



*Michelle S. Murray*

For the past 12 years, I have called Cambodia home. During the last eighteen months, I have been working with Marketplace Ministries Worldwide as a Marketplace missionary. Managing Divine Pizza & Ribs in Phnom Penh has stretched me. My most recent job title is Chief Spiritual Officer for CaterHelp, a catering company that provides nutritious food service for factory canteens located in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

People are my passion. I desire to see the whole person changed and come to an understanding of what a transformed life in Jesus Christ really means. I use my God-given skills, talents, and abilities to instruct and train job and life skills while at the same time teach about Jesus. My desire is to equip the staff to succeed in life. In my role I teach Firm Foundations, encourage the Christian staff members to share their faith, and offer connections to local churches where Cambodian Christians can take up the role of discipleship.

*BIBLE READING: Jeremiah 6:16*

“I have decided to follow Jesus / Though none go with me, still I will follow / The world behind me, the cross before me / No turning back, no turning back.” I learned this song back in my teen years, and I thought it to be rather simple, but now it challenges and inspires me.

Recently I have adopted a minimalist outlook on life. It has required me to make many decisions. This perspective starts with looking at things and deciding if I just want them or if I really need them. But as the process goes on, once I have let go of the top layer of easy choices, it requires me to start making harder decisions: How do I want to live my life? Does this thing add to my life or cause me to have another burden? These questions are much more difficult to answer, but when I have taken the time to answer the tough questions, then I go back to the simpler things and the decisions become easier. The choice before me either adds or detracts from my life.

The same thing is true in my walk with God. So often I look at the small decisions and get bogged down wondering, “Should I do this or that?” Instead the big question is, “How do I want to live my life to reflect my relationship with Jesus Christ?” When I have answered the big question, then like the song described, there is no turning back. Jeremiah says that when we come to the crossroad, we should ask what is the ancient or good way and then walk in it. It is a daily decision to follow Christ.

*SONG: I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Ask the Lord for wisdom, so you can make the best decision for the time, place, and circumstance you are in.*

—Michelle S. Murray

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG)*

I have always been intrigued by the idea of Sabbath rest. What are you supposed to do or not do? I wanted a list because rules are so much easier to follow than listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit. I have read a few books, asked many friends for input, and still felt I lacked an understanding of rest.

A couple of years ago, I meditated on Matthew 11:28-30 for nearly a year. I read it in many versions and liked *The Message* the best. The overall theme was Jesus saying, “Come to me and I will help you find (real) rest for your soul.” He continues and says, “You’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” Who would not want to live freely and lightly? I sure do.

I had always thought real rest was for the physical body, but this verse is clearly talking about the soul. After attempting a variety of ways to rest on the Sabbath, it became clear to me that what I needed to do was let go. “Let go?” you say. “Of what?” I came to understand that God does not need my supervision; when I rest and trust that he is in control, everything will be fine. Only then do I find rest for my soul that contributes to the rest my body needs. The Sabbath is a day for praise, worship, and enjoyment of my life with my Savior.

*SONG: The Spirit Song*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, please help me to understand what you mean by Sabbath rest and learn to practice it.*

—Michelle S. Murray

*BIBLE READING: Romans 12:1*

I wasn't always good with money, but over the past decade or so, I have really worked at being a good steward. So if you were to ask me, I would tell you that I am a good steward. Approximately 2,350 verses in the Bible deal with money and its management. I know that is where I got this idea.

However, recently I signed up for The Daniel Plan from Saddleback Church, and I was blown away by one of Rick Warren's talks where he explained about the stewardship of our bodies. This was a completely new idea for me. I have always been an overweight person and have struggled to lose weight and be in good health. Every time I tried a diet or exercise program, I failed. It was an area of my life I thought I had no control over. But I have come to realize it is an area that I *keep* control over instead of giving it to the Lord. Paul's words in Romans exhort us to be a living sacrifice.

Confession and letting go were the beginning of the change. But the most important change came from the time I have spent on my knees asking God to guide and direct me to become a good steward of all the things he has entrusted to me: time, money, talent, and the body I use to worship and serve him. These prayer times have given me new insight into self-control as a fruit of the spirit. In the past it was one that I ignored, you know, because it is at the bottom of the list. However, it is essential to being a good steward.

*SONG: I Surrender All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please help me to be a good steward whose reward is the joy of the Master.*

—Michelle S. Murray

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 6:12*

One of my favorite books is Richard Foster's *Freedom of Simplicity*. The idea is not living a frugal or minimalist life so much as choosing not to be complex. For example, enjoying the simplicity in a great sunrise or sunset versus watching TV. Why would I want to watch a reality show when I can actually participate in reality by relating to people?

