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**Video Lesson Length:**

**12:14 for the Part 1 video**

**8:19 for the Part 2 video**

**43-53 minutes for the total class length.**

**Book Lesson Length:**

**41-57 minutes for the total class length.**

**Number of Discussions: 2**

**Session Layout:**

**Give Introduction**

**Play Session 1, part 1 video**

**Lead Discussion #1a**

**Play Session 1, part 2 video**

**Lead Discussion #1b**

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**Please read the introductory sections prior to Lesson 1.**

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## Lesson 1: Simplify

### Preparation

1. Read through the Leader's Guide introduction (see above).
2. Watch the Simplify video (two parts, with a 15-second gap between the two for pausing the video) or read the chapter.
3. Key points of the video:
  - Big Thought:
    - Simplify in a crisis to focus on the Next Thing.
  - Core Passage:
    - 2 Timothy 2: 1, 3-4: **“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus...Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer.”**
  - Practical Faith ideas:
    - Make it easy on yourself.
    - Prioritize the essential over the optional.
    - Clear your calendar.
    - Focus on just the Next Thing.
  - Guiding thoughts for crisis, based on the core passage:

- Stay spiritually strong.
- Practice mental discipline.
- Please the Lord.
- Other points:
  - The Next Thing concept is based on something Cecil said on the worst day of his life. The concept is to focus primarily on the aspect of the crisis right in front of you. The whole of the crisis is too complex and too uncertain to address at one time. Instead, address the Next Thing and step your way through the crisis.
  - Crises come in different shapes and forms. They can either be downhill (fairly straightforward) or slalom (many twists and turns). They can be either single lane or multiple lane (depending on number of simultaneous Next Things).
  - Cecil shared these personal crises: Entering Sara into a psychiatric hospital after a suicide attempt; Sara's mother's hospice stay and eventual passing.

#### 4. Prepare for discussion.

- Notice on Discussion 1A Q2 and Discussion 1B Q3, it may be useful to use a white board or other way to capture or remember information.
- Every group is different, but generally it's expected that this material could stimulate a lot of discussion. Please watch the time and make sure that the key question of each section gets covered.
- Of all the video sessions in the series, this one is the longest because of the additional mental health commentary at the end. Upcoming videos will usually be slightly shorter, but the discussions could be longer than this lesson.

## Class Time

### Step 1. Introduction to the Series (1 minute)

Please read the following to the group:

**“The Next Thing” is a five-part series devoted to dealing with crises in your personal life. In it, Cecil Taylor proposes a four-part model for addressing your response to a crisis, suggesting practical steps to take as well as scripture that supports each part of the model. The fifth lesson is a conclusion to the series.**

**Over the next five weeks, we'll be talking about our own histories of crises and evaluating our responses to them in light of “The Next Thing” model. The intent of this series is to foster deep discussion that develops a toolkit for dealing with future crises and creates greater understanding of each other's history.**

### Step 2. Video Leaders Only: Watch Part 1 of the Simplify video (12-13 minutes)

## Step 3a. Discussion 1A (Target Time: 12-15 minutes)

**MAIN DISCUSSION GOALS:** Get the group talking about crises, and review the practical faith steps for Simplifying during a crisis. Be sure to have the group consider question 4.

**BOOK STUDY LEADERS:** Please include the questions in step 3b in this discussion.

### Questions:

1. What does the artwork for the Simplify video symbolize to you?
  - **LEADER NOTE:** *It's not important that people all agree on the "correct answer," as the beauty of art is that it often can be interpreted in multiple ways. If it is useful, you could share how Cecil and artist Connor Walden viewed the symbolism.*
    - *For the Next Thing art piece: This will be discussed in session 5.*
    - *For the Simplify art piece: The ball of yarn represents all of the different parts that go into the Next Thing. The string coming out of the ball represent all of the things that must be prioritized. The colored string represents mostly activities or tasks, but they could also mean general areas such as family or work. The white string is the highest priority, representing God and obedience to God, as Cecil will describe in the second half of the lesson.*
2. Let's start with the term "crisis" itself. List the kinds of crises you can think of.
3. Which of these listed crises have you experienced?
  - **LEADER NOTE:** *You could either do this as a vote, or have people comment on their crisis experiences. It may depend on how much time you have for discussion. With more time, they could even share some detail about their crises.*
4. What are the benefits of simplification in a crisis? Possible responses:
  - *Focus on the main thing*
  - *Endurance – by simplifying, we can better outlast the crisis*
  - *It's a coping mechanism*
  - *Peace*
  - *Alleviates paralysis*
5. What are your thoughts and experiences with simplicity in crisis?
  - **LEADER NOTE:** *One comment you may get is that the Next Thing crisis involving Ruth was a simple example. You can assure the group that the next lesson will contain a more complex example.*

