



Practice Guide | *Simplicity & Generosity*

WEEK 4—Simplicity of Stuff

Meeting Prep

1. Listen to this sermon: "[Simplicity of Stuff](#)" (45:17)

Read this Overview⁹

Frugality is good, if liberality be joined with it. The first is leaving off superfluous expenses; the last bestowing them to the benefit of others that need. The first without the last begets covetousness; the last without the first begets prodigality. Both together make an excellent temper. Happy the place where that is found.

William Penn
1644-1718

Whether we live in a five bedroom house or a studio apartment, most of us have some kind of space—a drawer, closet, even an entire room—where things just collect. When spring cleaning rolls around, we find ourselves thinking things like: “Why do I have so much stuff?” or “When did I start collecting *this*?” or, “Maybe I’ll just skip this closet.”

The fact that most of us have a space like this speaks to a principle that most of us have implicitly taken in over time: that *more is better*. But as we consider the way of Jesus and how to model our lives on the simplicity and power of his, it becomes clear that more doesn’t equal better. Often, more equals less—less contentment, less margin, less peace.

Most of us long for a heart that is full of contentment and the “life that is truly life.” The question is, *how* do we coax our hearts away from the desire for more, and toward the freedom of less?

As we press into the practice of simplicity, specifically in relation to what we own, there are two principles that are helpful in guiding our journey toward freedom: “de-owning” (or “owning less”) and generosity. As most practices go, the more you do it, the more it changes you and the easier it gets. Eventually, we can become the kinds of people who know in our bones that what Jesus says is true: it’s better to give than receive. At the end of the day, Simplicity is about a heart postured towards God, believing in his goodness and provision.

⁹ Lightly adapted from “Practicing the Way,” <https://practictheway.org/simplicity-practice/part-five>. Accessed 2/26/22.

Begin with Prayer & Silence

After gathering and settling in, keep silence together for a few minutes, simply being with God to listen for his voice and to experience his loving presence. Close the silence with a brief prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

Discuss the Teaching

Begin by having someone read 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

1. Before discussing the sermon or any additional readings, what stands out most to you from this passage in 1 Timothy?
2. What impacted you most from the sermon? Where did you feel convicted or challenged? Where did you feel freed or invited by God to something new?
3. How has the idea of “more is better” been a part of your life or upbringing? How has that idea impacted you, if at all?
4. Have you noticed any correlation in your own life between how much you own and how happy you are? How did one impact the other?
5. Is generosity a part of your current financial practice? How does giving money away affect you?
6. Have you ever gone through a process of simplifying your “stuff?” If so, what did you focus on? (Clothes? Books? Entertainment accessories?) How did that process go?
7. Jan Johnson talks about several reasons that might lie behind our attachment to “stuff.”¹⁰ Which of them resonate with you? Or others not on this list?
 - Longing for importance
 - Longing for love
 - Fear of not having enough
 - Guilt and regret
 - Perfectionism
 - Inability to accept where/who I am in life

Individual & Group Practice: Possession Audit

One significant step toward simplicity of stuff is a possession audit, an honest assessment of what we have, what we need, what we can do without, and what could be a new “stretch goal” in generosity.

PART 1: SIMPLICITY

Start with a single room in your home. If a room feels overwhelming, choose one that’s easier, or only one portion of that room. Set out five boxes or dedicated piles (though boxes help contain the clutter and might help you transport things later). Sort your items into five categories, each one to a box:

- **Give:** items to give away to a friend, a neighbor, or a ministry like Pour House (Goodwill, Habitat for Humanity, etc.), making sure they’re good enough condition to be a blessing;
- **Sell:** items in good condition that you’d like to sell;

¹⁰ Jan Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011, pp. 80-82.

- **Trash / Recycle:** items beyond repair or further use;
- **Wait:** *This pile is key.* For sentimental items, or things we think we “might need” in the future, put them away in a box or bag in a closet, to be put out of sight for a set period of time (maybe 3-6 months). If at any point you want something, go get it! Revisit the box when the time is up. You may discover the items are easier to give away.
- **Keep:** items that you feel are beautiful, useful, or have a purpose in your life as a follower of Jesus.

Because this might be challenging because of your attachments to these possessions, consider asking a friend (who isn’t emotionally tied up with your stuff) to accompany you on your audit. A few rules of thumb:

- Start with the easy stuff, like your bathroom or living room, followed by your bedroom.
- Save the hard stuff for last, like sentimental items, office paperwork, or the garage.
- With each item, ask a few basic questions: Do I need this? Is it useful or beautiful? Does it help me or hold me back in my pursuit of life in the kingdom with Jesus?
- Avoid duplicates and collections. (Most of us don’t need multiple sets of sheets, two dozen mugs, and three sets of towels.)
- Avoid the trap of, “But I might use this someday.” That’s possible for a *huge* number of items, and it’s the reason we hold onto so much! (Remember your “Wait” box and how it might teach you to live without something you think you could need.)

PART 2: GENEROSITY

Now, how can you let this possession audit help you take a further step toward not only simplicity, but generosity? Remember, start where you are, not where you think you “should” be. Here are a few ideas (don’t feel like you have to do them all!):

- **Give first.** If your “Sell” box yielded any proceeds, give away some portion of it first, before saving or spending any of it on yourself. (In biblical language, this is the idea of “first fruits.”) Stay attuned to your emotions and desires here. Is that giving hard? Are you willing to give even more?
- **Divert one specific expense to generosity.** It could be big, like selling a car to eliminate a monthly payment from your budget, or small, like canceling a streaming service. Whatever you end up saving from that expense, give it away.
- **Give to a person or cause you care about.** With special attention to the poor and the church.
- **If you can, tithe.** The New Testament doesn’t teach that we have to tithe, but most followers of Jesus view tithing (giving 10% of our pre-tax income) as the “floor” to start from, directing our tithe to the poor and the church. If you already tithe, consider a graduated tithe (increasing the percentage of your giving as your income increases.)

As you practice this, watch what happens in your heart. Stay alert to growing in feelings of freedom and contentment, as well as your relationship with God. Let it spur you to even more generosity!

[Optional Family Practice: “Give, Pitch, Keep, Thank”]

Kids can also join in a family’s possession audit! Have each family member start with their own room or personal area of the home (toy room, craft room, etc.). For younger children especially, it may be helpful to have only three piles or boxes:

1. **Give:** stuff to give away to friends, donation drives, or local ministries;
2. **Pitch:** stuff to throw away or recycle because it’s broken or not in good enough condition to give away;
3. **Keep:** stuff to hold onto purposefully with joy, not guilt.

If your family does garage sales or takes clothes to consignment, you could consider a fourth *Sell* pile, with children agreeing to use the proceeds for something specific. In pursuit of simplicity, how could that be giving away or buying less than what was sold?

After organizing these piles and deciding where they’ll go, take time as a family to *thank* God for the blessing that these items have been. For everything being given to others, offer it to the Lord and ask that he would make it a blessing to them as well. And for everything being kept, offer that to God as well, asking him to bless your ongoing enjoyment of it and to keep you from an inappropriate attachment to it—that is, loving the stuff, rather than the One who gives it all.

Close with Prayer