

The Happiness of Simple

Making Connections Between
Happiness, Simplicity, and
Productivity

by Dan Erickson

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my father, who understood and taught me many of these concepts, and to my daughter, Annie, who still tries too hard to find happiness in stuff.

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The Promise

This book is meant to be read with intention. Don't skim. Devour.

I wrote this book not to sell you something, but to teach you something. I want you to learn to live in a way that will bring you a deeper sense of joy. Does that sound okay?

My promise to you is that I've written this book from my heart and I attempt to daily apply the lessons within. All I hope of you is to:

1. Read it completely in a single sitting.
2. Begin to practice the concepts today.
3. Continue practicing the concepts a little more each day. Soon you will feel less stress and more happiness in your life.

Will you promise me to take an hour to read this book?

I promise you that I'll keep it short, simple, and easy to understand and apply. If you're ready to get started I'd like to ask you to do three things:

1. Find a quiet and relaxing place to read.

2. Read completely with an open heart and open mind.
3. Follow the directions at the end of the book.

I am happy that you are making this choice.
Thank you for reading:

The Happiness of Simple

The Problem is Complex

1. You have slipped off the track.
2. Somewhere between your childhood and now you have made life too complex.
3. Complexity has rooted itself within your heart and your mind.
4. This complexity steals your joy.
5. It is this complexity that leads you to falsely believe that you never have enough. This makes you unhappy and unsatisfied.
6. When you remove the complexity you begin to understand: The Happiness of Simple.
7. When you remove the complexity you become who you are truly meant to be, and you will begin to excel.

Knowing these things is the beginning of your journey to rediscovering the happiness that has always been within you.

The Dilemma

Complexity leads you to believe that life is harder and more problematic than it really is. It causes you to react rather than simply be. It leads you to believe that you need more in order to be satisfied. It keeps you from being productive. It causes many of the problems that human beings struggle with. It reveals itself in the following ways:

1. **Fear:** When you are faced with complex situations you often respond negatively. You respond by reacting instead of accepting. Rather than face your problem, you avoid it by practicing unhealthy behaviors.

2. **Addiction:** You believe you can solve your problems by replacing them. Some choose drugs. Some choose alcohol. Some choose sex or pornography. Some choose food. It doesn't matter what you choose. Addiction is simply an attempt to find happiness by replacing a problem with a bad habit. It never works. It only leads to more problems.

3. **Debt:** Buying stuff is simply another way of trying to solve your problems in a noneffective way. When you buy something new you get a temporary high. You are happy for a moment. That happiness is short-lived because it did not come from within. You had to buy it.

The purchase led to more debt which leads to more complexity in your life.

4. **Clutter:** The things you buy to attempt to find happiness begin to stack up. Soon you find yourself buried in stuff. This adds more complexity. True happiness is internal. When you begin to remove the clutter, you must look within for contentment. This is as it should be.

5. **Failure:** You fail at new things. You fail to create new relationships or commit to the ones you are in. You fail at starting a new business or developing positive habits. Why? Because you make things more complex than they really are. You believe that external forces hold you back. She was too angry. He was too busy. Time or weather did not allow you to exercise. The market did not allow the business to succeed. When you blame external conditions for your internal problems you are bound to fail.

6. **Jealousy:** You think others are better than you. They have better jobs. They have nicer cars. They have beautiful homes. They have perfect bodies. These things make you jealous. They also make your life more complex. They give you one more thing to worry about. Chances are that the ones you envy have the same thoughts and feelings that you have. If you let go of comparisons to others and focus on your own journey, you will find happiness.

7. **Anger:** You are quick to be bothered by others. They hurt you. They frustrate you. They annoy you. You believe they are acting out against you. They are not. You react to their current state of mind. If you believe that others are purposefully attempting to make your life more difficult through their behaviors, you are creating the problem. You are allowing external forces to control your life.

I think you see the connections here. Many of your problems stem from the complexities of life. You are the one who creates these problems. You react to external forces. The key to eliminating many of your problems is simple. Simplify your life. Simplify your thinking. When you learn to live more simply, you decrease stress. Decreased stress leads to happiness.

Some problems with complexity include:

1. Trying too hard to make things better.
2. Creating too many unnecessary stressors.
3. Taking other peoples' actions personally.
4. Searching for happiness on the outside.
5. Avoiding problems.

Take Action: Think about some of the struggles you face. Ask yourself if your problems stem from making simple things more complex.

