

Q&A | AUTHOR INTERVIEW



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Why did you write *Simple Spirituality*?

The book is a reflection of my own spiritual journey. I wrote it to remember the simple touch points that have helped cultivate my faith. It's a confession that I have not arrived at but am still working towards. It's a prayer for courage to not lose hope and give up, especially in a world where there's reason for such hopelessness. It's also a testament to the central role that community has played in my spiritual formation as it's been lived out vocationally. And it's the story of God opening my eyes to the surprising gifts among pain and suffering in some of the most unlikely places in the world.

You talk a lot about spiritual blindness. What are the disciplines you suggest in your book that can help us to see God more clearly?

I focus on five spiritual disciplines that, when celebrated, help us see God. They are some of the basic values of our faith: humility, community, simplicity, submission, brokenness.

Simplicity seems to be a central theme in the book, as one of the disciplines you highlight and as part of the title. What does simplicity mean practically?

I don't think simplicity is as much about *what* you have as it is about *how* you hold it. In the Information Age with the over-saturation of 24-hour news coverage, the suffering of the world is broadcast into our homes, and suddenly we're not as removed from it as we thought. That exposure is a good motivation to realize that there is a connection between how we live and how the rest of the world suffers.

How is simplicity a spiritual discipline?

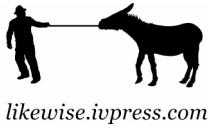
Rather than trying to fit our spirituality into complex religious practices, we can look to Christ. He kept it simple. He taught lessons even children could understand. And He used everyday illustrations to explain the mysteries and secrets of the kingdom of God—which we tend to complicate and reserve for the religiously astute.

What excites you about this book?

I'm excited to introduce friends that my wife, Phileena, and I have met during our travels, and to share the lessons from our experiences in what seemed to be really hopeless places that became spaces that have offered hope.

How did this book come to be written?

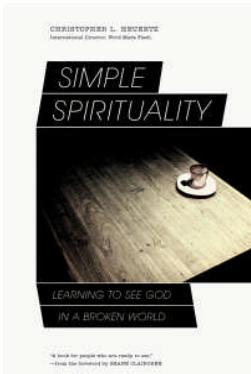
Years ago, while studying in Jerusalem, I visited the Brook of Elah where David pulled five stones, one of which he would ultimately use to kill the giant Goliath. I, too, pulled five stones out for myself.



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Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God in a Broken World
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Years later I reflected on what those stones could represent in my life, and what giants needed to be slain. The five stones became, for me, the five disciplines outlined—humility, community, simplicity, submission, brokenness.

I led a few retreats built around those five disciplines. One of the participants at a retreat in Omaha was Leslie Iwai, an art professor at the University of Nebraska—Omaha. The retreat inspired her to create a sculpture entitled “Sounding Stones,” which incorporates five giant stones named after each one of the disciplines. (It’s now installed in a city park here in Omaha).

My community, Word Made Flesh, published an article about this in our journal, *The Cry* (see Volume 11, Number 2, Summer 2005, page 17) and this article found its way to InterVarsity Press.

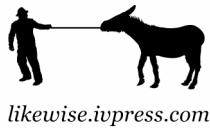
While visiting Chicago in the fall of 2006, I met with a couple InterVarsity Press staff. We had lunch at a killer little Thai place. Over the meal, the article about “Sounding Stones” came up. By the end of our pad thai, the primordial concept of *Simple Spirituality* was born.

What can this book say to the church?

This book laments how trendy Christianity has insulated and isolated itself far from those who are poor. This book offers an alternative expression of Christian formation, one that is drawn from Scripture and lessons God has enlivened for me through many friendships around the world.

What is the one thing you'd want readers to come away with?

My hope is that the reader would feel like spirituality is something accessible to everybody. You don't have to be a mystic or an aesthetic to be spiritual. But that you could find, in the everyday, ways to practice your faith.



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