

Embrace Simplicity

MATTHEW 6:19–21, 25–34

1 As you gather, read the other side of this page to familiarize yourself with the topic for today. Once everyone has gathered, spend a few minutes making sure everyone knows each other and introducing any visitors. Open the session with the following prayer:

You, O God, create all things, treasures and gifts of your creation. May we appreciate all that you give and treasure in our heart your love, blessing, and guidance. Amen.

2 Read “Summary of the Practice” on the other side of this page. As a group, brainstorm the first things that come to mind when you think of *simplicity*. Discuss what is similar about your responses and how simplicity might be considered a spiritual discipline.

3 Watch the video “VAN TOUR: SOLO FEMALE DIY BUILD // 2001 Dodge Ram Van 3500” (bit.ly/FMVanTour, 3:57) as a group. Then spend a few minutes alone considering these questions. Regroup and share responses.

- ➔ How does the woman choosing to live in her van embrace simplicity?
- ➔ Where do you embrace simplicity in your life?

4 Read “Finding the Practice in the Bible” on the other side of this page. Have a volunteer read aloud Matthew 6:19–21, 25–34. Discuss what life would be like if we all lived as Jesus suggests.

5 Read “Finding the Practice Then and Now” on the other side of this page. Then, read Acts 2:44–47. Process the passage with these questions:

- ➔ How did these actions and commitments help them to draw closer to God?
- ➔ Which of these activities and commitments do you embrace in your faith community?
- ➔ What effect do these have for individuals and the community?

6 Spend a few minutes alone writing in the space with the house. What are things you need to keep and get rid of? Spend some time this week thinking about this.

Remove clutter. Create space for God.



SUMMARY OF THE PRACTICE

Simplicity as an intentional practice creates space for the kind of transformative encounter with God that all our spiritual practices hope to enable. Simplicity as a spiritual discipline is a little different from the lifestyle choice that some call *minimalism*. There is overlap between the results of Christian simplicity and minimalist choices such as downsizing, keeping a tidy or tiny house, or shifting to a capsule wardrobe. Both simplicity and minimalism focus on intentionality with possessions and use of time. The goal of Christian simplicity, however, is deeper than an uncluttered home or a streamlined calendar. The primary goal, as with all spiritual disciplines, is to keep company with Jesus and allow Jesus to transform us. With that in mind, we can sing along and agree that true simplicity can lead to delight.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Those who follow Jesus in the spiritual discipline of simplicity can find ample inspiration in the life of the itinerant carpenter preacher from Nazareth. Jesus led a pretty simple life, by any standards today. He owned no property, relied on the generosity of others, walked everywhere, and counseled his followers to give away their cloaks and money and very lives. He lived simply, and so could dedicate himself to his primary mission of spreading the good news of God's radical love. He spent his time engaged in the work of peace, healing, and justice. His choices consistently led him into trouble with authority, but also drew a diverse crowd of people to him. Some even left everything they had behind and followed him into his way of simple living and loving.

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

The Christian spiritual discipline of simplicity has a long history, beginning with the first followers. A few centuries after Jesus' life, as the monastic movement took hold, Christians began to leave wealthy homes and embrace a simple life for the sake of the gospel. Francis of Assisi, who lived in the twelfth century, was one of them. Despite growing up rich, he chose to live an unpretentious life among the poor, preaching a straightforward message of God's love to ordinary people. Francis founded a religious order, the Franciscans, who continue to serve the poor and vulnerable while embracing a life of radical poverty. Even today, men and women enter classic and new monastic movements to center their lives on Jesus, and they embrace a simple lifestyle to do so.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS GUIDE

If possible, distribute this sheet to participants before gathering. Be prepared to summarize the information on this page. Bring extra copies, some pens, and a Bible.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Close with the following prayer:

O Lord, help us use our resources wisely, so we can serve you, and not harm others or the earth. Give us eyes to see what we truly need. Give us a heart to desire what is lasting. Give us a will to share out of our abundance. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.