

4

Embrace Simplicity

MATTHEW 6:19–21



GOAL

Children consider what it means to embrace simplicity by exploring what is truly needed and valued in their lives.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- C Conversation
- D Drama
- F Food
- G Game
- M Music
- NS Nature/Science
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, fill me with your insight and wisdom as I prepare to share your Word with these children. Allow us all to see your will for us as we explore your Word and way. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Embracing simplicity is often seen as decluttering and adopting a minimalist lifestyle. It may include that, but it is much more. As a spiritual discipline, embracing simplicity is about the intention of the act. If it is just to have a clean house, then it may look like simplicity, but it may not lead to connecting with God or keeping company with Jesus. Simplicity begins with questions about purpose. “What do I value most, and how do I get more of that?” is different from “What do I want to get rid of?” If the goal is to love God and others and that leads to simplifying life from busyness and possessions, then simplicity is embraced. The focus is on what allows one time, energy, space, and quality to love God and others.

THE BIBLE STORY

In the midst of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:19–21 is about treasures, moths, rust, and thieves. These verses speak to the heart of thoughts about embracing simplicity. Treasures on earth—whether they be of the material kind, how we spend our time, or anything else that we cherish—can be destroyed or taken away from us. Possessions can quite literally be eaten by moths, consumed by rust, or stolen by thieves, as can our busyness be thwarted by physical or virtual breakdowns. Jesus encourages us to appreciate those things that cannot be ruined, wrecked, or shattered. Loving God and others is to be treasured, and this is where simplicity is found.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Embracing simplicity is not easy. In a culture that promotes acquiring a lot of things, it is hard to be content with less. In predominant American culture, we are inundated from a young age to want more, to do more. Our rooms and our schedules get overloaded. Children often do not have control over this. It is important that significant adults in a child’s life model choices that embrace simplicity, which may mean acquiring less, getting rid of excess, saying no without fear of missing out, stopping comparisons, understanding the difference between needs and wants, and being grateful.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Wants and Needs” (p. 32): Gather the Spiritual Discipline journals from session 3. Have a few extra notebooks for children who were not present at sessions 1–3.
- Depending on the options you choose:
 - “More!” (p. 33): Obtain *More!* by Tracey Corderoy (Tiger Tales, 2015) or use the YouTube video “Ms. Tarrant: More! by Tracey Corderoy and Ill by Tim Warnes” (bit.ly/FMMoreBook, 5:33).



GETTING STARTED

- ☐ Cards cut apart from Resource Pages 1 and 2
- ☐ Spiritual Discipline journals from session 3 and extra notebooks
- ☐ Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils

WANTS AND NEEDS



Greet the children as they arrive and give them their Spiritual Discipline journals. Have a notebook for anyone who was not at sessions 1–3. Provide coloring supplies. Have the children write the word WANTS on one page and NEEDS on another page. Display the cards cut apart from Resource Pages 1 and 2 on a table and draw the children’s attention to them. Invite them to decide what items are things they want or things they need and make a list or draw pictures on the corresponding pages in their journals. Set aside journals for “What Do You Treasure?” (p. 33).

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD



The opening ritual is a responsive litany with one line changing to correspond to the spiritual discipline in each session. The motions help children learn their responses, which are printed in the bold text and remain the same throughout the unit.

Draw near to God

and God (*raise both arms to the sky*)

will draw near to us. (*bring hands toward heart, crossing them over your heart*)

When we embrace simplicity, we untangle our lives so we can focus on loving and serving God.

Let us (*extend arms forward, palms facing upward*)

keep company (*bend elbows and bring together hands in prayer*)

with Jesus. (*sign “Jesus” using right middle finger touching the middle of left palm, repeat with left middle finger touching the middle of right palm*)



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- ☐ Cards from “Wants and Needs” (above)

WHAT DO WE NEED?



Invite the children to play a game moving to one side of the room for WANTS and the other side for NEEDS as you hold up each card. Wonder together what items were common needs.