You're Trying Too Hard

We all seek happiness. No one sets out to live a miserable life. The problem begins when you falsely believe that happiness comes from something outside of yourself.

I am learning to be more happy every day. I am not a master of happiness. I am an apprentice. Life is my teacher. I study my own life, the lives of others, and the natural world around me. What I am learning is simple. We find happiness when we let go.

Many people are unsatisfied with their positions in life. They want a better job. They want more money. They want a sexier body. They want a perfect partner.

The problem is that these wants become a distraction. When you chase the things you want, you can never truly be satisfied. Because you base your ideal life on unrealistic standards, you will fail to reach your goals.

I have been writing since I was a child. My writing is driven by something internal. Of course, I desire a larger audience, but I've discovered something:

When I put the emphasis on gaining more readers and getting more followers, I do not write from the

heart. When I try too hard, I am not being the writer I am meant to be. It's only when I let go of my preconceived ideas of writing success that I find my true voice.

Why?

Because when I try too hard, I focus on things I cannot control. That only complicates and confuses my thoughts. When I let go of those complexities, I simply write. It is only then that I find: 'The Happiness of Simple.'

Take Action: Can you enjoy a simple process such as writing, reading, gardening, or cooking? Can you do something simple without preconceived expectations? Do something simple today. Focus on the process rather than the outcome.

Don't Overfill Your Plate

In the process of trying too hard, do you overfill your plate? Do you take on more than you can handle? That makes life more complex. In the end you can't keep up with everything and you feel as though you've failed.

You want that new car, so you work more hours. You want to impress that girl or guy, so you spend more time in the gym. You believe these things will make you happy. When you get the car you're excited, but it's temporary. You're still not happy. When you win the girl, you stop exercising. You feel unsatisfied. "There must be something more," you say to yourself.

So you do more to try to become more happy. You take on more responsibility. You buy more stuff. You drink to ease the stress. Drinking leads to fighting with your partner. You complicate your life.

Being content starts by eliminating excess. You need to take an honest look at your life. You need to ask yourself why you are doing the things you do. Are you chasing an illusive dream. Do you falsely believe that more is always better?

Take Action: Do an inventory. Write down the five most important goals in your life. Ask yourself why

those goals are important to you. Ask yourself if reaching those goals will add more stress or more peace to your life. Eliminate any habits or actions that only create stress without adding value.

People Will Always Fail

Your expectations of others is another way you make life more complex. It is not reasonable to expect that others will always do things to please you. But that's exactly what many people expect.

Have you ever become angry based on someone else's actions?

- Someone cuts you off in traffic.
- A friend is late.
- A co-worker doesn't do their part.

Of course, these things can upset you, but when you react negatively, you lose. You let the behavior of others control your emotions. You will never find happiness this way.

Human beings are not perfect. Other people will fail you just as you will fail others. Other people will anger you just as you will anger others. The key is in how you react.

Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

No matter your spiritual belief, there is great wisdom in this saying. When we respond to others in anger, we are essentially judging their behavior. We

complicate the situation. We get stuck. When we accept the behavior for what it is, we can move forward.

I learned much from my father. My father was very slow to anger. When others did things that would upset the average person, my father responded simply. He would respond to the behavior by saying, "That is where they are on their journey."

My father understood a fundamental principle of life. Responding negatively to others only creates more unhappiness in yourself.

I also learn from my daughter, Annie. She's nine years old. In the process of daily living, I can become frustrated with Annie's behavior. When I get upset with Annie it escalates her anger. If I remain silent she is quicker to regain emotional control.

People will always fail you in one way or another. To expect anything different is to expect something that doesn't exist. You create a complicated fantasy. The reality is simple. Accept the behaviors and actions of others. Meet them where they are.

Remember my father's words, "That is where they are on their journey." Accept this.

Take Action: Do you get angry with others? Do you react based on their behaviors? Do you expect perfection from others? Like you, they are human. Learn to accept their faults. When another's behavior upsets you, give them room. It's their journey, not yours.

Happiness Is Not External

Many people look for happiness in things outside of themselves. This is a mistake. This only creates more complexity in their lives. Happiness must come from within.

I did not have many things as a child. My parents were poor. They fulfilled my basic needs and little more. I did not have much as a young man. I had little education and worked at jobs that paid minimum wage. I was able to sustain my basic needs.

In my thirties, I returned to school. After graduating, I made more money. I began to buy more material things. I discovered something. The more things I bought, the less satisfied I became. I found this curious and searched myself for the reason.

I found a simple answer:

Because I did not have much when I was young, I learned to appreciate the little things in life. Not the stuff, but my surroundings and my abilities.

