

Embrace Simplicity

LUKE 10:38-42

4



GOAL

Youth discern tangible ways to embrace simplicity in their daily lives.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Think of one word that represents something you need (e.g., patience, wisdom, focus). Take five deep breaths. With each inhale and each exhale, recall the word.

THIS SESSION

Embracing simplicity is about not just minimalism but also spiritual devotion. It is a discipline that creates space in our minds, movements, and daily actions that helps us refocus on what is important to God. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes that the purpose of simplicity is “to uncomplicate and untangle my life so I can focus on what really matters.”¹ When we embrace simplicity, we let go of worldly values about quantity, quality, and competition, and instead focus on Christian values of gratitude, humility, and respect for creation.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Luke 10:38–42, we encounter two women, Mary and Martha, who are part of Jesus’ ministry. Martha is working hard to provide hospitality, comfort, and care for Jesus and his followers while Mary spends her time listening to Jesus. Martha does not understand the value of Mary’s seemingly passive actions. Why would her sister not help her? She complains to Jesus, but Jesus affirms Mary’s decision to simply keep company with him. This story challenges readers to consider what preoccupies their mind, body, and spirit, ensuring that their actions keep company with God.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Between schoolwork, social demands, extracurriculars, part-time jobs, household chores, and family commitments, youth can be very busy. While youth often have a lot of energy to juggle the many, and often conflicting, demands placed on them, reminders to slow down and embrace simplicity will contribute to their holistic health. The majority of youth will connect more deeply with a spiritual discipline about cultivating intentional, nonjudgmental presence than one about maintaining material minimalism. It may be a challenge at first for youth to focus on simply being, instead of doing, yet the rewards of embracing simplicity will be refreshing and impactful.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Call and Response” (p. 28): Post the “Call and Response” newsprint from session 1 (p. 6).

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Taizé” (p. 29): Prepare to play the songs for youth to hear.

1. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 84.

GETTING STARTED

☐ “Call and Response” newsprint

CALL AND RESPONSE

QC

Lead youth in the following prayer or invite a volunteer to lead:

Draw near to God

and God will draw near to us.

When we embrace simplicity, we untangle our lives so we can focus on what really matters.

Let us keep company with Jesus.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

☐ Internet-connected device



Many youth experience homelessness, which is not the same as wealthier people (such as the woman in the video) choosing to live more simply than they have to. Be sensitive to this issue as you discuss with youth.

LIVING IN A VAN

T C

Show the video “Van Tour: Solo Female DIY Build // 2001 Dodge Ram Van 3500” (bit.ly/FMVanTour, 3:57). Invite youth to tell any stories they know about people who live a minimalist life by choice.

Encourage youth to spend a few moments imagining what it would be like for them to live in a van by choice. Ask youth how a minimalist lifestyle might relate to the spiritual discipline of embracing simplicity.

A ZEN PROVERB

C

Read the following excerpt from *The Empty Mirror* by Janwillem van de Wetering:²

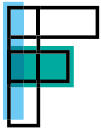
In China a Zen master travelled with a few disciples to the capital and camped near the river. A monk of another sect asked one of the disciples of the Zen master if his teacher could do magic tricks. His own master, said the monk of the other sect, was a very talented and developed man. If he stood on the side of the river, and somebody else stood on the other side, and if you gave the master a brush and the other a sheet of paper then the master would be able to write characters in the air which would appear on the sheet of paper.

The Zen monk replied that his master was also a very talented and developed man, because he too could perform the most astounding feats. If he slept, for instance, he slept, and if he ate, he ate.

Let the passage sit with the youth for a minute or two and then wonder together using the following questions:

- What is your reaction to the proverb?
- How does the story relate to simplicity?

2. Janwillem van de Wetering, *The Empty Mirror* (St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 1971), 20.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both activities.

REENACTMENT OF LUKE 10:38–42

AM

Bibles

Form groups of three. Distribute one Bible to each group and have them turn to Luke 10:38–42. Explain that, after youth read the Scripture passage, they will work as a group to create a skit illustrating the story. Encourage youth to be creative with their presentations and to express the emotions that they think each character is feeling in this story.

Allow groups to read, plan, and practice for a few minutes before performing their skits one at a time. Compare how each skit emphasizes the importance of simplicity.

MARY AND MARTHA

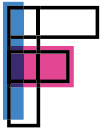
C AT

Bibles

Form pairs and read Luke 10:38–42 to the group. For each of the following prompts, invite youth to spend 20–30 seconds thinking of an answer and then sharing their answers with their partner and discussing. Invite partners to summarize their conversations for the group. Be sure to allow enough time for youth to think, discuss, and summarize each question.

Use the following prompts:

- ➔ Do you relate more to Mary or Martha? Why?
- ➔ When was a time that you felt like Martha?
- ➔ When was a time that you felt like Mary?
- ➔ Why do you think Jesus praised Mary?
- ➔ Is it OK to be like Martha and like Mary sometimes?



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

TAIZÉ

M T

Internet-connected device
 Music app

Explain to youth that the Taizé Community is an ecumenical, Christian, monastic community located in France. Each year, thousands of people of all ages visit the community to enjoy simple prayers, meals, and chants together.