Tell the children that they are going to consider what it means to embrace simplicity as a spiritual discipline. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✦ What do you think it means to embrace simplicity?
- ✦ What is a spiritual discipline? (*Remind the children, if necessary, that spiritual disciplines are those activities that help us train to be disciples, to practice being a follower of Jesus.*)
- ✦ How might embracing simplicity be a spiritual discipline?
- ✦ How does thinking about our wants and needs help us embrace simplicity?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

WHAT DO YOU TREASURE?



Hand out the passages of Scripture cut apart from Resource Page 3. Provide glue sticks and the Spiritual Discipline journals. Invite the children to glue the Scripture passage in their Spiritual Discipline journal.

Have three volunteers take turns reading the passage, a verse at a time, from Matthew 6:19–21, aloud to the group. Provide coloring supplies. Use the following directions and prompts to guide the children through a study of the passage:

- Put a box around the phrase “treasures for your own benefit on earth.”
 - ➔ What might these treasures be? (*Help the children think beyond possessions to how their time is spent as well.*)
- Write some of the suggestions that apply to you by this phrase. (*Assist with writing as needed.*)
- Draw a fly by the word “moth,” color the word “rust” orange or brown, and draw a mask by the word “thieves.”
- Put a circle around the phrase “treasures for yourselves in heaven.”
 - ➔ What might be treasure in heaven? (*Help the children think about what God wants for us and how we follow Jesus.*)
- Draw a heart on the word “heart.”
 - ➔ How might focusing on what God wants for us and gives us and how we follow Jesus help us embrace simplicity, or simplify our lives?

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- Scripture passage cut apart from copies of Resource Page 3
 - Glue sticks
 - Spiritual Discipline journals from “Wants and Needs” (p. 32)
 - Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

MORE!



In the children’s picture book *More!* by Tracey Corderoy, a little rhino rethinks his enthusiasm for *more* as his friends help him get out of a tight situation. Teach children how to sign *more* with their hands by placing their fingertips and thumb together on each hand and tapping both hands together at the fingertips and thumbs. Encourage the children to use their hands to sign *more* every time they hear the word in the story you will read. Read *More!* by Tracey Corderoy or show the YouTube video “Ms. Tarrant: *More!* by Tracey Corderoy and *Ill* by Tim Warnes” (bit.ly/FMMoreBook, 5:33; stopping at 4:44). The video begins with reviewing the sign for *more*. Note that the little rhino is named Otto in the book and in the video. In some print versions, the little rhino is named Archie. Discuss the story with the children using the following questions:

- ➔ What did Otto enjoy more of in this story, and why do you think he liked more of these things?
- ➔ Everyone thought Otto’s costume was amazing, but what different problems did Otto have when he wore it?
- ➔ How do you think Otto felt when he got stuck in the bushes?
- ➔ Why do you think Otto thought, “Maybe ‘more’ wasn’t always more fun. Maybe ‘more’ was sometimes too much”?

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- More!* by Tracey Corderoy (*Tiger Tales*, 2015) or internet-connected device



“Maybe ‘more’ WASN’T always more fun. Maybe ‘more’ was sometimes TOO MUCH.”—*More!* by Tracey Corderoy

- ✿ What does “less is more” mean? Where might this be a good idea?
- ✿ By having less of his costume, what can Otto now enjoy more of at the party?

✿ To see a demonstration of the sign for *more*, show the YouTube video “How to Sign More—Baby Sign Language/ASL” ([bit.ly /FMMoreSign](https://bit.ly/FMMoreSign), 0:10).

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- ☐ Resource Page 4 (one or three copies)

✿ Children do not always have agency over decisions that the adults in their lives make for them. Also, recognize that it is from a place of privilege that some people have more than enough and time to fill with activities. Remember that embracing simplicity is not about quantity but quality and, ultimately, what may draw us closer to God.

JUST ENOUGH

D C

Tell the children that uncluttering and organizing has become a very big business, particularly in the United States where many people have an excess of possessions and take part in many activities. Explain that people are hired and paid to help others simplify their lives. Comment that, while this might be helpful, cleaning out closets is not what the spiritual discipline of embracing simplicity is about. It is about the intention of simplifying one’s life to draw closer to God.