I love what Leo Babauta from Zen Habits says about appreciating the little things in his book about contentment. He says, “Noticing and appreciating the goodness in a cup of coffee causes us to be happy.”

When I was younger I spent a lot of time in nature. I still do. I found that nature is an excellent place to find happiness. I noticed and appreciated the birds, the trees, the trickling creek. These things made me happy.

Recently, my daughter Annie was very angry about losing her iPod privileges for the afternoon. It was her consequence for not completing her homework as assigned.

I asked Annie to come help me rake the autumn leaves. In about fifteen minutes she was enjoying that experience. I asked her a few questions. “Annie?” I asked,

- Are you angry?
- Are you sad?
- Are you disappointed?

Annie answered each question with a firm, NO. Then I asked Annie if she was happy. She answered, YES. Annie found happiness in the simple act of raking leaves.

People often complain about chores such as raking leaves or washing dishes. Think about that. It’s ridiculous. It’s been my experience that it’s often during these simple chores that we are most content.

Why?

Because we do not have expectations of a great outcome. We are simply doing what needs to be done. We find happiness in that simple process.

Many people seek great outcomes. They believe a new house, boat or car will bring happiness. They believe a new job or a raise will make them content. When they reach their goal they are temporarily elated. It passes. Soon they must find another thing to make them happy again. This is often how the cycle of addiction begins.

Don't seek happiness in external things. Find happiness in the process of living.

I'm a musician. When I get a new instrument it makes me happy, but that feeling is fleeting. It's in the playing of the instrument where true happiness is found.

It's in the music, not the guitar.

It's in the raking, not the rake.

It's in the coffee, not the cup.

Take Action: Do you seek happiness through something outside of yourself? Do you eat too much? Do you drink too much? Do you buy too much? Do you do these things in an effort to be happy? Stop. Focus on your surroundings and your abilities. Take a few moments each day to find contentment in the simple act of being and doing.

Avoidance Is Dangerous

If the heating system in your house begins to have problems, what do you do? You call a heating professional. Otherwise, you might wind up with no heat in the middle of winter.

Ironically, you do not take the same precautions with your internal heating system. You often overlook or resist your own problems. You falsely believe they will go away by themselves. This is a mistake. Avoidance is dangerous.

Like you, I struggle. I struggle with diet. I struggle with exercise. I struggle with unhealthy thoughts. I am human, but I've discovered something:

One reason you avoid change is that you believe that change is hard. You think that you are too weak. You sell yourself short. You avoid the problem. I did this for many years. Avoidance does not solve anything.

You can be certain that avoiding a problem won't make it go away. Resisting a problem won't help either. It only draws your attention back to the problem.

You must accept and admit your problem. Once you do this, you have taken the first step in finding a solution. If you don't accept and admit, you'll likely find an unhealthy way of dealing with the problem.

Starting a fire in the middle of your living room after your heater breaks down will not solve the problem. Addressing the problem early and repairing the heater will.

Don't wait until your eating, drinking, or gaming addiction spirals out of control. Admit that you struggle. Accept your weakness. Take small steps to develop a healthy habit that replaces the unhealthy one.

If you wait, the unhealthy habit will grow bigger and your house might burn up.

Take Action: Is there something in your life that you struggle with? Do you eat too much? Do you view pornography? Do you gamble? Do you get angry too easily? Avoidance will not help matters. Write down the things that you struggle with. Then write down one small step you can take to overcome those things.

Review

Happiness is something many people miss out on for several reasons. One of the biggest reasons is simple. You make life too complex.

Complexity magnifies stress: Stress multiples your problems. Many people deal with stress by turning to unhealthy habits. Fear, addiction, jealousy, anger, and many other negative traits can arise due to life's pressures.

Stop trying too hard: You can begin to overcome stress and simplify life. Yet many people try too hard to reach an unreachable state. You want a better job, more money, or a perfect body. When you try too hard you add more stress. This makes life more complex.

Don't overfill your plate: Happiness is more likely to be found when you do less. If you take on too many responsibilities and activities, you're likely to feel pressure. That pressure induces stress which overrides happiness.

People will fail you: Often you may base your own happiness on how those around you act. You let their actions upset you. Understanding that each person is on his or her own journey is very helpful.

When others do something that annoys you or hurts you, remember it's usually their problem, not yours.