Invite youth to assume a comfortable posture and listen to a song from the Taizé Community. Play the song “Simply Taizé - My Soul Is at Rest” ([bit.ly/FMSimplyTaize](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMSimplyTaize), 2:37). Then, play the song a second time and invite youth to sing along with the chorus: “My soul is at rest in God alone. My salvation comes from God.”

Invite youth to describe the thoughts and feelings that emerged for them as they listened (or sang along with) the song.

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
 - Coloring pencils or markers

COLORING REFLECTION

CT A

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and coloring supplies. Request that a volunteer read the paragraphs at the top of the page. While the youth color, use the following questions to facilitate a conversation or lead the activity below (“Monastic Wisdom”):

- Why do you think someone might go into the wilderness to embrace simplicity?
- What do you think it might be like to live as a monk in the desert?
- What do you think would be different about being in the wilderness alone versus being in the wilderness with a community? What would be different about embracing simplicity?

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- Internet-connected device

MONASTIC WISDOM

T C

Show the video “Ancient Wisdom for Today: Three Stories from Desert Monks” (bit.ly/FMDesertMonks, 7:23; begin at 3:11 and end at 4:48). It is more important for youth to be able to listen to this video than to watch it.

Choose one of the following questions to wonder together:

- Did this story change your perspective on today’s Scripture passage? If so, how?
- What did you learn about embracing simplicity from this video?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

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- Paper
 - Pens

SIMPLE PRAYER

QC

Invite youth to recall the different types of prayer they learned about during the previous session on prayer. If they do not recall the session or were not present, invite them to share different types of prayer that they have experienced.

Distribute paper and pens. Invite youth to spend about two minutes writing a prayer. Once they have completed their prayer, instruct youth to do the following:

- Cross out all prepositions (words like *in*, *on*, *around*, *with*, and so forth).
- Cross out any words that repeat, leaving only the first time the word is used.
- Cross out any first-person or second-person language.

Invite youth to share what remains of their prayer. Invite youth to consider how the second prayer resonates with the youth compared to the initial prayers they wrote.

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- Paper
 - Pens (two different colors)
 - Highlighters

SIMPLE SCHEDULES

CT C

Distribute paper and one color of pens. Instruct youth to turn the paper sideways so that the longest side is at the top. Have them write the days of the week in order across the top of the paper. Then, direct youth to draw a line horizontally across the paper underneath the days.

Invite youth to write out their schedule for each day while leaving about 5 inches of space at the bottom of the page. After youth have written their schedules, ask them to write their “to do” list in the space at the bottom of the page. This may include, but is not limited to, homework, practicing a musical instrument, a self-care routine, or caring for a family pet.

Challenge youth to underline activities or times when they expect to multitask. Invite youth to explain to the group what they underlined.

Next, challenge youth to highlight activities or times that they believe they can simplify in some way. Invite youth to explain to the group what they highlighted.

Distribute a different colored pen to each youth. Invite youth to add activities or times when they can intentionally keep company with God. Invite youth to tell the group what they wrote.

MEDITATING ON SIMPLICITY



Explain to youth that mindfulness meditations are used to simplify one's focus and attention. They are often used by people to calm their minds and encourage a feeling of groundedness. Inform youth that, while there are many ways to participate in a mindfulness meditation, we will be following a 5-4-3-2-1 countdown.

Invite youth to assume a comfortable position. Encourage them to take deep breaths in through their noses as if smelling flowers, and to exhale deeply through their mouths as if blowing out candles. Explain that it is normal to hear themselves breathe.

Invite youth, as they inhale, to think of five different things they see around them. Wait for them to take five deep breaths.

Next, invite youth, as they inhale, to think of four different things they hear around them. Wait for them to take five deep breaths.

Then, invite youth, as they inhale, to think of three different things they can touch. Wait for them to take five deep breaths.

Invite youth, as they inhale, to think of two different things they currently smell. Wait for them to take five deep breaths.

Finally, invite youth, as they inhale, to think of one thing they taste. Wait for them to take five deep breaths.

Invite youth to take five more deep breaths and then bring the group back together. Ask youth to share where God was present in that meditation.



FOLLOWING JESUS

WORDS AND MOTION



Gather youth in a circle. Challenge youth to think of one word and one movement that they want to offer as part of a closing prayer for the group. For example, they could choose the word *joy* and a thumbs-up, or the word *rest* and a big stretch. Once everyone has made their choices, have youth offer their prayers in a clockwise motion around the circle.

Desert Fathers and Mothers

During the early first century, many Christians withdrew from society, entered the deserts of Egypt, and adopted a monastic lifestyle. They embraced simple clothes and simple food and spent their time and energy on prayer, fasting, and giving to those in need. Sometimes they lived as solitary hermits, and sometimes they resided in community with like-minded practitioners.

Although these monks are commonly referred to as the Desert Fathers, many women and people of different gender expressions also sought a simple life and community in the wilderness during that time. Among them were Anthony the Great, Amma Syncletica of Alexandria, and Theodora of Alexandria.

