (Jn. 3:16)—that’s the Incarnation. Christ needed creation after the Resurrection, i.e. his body (Lk. 24:39-43), to demonstrate God’s power over death *and destruction*. Why is Christ called the “firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15), if at the end of time creation gets wadded up and thrown away like a useless piece of paper? The answer appears to lie with the totality of salvation. All creation awaits its own freedom from corruption and a share in the redemption of Christ (Rom. 8:21; Col. 1:20). This approach to theology invites us to appreciate God’s gift of creation and to see ourselves as interdependent with it in the web of life.

Curiously, a simple lifestyle sounds so Gospel, but respecting earth science appears so spiritless. We revel in the intimacy and dependence on God when we recall the “lilies of the field” (Lk. 12:22-34) and “allow the children to come unto me” (Matt. 19:13-15) and “let not your hearts be troubled” (Jn. 14:1). Yet St. Augustine reminds us that God speaks in two ways: through the revelation in Scripture and through the revelations of creation.

If discipleship entails proclaiming the Good News, then as part of that Good News our patterns of consumption must reverence creation. Currently the findings of earth science are begging us to change our lifestyles based on overconsumption of scarce resources and the excessive use of fossil fuels. Human activity is changing the earth’s climate and inducing global warming. While carbon dioxide levels fluctuate by season, they are currently increasing by two parts per million (ppm) each year which is intensifying the greenhouse effect and raising earth’s average temperature. In the mid 1950s the carbon dioxide level measured 315 ppm. Today it stands at 390 ppm. The science is irrefutable.

Perhaps the simple lifestyle calendar can help us in two ways. First, it can reduce the fear that lifestyle changes will lead to boredom. People are finding themselves addicted to the Internet, texting and shopping which many times leaves them unfulfilled. The calendar suggests creative activities that can satisfy the human spirit: “Explore the beauty of Autumn,” “Dig in—get your hands dirty,” “Celebrate the use of herbs and all things herbal.”

Second, the calendar can teach us a connection between spirituality and creation care: “Smart energy choices save money and improve life,” “More with less is best.”

Finally, faithfully following the simple lifestyle calendar gets you to December 31<sup>st</sup> and something new: “New Year, New You.”