## Step 3b. Bonus Book Study Questions related to Discussion 1A (15-18 minutes)

1. Cecil discussed in the section, “Acceptance of Crisis,” within “The Next Thing” chapter, that we can make the mistake of denying that a crisis is occurring, and this can impede our response. Have you found this to be true? Can you think of examples of accepting or denying crisis?
2. Cecil wrote about his atheist uncle who admired Cecil’s family’s “context.” How important is context when addressing a crisis? How do families without the context of faith address crises, and how does a lack of a faith component impair their ability to Simplify, Trust, Rest and Grieve?
3. The book contained the rare example of someone who faced both a fire and a tornado in protecting his house. His choice was to focus on the fire coming straight at him versus the tornado that might hit or might not. What can you learn from this example of how to simplify and prioritize when multiple crises are hitting you?
4. Cecil shared a time in his life when he did not follow his principles of simplification. Examining your own crises, when did you simplify well, and when did you fail to simplify?

## Step 4. Video Leaders Only: Watch Part 2 of the Simplify video (8-9 minutes)

## Step 5a. Discussion 1B (Target Time: 10-15 minutes)

**MAIN DISCUSSION GOAL:** Participants should be able to connect the practical faith steps with the core scripture passage. Be sure to cover question 3.

**BOOK STUDY LEADERS:** Please include the questions in step 5b in this discussion.

### Questions:

1. Cecil had a couple of different interpretations of the phrase “Stay spiritually strong.” What is your takeaway? What does being spiritually strong in a crisis mean to you?
  - **LEADER NOTE:** Cecil had two interpretations: Resisting temptation; relying on God’s strength.
2. Cecil said that simplifying can help us endure and “soldier on” as a follower of Christ. How do you think this works? How do we increase our endurance through simplifying? Possible responses:
  - *Focusing through simplification can help us block out other noises and concerns that can wear us down. We’re marshalling our energy just for the most important and immediate items.*

- *The passage talks about enduring hardship. A crisis IS hardship! So we need techniques like simplifying to help us endure it.*
  - *Part of simplification is focusing on obedience to Christ. In being obedient, we can find we are gifted with attributes like endurance.*
  - *The dedicated Christian is designed to endure hardship.*
3. There were three key thoughts to extract from the core Bible passage: (1) Stay spiritually strong (2) Practice mental discipline (3) Please the Lord. From these three thoughts, what do you see as the connection between simplification in a crisis, and our Christian walk with God?
- **LEADER NOTE:** *You may have to repeat or post these three thoughts to clearly remind the group.*
  - *All three thoughts encourage us to focus on the most important things – the key Next Thing of the crisis, and our continuing obedience to and relationship with the Lord.*
  - *C.S. Lewis once wrote that all events in life either draw us closer to or pull us farther way from God. In a crisis, it would be easy to be pulled away from God. Through these three thoughts, the crisis does not overwhelm us nor cause us to lose faith in a God that suffers with us through the crisis.*
4. What other thoughts will you take away from this session?
- *This could be an opportunity to bring up the mental health discussion at the end of the video.*
  - **LEADER NOTE:** *Someone might express a concern that Cecil shared such intimate health information about his wife. Please assure the group that it was actually Sara's suggestion to incorporate this story into the videos and book, that long consideration was given before doing so, and that she reviewed and approved any information shared about her story.*

## Step 5b. Bonus Book Study Questions related to Discussion 1B (3 minutes)

1. Cecil wrote how football gave him a mentality and toughness to allow him to endure hardship. What experiences help you to endure hardship?