Don't seek external happiness: Happiness is not found outside of yourself. The things you buy do not make you happy in themselves. When you moderate your purchasing behavior you will be happier. You'll spend less money. You'll have less debt. You can learn to find true happiness in your surroundings and in the simple appreciation of your own abilities.

Avoidance never works: If you avoid problems they usually worsen. Accepting and admitting your problems is best. When you accept and admit, you start the journey to change.

I hope this short section on happiness has helped you. I sincerely want you to be happy.

In the next section, I will show you ways to simplify your life. If complexity is the enemy of happiness, you need to live more simply. Thank you for reading. Please continue:

Getting Back To Basics

I'd like you to ask yourself two questions:

1. Am I truly happy with my life?
2. What can I do to increase my happiness?

Perhaps these are trick questions. When you ask yourself if you're happy, you usually begin to evaluate. Evaluation often leads to comparing yourself to others. This will never work. Evaluation also leads to accessing your material wealth. This will never work either.

The idea of increasing our happiness is problematic. We often think of success, money, mansions, and beautiful furnishings.

What if we turned the questions upside down? Try these two questions instead:

1. Do I have the basic needs for living?
2. What can I do to decrease what I don't need?

This should lead you to ask another question:

What are the basic needs for living?

Big corporations and advertisers have sold you a lie. Based on the images you see in the media, only the lucky few have enough. That's no accident.

Corporations want you to feel inadequate. Advertisers want you to believe that you lack something. It is on these premises that they gain the ability to sell you things that you don't really need.

The constant bombardment of messages telling you that you're not good enough take their toll. You begin to believe them. You begin to compare yourself and your life with the fantasy you see on the TV and the Internet. The cycle of achieving happiness through bigger cars and sexier partners begins. What if you tuned out the media and returned to the basics of life?

What are the basic necessities for living?

- Air
- Water
- Food
- Shelter
- Transportation
- Employment
- Communication
- Relationships

If you're honest with yourself, everything else is extra. I know what you're thinking. The list is too sparse, stoic. Let's revise this list to accommodate for your concerns:

- Fresh air
- Clean water
- Healthy food
- A comfortable and furnished shelter
- Dependable transportation
- Meaningful employment
- Modern communication
- Quality relationships

Is that better?

Keep in mind that quality relationships can include relationships with both people and God. Be careful of treating God as an external force. It's only when we are able to find God within our own human spirit that we can begin to discover our true potential.

Take Action: Make an inventory of what you believe your basic needs include. Compare that with what you have. Could having too much be causing you to be less happy?

The Fear Of Not Enough

One reason you feel as though you need more is that you've likely been instilled with the fear of not having enough.

This is due to advertising and the media. Even so, humans are like parrots. We repeat what we hear. You have likely heard people say things like:

- I need to stock up on food.
- I need more space.
- I need a car with more power.
- I'm afraid I'll run out of...
- There's never enough time for...

You have been programmed to believe you can never have enough. That has created a fear in you that you'll run out of something. And here's an additional problem. The norm of what you've been told you need keeps increasing. For instance:

- The average new home in America has doubled in size in the past 50 years.
- Most cars and trucks have become bigger and less fuel efficient since the gas shortage of the 1970s.
- Our communication and media expenses have increased dramatically in the past 30 years.

- What used to be a large portion of food has now become a medium or small portion.
- Most Americans have several times the material belongings as they had just 50 years ago.

Still, you're being told you need more. This creates the fear of not enough.

Jesus had something to say about the fear of not enough. He said:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”

Whether or not you believe in the Christian faith makes little difference. Jesus's wisdom pinpoints the problem. We worry about stuff too much. That worry leads us to wanting more. We wouldn't want to get caught with nothing.

After my parents divorced, my father lived a very simple life. He was poor, yet content. He stayed in small spaces. He lived in trailers, single rooms and small apartments. He owned very little. He spent his time studying mysticism and teaching his friends

what he'd learned. He found happiness in that simple lifestyle. I learned by his example.

I also have lived in small spaces. I spent most of my twenties and thirties with only the bare necessities of life. It was only after I was married and had a child that I acquired more.

Annie and I now live modestly in a 1200-square-foot home. We have little more than the basic comforts of modern life. My goal for the future is not to increase, but to decrease my belongings. I understand that having less increases my appreciation for life. Increased appreciation for life brings more happiness.

Take Action: Have you fallen for the lie that leads you to fear that you do not have enough? Has that caused you to keep accumulating more? Survey what you have. How many things go unused? How many things are not needed? Let go of some things.