Invite the children to hear a story about a girl named Jenny and what she learned about simplifying her life. Read the story on Resource Page 4, or have three volunteers read parts for a narrator, Jenny, and her mom.

Wonder together who might feel the way Jenny did about all the things she had and did. Tell the children that a question they might like to ask themselves is, “Do I like it, or do I like doing it?” Suggest another way of asking this question is, “Does it bring me joy; does it bring me closer to God?” Assure them that they don’t have to give away everything or stop doing all their activities to simplify their lives, but if something isn’t giving them joy, they should wonder why they have it or are doing it. Other questions to ask are, “When was the last time I played with it?” or “When was the last time I wore it?” Those questions may help them decide if the item is really important to them.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- ☐ Card-stock copies of Resource Pages 5 and 6
 - ☐ Scissors
 - ☐ Glue sticks, tape
 - ☐ Markers, crayons, colored pencils

FIVE DAILY STEPS

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Tell the children they can practice embracing simplicity by following five daily steps. Hand out card-stock copies of Resource Pages 5 and 6. Invite volunteers to take turns reading each of the steps shown on the cube sides. Invite the children to decorate, cut out, and assemble their cubes with glue sticks and tape.

Form groups of three or four people, or play together as one group. Have the children take turns tossing their die and doing what it says on the side that lands facing up. If the verse from Psalm 118 lands facing up, tell the children that the whole group should stand and say, “Praise God!” Note that the sides of the die are numbered for the children to follow as steps to take sequentially. For the game, however, they may do them in whatever order they land and repeat them if landed on again. Encourage the children to take home their dice and follow the steps each day to practice the spiritual discipline of embracing simplicity. Suggest that they play the game with their families as well.

LIVING SIMPLY THROUGH MUSIC

M T AM

Embracing simplicity reminds us that one does not need a lot of things to draw near to God. Something as simple as humming or singing a song can help remind us of God's presence and desire to spend time with us.

Teach the children the new words to the familiar Shaker song "Simple Gifts." Play the music from the YouTube video "Simple Gifts with 4 Cellos" (bit.ly/FMSimpleGiftsCellos, 2:57) so the children may hear the tune. Sing a line at a time of the verse, having the children repeat after you. Sing the whole verse with the music. Then do the same with the chorus. As the children practice singing the song together, invite them to play the rhythm instruments as they sing.

Verse:

It's a gift to live simply
where we serve and we love.
It's a gift to follow our great God above.
When we walk with Jesus and keep company with him,
we will play and we'll dance as we sing this hymn.

Chorus:

When true simplicity is found
our hearts are with God, our feet on the ground.
To give love will be our delight
And by giving and loving, we live in God's light.

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- Rhythm instruments
 - Internet-connected device



To extend this activity, work together to create motions to go along with the song. Sing the song using the motions.



FOLLOWING JESUS

BLESSING OUR EMBRACING SIMPLICITY

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Invite each child to hold their Spiritual Discipline journal in their left hand and place their right hand over it like a roof. Have them repeat after you as you lead them in a blessing:

Lord, we bring our prayers to you /
as we try the practice of embracing simplicity in the coming days. /
Accept our prayers as a token of our love and devotion /
and our desire to grow closer with you. /
Amen. /

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- Spiritual Discipline journals from "What Do You Treasure?" (p. 33)



Have the children leave their Spiritual Discipline journals in the room for the next session. Encourage the children to try making choices about their belongings and their time that would simplify their lives and provide time and space to love God and others.





Stop collecting treasures for your own
benefit on earth, where moth and
rust eat them and where thieves
break in and steal them.

Instead, collect treasures for yourselves
in heaven, where moth and rust don't
eat them and where thieves don't
break in and steal them.

Where your treasure is, there your
heart will be also.

—Matthew 6:19–21 (CEB)

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Where your treasure is, there your
heart will be also.

—Matthew 6:19–21 (CEB)

Just Enough

“Mom, I can’t find my blue sweater,” yelled Jenny.

“It’s in there. Keep looking,” replied her mom.

