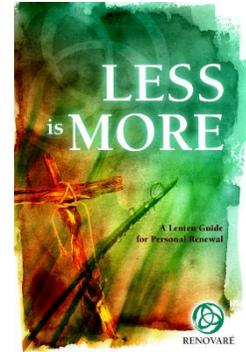


## Less is More – Week Three

### ***Simplicity: Less Stuff/More Freedom***

Lent 2023

*This guide for group discussion is based on the Renovare resource, Less is More, written by Pastor Kai Nilsen with contributions from Richella Parham and Rachel Quan.*



### **Opening Questions**

- What is something you have in abundance in your home? What is something you have an especially difficult time giving away or tossing?
- If you were able to try one of the faith practices last week, how did it go? What did you notice or experience? What about this practice could you continue to build into your life?

### **Opening Prayer**

*This responsive reading comes from the opening song for Wednesday worship.*

One: Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,

**All: Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:**

One: Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see

**All: All the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be. Amen.**

### **Introduction:**

Storage units galore. We have so much stuff that we cannot even fit what we have in our homes any longer. Fifty percent of Americans renting storage units are simply storing what wouldn't fit in their homes — even though the size of the average American house has almost doubled over the past 50 years.

We are constantly bombarded by messages that tell us we need more. Our credit cards and debt, and all of the extra stuff that accumulates in our storage units has not served to free us. We have become prisoners to our "stuff."

The discipline of simplicity asks us to deliberately say "no" to those things we do not need. We've been so indoctrinated by the world around us, however, that truly knowing the difference between a need and a want is difficult. This discipline asks us to stop and really think about that which is a need and that which is a want. When we begin to practice this type of deliberate way of thinking, we begin to realize how very little we do need.

Freedom to be generous with others is a result. When we spend and accumulate less, there is more room to give. When we don't need things to define us and give us status, we are freed from the worry of what others think. We are free to focus on relationships instead of things.

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

Hebrews 13:5

"Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have: for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'"

For most of us the accumulation of "stuff" is about a lack of contentment and a lack of trust.

#### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

- How is our security wrapped up in what we have or own?
- What do you believe contentment really looks like in God's economy?

### **What Do Others Say?**

*Our Guides*

Wendell Berry, in his poem titled, "The Want of Peace" uses the line: .  
*"I lack the peace of simple things..."*

- What is the "peace of simple things?"
- When is it you have felt the most content? What are the things that sow the seeds of discontentment in your life?
- Simplicity can be about the "things" in our life. What other areas of life can benefit from a sense of simplicity?
- What other insights do you see in the quotes on the right?

*We make our lives rich by making our wants few. – Henry David Thoreau*

*Live simply that others may simply live. – Mother Teresa*

*In everything, love simplicity. – Saint Francis De Sales*

### **What Do Others Say?**

*Personal Reflections written by Pastor Kai Nilsen, Richella Parham and Rachel Quan*

I enjoy giving gifts. In fact, through the years I have become more and more deliberate about the kind of gifts I give. Throughout Advent my family and I have consciously thought of the kinds of gifts that are about relationship instead of "just one more thing" for someone.

Every year we trek to the same place for our anniversary. It is only a two and a half hour drive from home, not too far from towns and cities. We go to a lovely bed and breakfast that is in the middle of a nature preserve in the Texas Hill Country. Just a few miles in any given direction are small towns with unique shops and crafts. But in between these towns is a larger city that has one of the most gigantic discount shopping malls around. As we passed it on our way to lunch

one day, we noted that there was a particular shop in the discount mall that we wanted to go to for a specific gift on our Christmas list. We told ourselves it was a way to save money when buying this special gift for someone in our family.

We went, found the store and bought the gift. And suddenly, we were in the store next door. And the store next door to that. We began to look at shoes and clothes and other items that seemed to be deeply discounted. Being in that environment, we were convinced for a while that we should perhaps buy these items because they were discounted.

Something hit us. Did we need any of the stuff we were looking at? No. We felt the urge, the sense that we might need it just because they appeared to be items that cost less. But our original intent was not to stop to pick up any of these additional items. We were only there to pick up one gift. And beyond that, we were on our anniversary trip! Why would we spend it in a discount shopping mall instead of hiking the trails outside the room of our bed and breakfast on the nature preserve? What in the world were we doing? My husband wisely said, "That's it. Let's get in the car. We don't need a thing here, no matter how cheap we think it is."

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

- What are examples of giving gifts that build relationships instead of just more "stuff" to those in our lives. How might a life of simplicity be something you can share in your relationships?
- What day-to-day decisions are part of living a path of simplicity? How can you keep the light of this path present in your day-to-day life?
- How might your relationship with God be affected by living a simpler life?
- What situations prompt us to begin to feel we need something that we don't really need? What are some ways around this?
- What else prompts our desire for more things?
- How has your family shaped your view of your needs, your wants and where your security comes from?
- What are the next steps you can take in following the path of simplicity in your life?

### **Faith Practice: Simplicity**

Simplicity is a way of life that begins from the inside and works its way out. If what is happening within our own soul is truly the path to simplicity, then it will automatically have a deep effect on the way we outwardly live. It is almost overwhelming to think of where to begin practicing this discipline in the midst of our current culture, but here are some places to start:

- Make a list with two columns. In one column list your current needs. In the other column list your current wants. Take the time to prayerfully look at each item you've placed on

your list. Do you really need the things in the need column? Are there items on the "needs" list that are actually wants?

- Break your list down even further. What do you need for just this week? List the items you believe you need. Then reassess that list.
- Ask yourself "What is it that the accumulation of things and wealth mean to me? Security? Status? What am I afraid of if I begin to make choices of simplicity?"
- Ask yourself "Am I afraid of what others will think of me if I have less and live with less? Is status more important to me than relationship?"
- Expand your thoughts to others. Ask yourself "How much more generous could I be if I chose to assess my needs versus my wants and practiced only acquiring my needs? How much more might I be able to focus on my relationships with others if my mind is not occupied with accumulating more?"
- Focus your thoughts on God. Thank him for providing for all your needs and more. Commit to trust him to provide for every need. Ask him to continually remind you that security comes from him and not from material goods. Pray for a generous heart that would make decisions to follow the simple path.

#### **Faith Practice Questions:**

- What do you think about this practice?
- What do you think is the core intention, or hope?
- What is helpful about the practice? What is challenging or difficult? What do you wonder about?
- What are some other ways to do this practice, keeping in mind the purpose?

#### **Closing Prayer**

*Share the date, time and location for the next gathering.*

Holy God, through your Son you have called us to live faithfully and act courageously. Keep us steadfast in your covenant of grace and teach us the wisdom that comes only through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Come and Find the Quiet Center.* Text: Shirley Erena Murray, (c) 1992 Hope Publishing Company. CCLI License #404667.

*Less is More: A Lenten Guide for Personal Renewal* by Nilsen, Kai, Richella Parham, & Rachel Quan. Renovare. 2013. [www.renovare.org](http://www.renovare.org).

Prayer from the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Prayer for Third Sunday in Lent, page 28). © 2006. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

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#### **Other Readings on Faith Practices:**

*Simpler Living, Compassionate Life* edited by Michael Schut