Rethink Your Needs

Once, I found myself with four automobiles. Why? What did one person need with four vehicles. I realized this was a problem. I sold one car and gave another away. I sold the pickup truck and downsized to one economy car.

Perhaps I was overcompensating for an earlier time. I spent most of my twenties without a car. I chose to walk or ride a bicycle. I lived and worked in a small town. I had no need for a car.

It was only when I returned to college that I returned to driving. I lived in a rural area and the school was ten miles away.

As a single parent, I currently have a need for a vehicle. As my daughter gets older, I hope to return to using a bicycle as my major mode of transportation. This is one way I have assessed my basic needs.

I also take inventory of my household belongings on a regular basis. When I find something that I rarely use, I question its necessity. I give away boxes of items that I no longer use. I do this several times each year. I let go of clutter. I give to others

How many cars does your family own? How many cars do you really need?

How many pairs of shoes are in your closet? How many shoes do you really need?

How many books are on your bookshelf? How many books will you actually read a second time?

How many unused gadgets are in your kitchen? Your garage? Why do you hold onto them? Is it the fear of not enough?

Take Action: How much do you really need? I encourage you to go through your garage, your basement, closets, and drawers. Look for items that have not been used in more than a year. Critically evaluate whether or not you really need each item. Could someone else make better use of your unused stuff? Why not give it away?

Rethink Your Activities

How many activities do you and your kids do? How many commitments do you make each week? If you're an average American, you do much more than your parents and grandparents did.

When I was a kid I went to school. I was in Cub Scouts. I played baseball. That was about it. Today, most of my daughter's friends participate in three or four regular activities outside of school.

Parents have been led to believe that their kids need to take gymnastics, dance, theater, martial arts, music, and participate in a variety of sports. They fear their children will not get enough. Sound familiar?

You've not only been convinced that you don't have enough. You've been convinced that your children don't have enough.

So you add to your commitments. You spend more money on your kids. You spend less time with your kids. You run them around and leave them in the hands of strangers. You do this with the hope that they gain an advantage over their peers.

Wait! This only reinforces your kids with the idea that more is better. More is not better. If you keep

eating, you get fat. If you keep driving, you run out of gas. If you keep fighting, sooner or later, someone else will defeat you.

Why do you keep adding more to your schedule? More is not better. More creates too much. Too much leads to stress. Stress leads to poor health. Stop adding more.

Annie participates in two after-school activities. She takes piano lessons. We practice karate together. That's enough.

I volunteer to play music at my church. I used to play weekly. The rehearsals and performances became too much. I was no longer enjoying the activity. So I took a year off before returning to performing on a monthly basis.

Life is filled with chores and commitments. Your home requires upkeep. Your job requires you to attend meetings and conferences. Your kids' schools have parents' nights. Don't add more. Keep your schedule simple. You'll have more quality time for your family. You'll have less stress.

Take Action: Review your schedule. How many activities do you do each week? How about your kids? Are you always running? Reevaluate your needs. Cancel everything but the absolute essentials.

Stop Throwing Your Money Away

All this stuff and all these activities cost money. How many times have you bought something that only gets thrown away later? The food goes bad. The cheap shoes rip out. The gadget breaks. The book goes unread. The garbage gets filled.

You're throwing your money away. I cringe when something in our refrigerator goes bad. It's like throwing \$5 in the garbage here and \$10 there.

Why pay \$60 a month for your kids' piano or dance lessons?

If your kids do not show promise, it makes no sense. If your kids do not show improvement, it makes no sense. Many parents keep sending their kids to lessons even though the kids stop trying. Don't throw your money away like that.

Money can be tight. I'm a college instructor and a self-published author. My income is considered middle class yet I barely make ends meet payday to payday. Why would I want to add stress to life by spending more than I need to?

Most Americans have too much debt. In 2004, I made an effort to pay off all of my consumer debt. I eliminated \$12,000 in debt in less than 24 months. Unfortunately, divorce and student loans keep me struggling. That's all the more reason to be critical about my spending habits.

Don't be foolish with your spending. Consider your basic needs. If you don't really need something, don't buy it. If you're not sure you can eat five bananas before they go bad, buy three. If you can't afford a new car, buy a used car. If your kids don't appreciate their lessons, cancel them.

Spending too much money only leads to complication. Complication leads to stress. Simplify.

Take Action: Do you have excessive consumer debt? Do you have a plan to pay it down? Review your finances. Think before you spend.

Unplug

You now live in a world that keeps moving 24/7. Stores used to close in the evening and on weekends. Now, many stores stay open 24 hours. Some stores stay open all weekend. You can always shop on the Internet.