Jenny kept looking. She found a red sweater, a purple jacket, three pink sweatshirts, six pairs of jeans, and three pairs of silver sequined sneakers. But no blue sweater.

“Hmmm,” she thought, “maybe I have too many clothes.”

The next day after school, Jenny started working on her geography project.

“Mom, I can’t find my atlas,” she yelled.

“It’s in there. Keep looking,” replied her mom.

Jenny kept looking. She found four comic books, three copies of *Mr. Poppers Penguins*, a set of Sesame Street books, and assorted coloring books.

“Hmmm,” she thought, “maybe I have too many books.”

On Saturday, Jenny’s friend Mattie came to play. She brought her doll along, and the girls decided to have a tea party.

“Mom, I can’t find the tea cups,” Jenny yelled.

“They’re in there. Keep looking,” replied her mom.

Jenny kept looking. She found a tennis ball, three tiaras, a slinky, assorted doll dresses and four stuffed animals . . . and the teacups.

“Hmmm,” she thought, “maybe I have too many toys.”

Later that day, Jenny’s mom noticed that Jenny looked unhappy.

“Are you all right? You seem grumpy and upset,” her mom said.

Jenny replied, “I don’t like not being able to find my stuff.”

“What could we do about that?” her mom asked.

“I guess I could sort and get rid of some things,” Jenny answered.

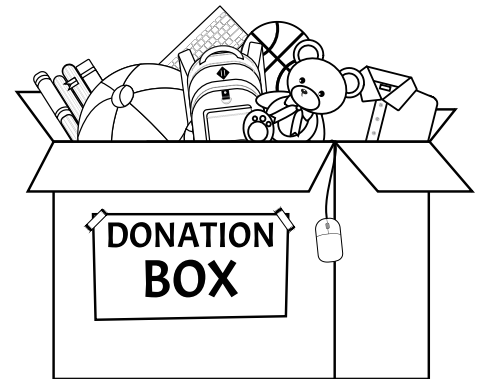
So Jenny sorted her clothes and filled two boxes for the mission closet at church.