This past year I sold my TV. I still watch videos on my laptop, but the TV is not the focal point of my living room. When I have people over, it is to enjoy a good meal and conversation. When home alone, I sit with my feet up and enjoy a good book, a book that stimulates my mind and challenges my viewpoint and understanding of the world.

I don't want you to get the idea that I have gotten rid of technology. No, I am a product of my generation, I have a MacBook, iPad, and iPhone; they make my work life easier, though sometimes harder. But often I have a great desire to disconnect completely from the digital world. This world is not what is truly important. Sitting and sharing a coffee and a joke with a friend is worth more than anything I own. The challenge is to recognize what Paul tells us in Corinthians—not all things are beneficial for me, and more importantly, I need to not be mastered by anything. I completely unplug on Sundays except for the phone (which is on silent) because in the simple silence, that is the time I hear God.

*SONG: Simple Gifts*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, please help me to put aside all the distractions so I can be quiet, hear your voice, and spend time with you.*

—Michelle S. Murray

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 138:3 (NLT)*

As I have made decisions recently to have a simpler life, I have minimalized my belongings, allowed for space for creativity, and opened myself to new experiences and opportunities. My family and friends have complained that it is very difficult to buy me gifts because I don't want anything. That is not entirely true. What I want are experiences that create memories, not things to put on a shelf that require cleaning or maintenance.

Now don't get me wrong, but to me it is like comparing worshiping God to worshiping an idol. No, I do not think that all things are idols, but they can easily dominate our homes or lives. As I watch people get bigger and bigger TVs, I see families eat together less, thus having less interaction, except through media experiences. Can media-based interactions bring about real relationships?

When I was a kid, dinner was at 6:30 p.m., and we did not answer the phone or even think about watching TV during dinner. That time was family time and it was sacred (set apart). It was not until I moved out on my own as a young adult that I realized how valuable that time together was. It was the basis for shared life experiences. Now as a single adult, I crave that time around the table with others, to share about the latest book I have read or something I did; to have someone be interested in my life and at the same time get to listen to what makes *them* excited.

*SONG: Be Thou My Vision*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please help me to crave time with you, so when I look back, I have experiences to reflect upon.*

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*BIBLE READING: Lamentations 3:22-26*

Anyone who was a Christian during the '70s should remember the song "Day by Day" from the musical *Godspell*. The lyrics say, "Day by day / Oh, dear Lord, three things I pray / To see thee more clearly / Love thee more dearly / Follow thee more nearly." I love this song (despite the use of the word "thee"). It reminds me that everything else needs to be seen through glasses that have these three descriptions as the filter.

How can I accomplish these things? Reading God's Word each morning is the start for me. He answers so many questions in such timely ways when I take the time to read and have the desire to listen. The way I show love to people is through spending time with them and giving them gifts. I spend time with God when I read his Word and have conversations that require me to listen, not just talk.

Having worn glasses for most of my life, I used to be amazed by how dirty my glasses were when I took them off. *How could I see through them?* I would wonder. After cleaning them, the clearness returned; the obstacle had been removed. When such obstacles are removed—physically or spiritually—only then am I able to follow the path or the shepherd who always is leading me. Psalm 23 says that he leads me beside the still waters and makes me to lie down in green pastures. He cares for me when I am willing to follow.

*SONG: Day by Day*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please help me to see clearly and learn how to follow you where you lead, to know that you desire the best for me.*

—Michelle S. Murray

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 2:15*

I was always of the understanding that work was a product of the curse after Adam and Eve ate from the tree. But when we read Genesis 2:15, we see that God has made man and put him in the garden to work the ground and keep it in order. This happens before God even tells them not to eat of the tree. What came after “the fall” is that work became hard, as to toil.

A calling is a funny thing. In older times nuns and monks had a vocation, a calling, into the religious life. That was a life set apart, sacred. Then there was everyone else who toiled and worked and went to church on Sunday, living disconnected lives. I think this was a complete misunderstanding of what work is in our lives.

What I have come to understand is that we were put on this earth to work and that work should be done for God’s glory. As a missionary, I have shared many times how I have been called to the work that I do. But I believe all of us are unique and God has put a calling on our lives: to be salt and light in the places where we work. My life is complete and whole; what I am six days of the week is congruous with the person who goes to church on Sunday. I have the option to accept God’s call to be the person he created and live a life that is a witness to him.

*SONG: Living for Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father in Heaven, please help me to understand how you have created me for work and how I can be your witness at my work place.*

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