TV used to broadcast until midnight. Now you can find almost any kind of entertainment at nearly any hour.

If you're like the majority of Americans, you spend hours a day staring at one screen or another. Computers, smart phones, and televisions are stealing your time and zapping your energy.

Screen time hijacks quality time from your partner, your kids, and your friends.

Time spent at screens is time spent sitting. Excessive sitting is not good for you. Limit your screen time.

Of all the things I promote in this book, this is my biggest weakness. I'm a writer. Some days I spend far too many hours on my computer. I try to justify my behavior as positive because I'm producing rather

than consuming. There is some truth to that, but too much screen time is bad for your health. Period.

Do you spend too much time using electronic devices? If you're spending more than two or three hours a day, the answer is yes.

Unplug.

Set aside specific times each day for no-screen time. Take a day or a weekend away from screens a couple of times each month. Do a screen-free week in the summer. Replace your screen time with physical activity. I go as far as disconnecting my Internet at times.

Take Action: Keep a log of your screen time for one week. How many hours do you spend in front of screens? If you spend more than a few hours a day, devise a plan to limit your screen time. Do the same for your kids.

Get Back To Nature

Do you make excuses for not exercising? You don't have the time. You don't have the space. You don't have the equipment. Don't make excuses. All the space in the world is right outside your door. You don't need equipment.

I've been exercising most of my life. I've participated in a variety of sports and exercise. I've discovered that walking, hiking, running, and biking are best for me. Each of these activities gets me outside. I breathe fresh air. I study my surroundings. I meditate.

Have you slacked on exercising? Are you out of shape or overweight? It's okay. I've been there. It happens to the best of us. It's never too late to start or restart.

Start slow. Take a ten minute walk after dinner. After a week or two, add another ten minutes. Drive to an outdoor location on the weekend. Take an hour-long walk. After a few months you may want to add short periods of running or longer hikes to your routine.

Find other people to walk with. Get your family involved. Ask others to hold you accountable. Don't give up.

I enjoy my exercise more when I find scenic places to visit. Nature is healing. Nature is simple. We can learn lessons from the wind and the waves. There are life-affirming messages in the trickling creek and in the raging river. There is grace in the falling leaves. There is beauty in wheat fields blowing in the wind.

Take Action: Start simple. Find a form of exercise that suits you. Spend 10-15 minutes a day exercising. After two weeks, double your exercise time.

Spend More Time In The Kitchen

Americans eat too much processed food. I've often eaten too much junk food. Chances are high that you have not always practiced healthy eating. If you eat too much fast food, there's a simple solution: Spend more time in the kitchen.

I know this might sound contrary to simplifying your life, but it's not. There are many simple, whole foods that can be prepared quickly. Some commitment is required.

If you're like most Americans, you struggle with your diet. I've been doing better as I get older, but I still have my weaknesses. I stock 14 simple foods for better health in my kitchen. This makes it less likely that I'll eat junk.

Here's the list of the 14 simple foods:

- 1. Oatmeal:** This is number one on my list. Oatmeal is easy to cook. It's inexpensive. You can add nuts, berries and a dash of honey or raw sugar to make it more tasty. And it fills you up.

- 2. Brown Rice:** Similar to oatmeal, brown rice is inexpensive and easy to cook. You can prepare brown rice with a variety of vegetables and meats. Look for California brown rice to limit arsenic intake.

- 3. Black Beans:** Black beans go perfect with rice. Buy beans in bulk and soak them overnight for best results. I make a good black bean chili.

- 4. Nuts and Seeds:** My favorites are cashews, almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, and flaxseed. Nuts and seeds go great on oatmeal or salads. Make sure to grind your flaxseed for maximum health benefits.

- 5. Berries:** Blueberries are one of my favorites. I picked and froze about ten pounds of blueberries last summer. They go great on my morning oatmeal. Strawberries are a close second.

- 6. Bananas:** A quick, easy and nutritious snack. I try to eat a banana every morning when I get up. I also make a point to drink a big glass of water in the morning.