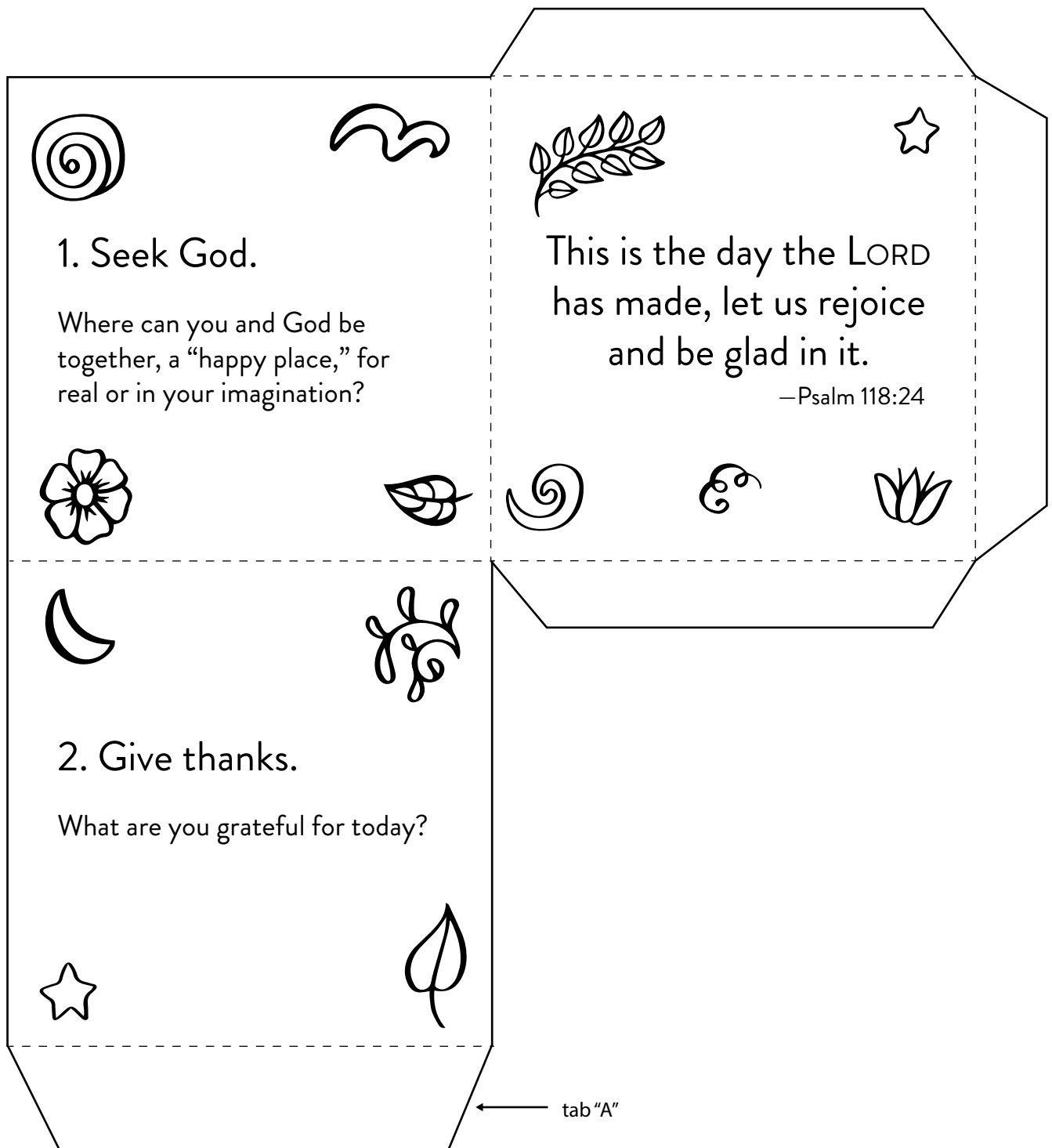
Then she sorted her books and filled two bags to donate to the refugee center.

And then she sorted through her toys and filled two boxes that she donated to the family shelter in town.

“What do you think?” asked her mom.

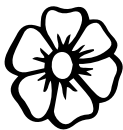
“I like it,” replied Jenny. “I have just enough to appreciate and enjoy. Now I’m going to think about all my activities. I don’t have to do everything and be in so many clubs at school. I’d like some time to be quiet and see what God would like me to do.”





1. Seek God.

Where can you and God be together, a "happy place," for real or in your imagination?



2. Give thanks.

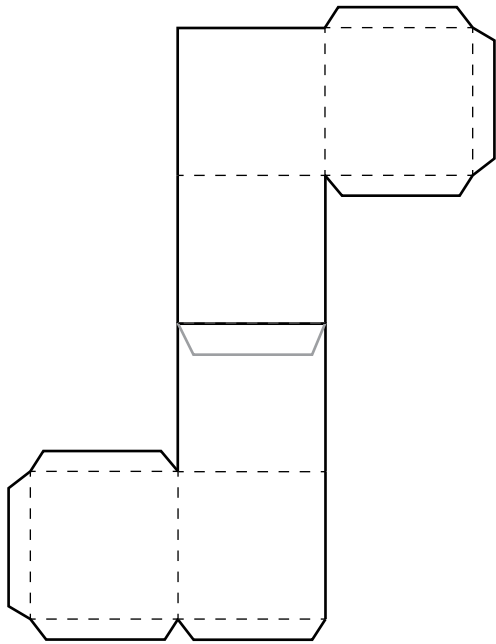
What are you grateful for today?



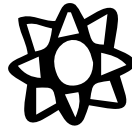
This is the day the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

—Psalm 118:24

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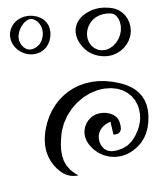


tape tab "A" behind



3. Simplify. Don't overcomplicate.

What is needed for today?



4. Let go.

About what can you say, "It's OK if I don't have..." or "It's OK if I don't do..."?

5. Give thanks again!

... and again, and again!