- 7. Apples:** Another simple snack. Apples are easy to grab on the go. They're perfect for putting in your lunchbox. And you know the old adage...
- 8. Grapefruit:** I love grapefruit. My only complaint is that the season is too short. Some friends send me the best and juiciest Texas grapefruit every year. Mouthwatering.
- 9. Leafy Greens:** Spinach is my favorite leafy green. I buy large containers of organic, pre-washed salad. It's quick and easy. I often top salads with seeds and greek yogurt rather than salad dressing.
- 10. Broccoli:** This is one of the only cooked veggies I can get my daughter to eat regularly. Broccoli goes great with with rice dishes and works good as a side to light meats.
- 11. Carrots:** Perfect for healthy snacks and lunches. I buy the baby carrots and eat some most every day.
- 12. Yogurt:** Make sure you get the good stuff, not the candy. I use Greek yogurt like sour cream. It goes with many foods.
- 13. Eggs:** An alternative to oatmeal and cold cereal, eggs are quick and easy. We get the organic eggs.

14. Olive Oil: The last but not least on my list of 14 simple foods. I use extra-virgin olive oil liberally for cooking. It adds flavor and it's good for your heart.

There are many other healthy foods you could add to this list. I included these 14 simple foods because they're all easy to find, easy to stock and easy to prepare. They're also all reasonably priced.

Did you notice that most everything on this list has no ingredients but the food itself? The best foods are single-ingredient foods. I challenge you to stock healthy, whole foods in your kitchen. I challenge you to start eating more healthy today.

Take the time to cook some basic healthy meals with simple ingredients. The process can be very fulfilling.

Take Action: Go through your kitchen. What kinds of foods do you stock. Take an inventory. Next time you go shopping be sure to buy some nutritious foods. Use my list of 14 simple foods.

Create More Space

The best advice I have for simple living is this: create more space. Create more space in your home. Create more space in your schedule. Create more space for your family. Keep your inbox clean. Create more space.

I furnish my home sparsely. The extra space allows for room to move. Each room, other than Annie's, has only the basic needs: a bed and a dresser, a table and four chairs, a desk and a bookcase, a sofa and a piano.

Make as much floor space as possible. The extra space creates a relaxing vibe. It's like white space on the page. It allows for visual freedom and imagination.

Keep your schedule open. People tend to take on too much. I used to do this. You have to say no in order to make space for what's truly important.

Make no more than one appointment per week. If people really want to work with you, they'll wait. Let them know that your family time is important. They'll respect you for that.

Who are the most important people in your life? I hope the answer is family. This is one of the best

reasons for reducing your commitments: so that you can spend more time with your family. Keep an open schedule for your partner, your parents, your kids. You only get one life to make positive memories with your family.

Keep your inbox clean. A full inbox is clutter. Just as I keep my house clutter-free, I check my inbox daily and keep it clean. I also use very few apps.

Clean spaces allow you to relax, to breathe, to live, to be happy. Take some time to create more space today.

Take Action: Do you have a cluttered home? Is your schedule too full? Do you spend quality time with your family? Is your inbox clean? Take some time this week to let go of clutter. Schedule less appointments. Check your email and clean your inbox. Make a date with your family.

Review

Simple living increases your happiness: Taking away the complexities of life will give you room to breathe. Remember to do these things:

Get back to basics: Reconsider what you have and what you need. Do an inventory and set your priorities.

Don't fear not enough: The media has tried to convince you that you need more. Don't let the fear of not enough dictate your choices. A little is enough. Take note: most advertisers are lying to you. They want your money, but you likely don't need their product.

Rethink your basic needs: Do you need more than one car? Do you need multiple electronic devices? Do you need that closet full of comic books or sports cards? Begin to let go of a little each week. Others may be able to use what you don't use.

Rethink your activities: You can only do so much in a day or a week. Rethink how many commitments you make. Don't overfill your schedule. If you're always running, you don't get time to relax.

Stop spending so much: Cut up your credit cards up. Overspending leads to debt. Debt leads to stress. It's hard to be happy when your life is filled with stress.

Unplug your electronics: We have more devices than ever: TV, smartphones, computers, and video games all steal your time. They can create relationship problems too. It's easy to spend money while you're on your devices. Limit your screen time.

Get back to nature: Exercise helps relieve stress. The best place to exercise is outdoors. Walk, hike, run, bike. Stay active and do more outdoors.

Spend time in the kitchen: Eat healthy foods. Spend time creating meals that your family can enjoy. Cooking doesn't have to be complicated. Remember the 14 simple foods.

Create more space: Keep your home clean and your schedule clear. Check and respond to email regularly. Make time for your family.

Simple living can help you create a happier and healthier life. It can also give you the time and space to be more productive. Productivity is the focus of the next section of this book. Keep reading:

Your Slate Is Ready

“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise.”

You might think it's contradictory to include the topic of productivity in this book. How does producing goods tie in with simplicity? Isn't the production process complex? It could be. It doesn't have to be.

Great writers, musicians, artists, architects, athletes, business executives and many others know this secret: Living simply gives you the time and space to create.

I'm a very productive person. Sometimes I think I produce too much. I've written over 600 songs in the past 20 years. I've written 100s of poems. I've written several books. I keep several blogs. I play music with a small acoustic group at church. I do regular home improvement projects. I love to landscape and paint. I teach. I create new curriculum. I produce.

What makes some people more productive than others?

It's a combination of passion, discipline, and space. Simple living supports all three of these qualities. Let's start with space:

Have you been following the action statements at the end of each chapter? If not, I suggest you go back. Take each action step seriously. If you have been taking action, you're ready to be more productive.

A writer always starts with a blank page. Sometimes it's hard to get past that blank page. I've discovered that it's always easier for me to write once I've cleared my space. By keeping my life simple, I find more happiness and I also have more space for creating something beautiful.

If your house is a mess you won't feel free to create. You'll feel pressured to clean up the mess. If your schedule is packed you won't have time to create. If you have outstanding debt you'll feel pressure to work overtime.

The best way to become more productive is to keep your life simple. Start each day with a clean slate.

Take Action: Have you simplified your life? Is your space clean? Is your schedule clear? Now you have effectively created time and space to be productive. Jot down some ideas.

The Discipline Connection

“Plant your seed in the morning and keep busy all afternoon, for you don’t know if profit will come from one activity or another—or maybe both.”

There’s an undeniable link between simple living and productivity. Both take discipline.

It’s much easier to go with the crowd. It’s easier to buy more than to restrain yourself from buying. It’s easier to let your house build up with clutter than to keep it clutter-free. It’s easier to drive a car than to ride a bike. It’s easier to play video games than to write a book.

Simple living takes discipline. You must make focused choices every day. You must continue to choose the simple path over the path filled with distractions. You must be willing to let go of your fantasies of perfect relationships. You must accept imperfection.

It makes sense that people who live simply are often very productive.

Productivity takes discipline. Producers get up earlier. Producers choose to create rather than consume. Producers pay attention to detail and

quality. Producers must avoid distractions. Producers must accept imperfection.

Take Action: Take a disciplined approach to living simple. Make a point to question your daily decisions. Use that same discipline to find the time and space to be productive.

The Passion Connection

“Our people must learn to do good by meeting the urgent needs of others; then they will not be unproductive.”

Another quality that living simply and being productive have in common is passion.

Have you ever met a true minimalist? People who choose to live simple are often outspoken about that choice. They're passionate. They want to help others find contentment and peace. They share their love of simple living. They freely give tips and advice.

The same holds true for productive individuals. People who create are passionate about their art, business, or music. They want to share their work with others. They want to entertain. They want to help others in practical ways. They want to make others happy.

Take Action: Are you passionate about something? Have you learned that to live simple is to be passionate? Share some things you've learned about simple living with others.

Share The Wealth

“Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop.”

I hope you’ve enjoyed this book. I hope it has helped you in your quest to find happiness. I hope you’ve learned more about the benefits of living simply. I pray you take action.

What’s next?

You’ve learned more about the connections between happiness, simplicity, and productivity. Share this information.

I’ve freely shared my understanding and experiences with you. I’ve asked you for no money. I’ve asked you to join no program. I’ve only asked you to take action in your own life, to live more simply.

I’ve taught you how simple living can increase your level of happiness. I’ve shown you how simple living can give you the time and space to accomplish more. In return, I only ask one thing of you:

Share the wealth.

Share the things you have learned. Use your newfound time and space to create something wonderful. Share your creation.

Share this ebook with a friend. Send a copy to a coworker. Share the link with a loved one. Let's help others learn:

The Happiness of Simple.

Take Action: Share the wealth.

About The Author

Dan Erickson is a teacher and a minimalist. He's also a writer, a poet, and a songwriter.

Dan has written several books. His first book, "A Train Called Forgiveness," is about his own childhood as a victim of religious cult. It's the first book of "The Cult Trilogy."

Dan has written hundreds of songs and poems. He's published a book of poetry, "Incandescent Man Walking."

Dan's blogs include <http://www.danerickson.net>, <http://www.hipdiggs.com>, <http://www.simplwrtr.com>, and <http://www.simplblogger.com>. He's passionate about helping others learn to live and produce simply.

He lives in Washington State with his daughter, Annie, and their dog Shep.

Thank you for reading:

The Happiness of Simple