

Practice

Our exercise for this week is based on Jesus' command: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor." In context, he wasn't saying you need to sell everything. He was calling his followers to be the kinds of people who regularly simplify their lives, by selling their possessions and giving the money away to the poor.

Exercise: Identify something you own that you do not need, and give it away or sell it and give the money to someone in need.

- **Identify an item to sell and/or give away.** You don't need to sell everything, just something. It could be an item you rarely use — that bike you never ride, the surfboard collecting dust, your aging record collection, etc. Or it could be an item you love and use regularly, but you feel the gentle pull of the Spirit to give away. This calls for prayerful discernment.
- **Once you identify an item, give it away.** You can give to an organization like a local nonprofit or directly to someone you know in need. Don't make a big deal out of it. Just bless people as quietly as you can, without drawing attention to yourself or putting them in an awkward position. You may want to consider giving anonymously, if you feel led to do so.

This exercise may be really hard and feel like peeling a layer off your heart, but on the other side is joy and freedom.

Practice

We recognize that we're all at different places in our stage of discipleship and season of life. To that end, we've added a Reach Exercise to each of the four weeks for those of you who have the time, energy, and desire to go further in generosity.

Reach Exercise: Simplify

- **Pick a room or area of your life, go through it thoughtfully and peacefully, and simplify it down to the essentials.** This could be your closet, bedroom, living room, kitchen, garage, etc.
- **As you quietly observe each item in the room, consider holding it up before God.**
- **Ask yourself questions:** Do I really need this? Could I live without this? Would my life possibly be better without this unnecessary item? Rather than asking ourselves how we can get more, we're pondering how we could live with less.
- **Make four piles for the unnecessary items:** 01. Throw away. 02. Recycle. 03. Sell. 04. Give away.
- **Give your extra stuff away.** You can give to the poor via the Salvation Army or a local donation drop, or give directly to someone you know.
- **Go sit in the decluttered room or area, and pay attention to how you feel.** Spend a few minutes in gratitude to God for the goodness of ordinary life.

To simplify your whole home and life is a long process that takes most people many weeks or months, but it can have a dramatic effect on your discipleship to Jesus, emotional well-being, and spiritual freedom; so we've created a four week guide to simplifying your life, if you would like to pursue greater simplicity.

Additionally, you can listen to these three interviews John Mark did with author, former pastor, and minimalist expert Joshua Becker:

- [Simplifying your wardrobe](#)
- [Simplifying your living room and bedrooms](#)
- [Simplifying your kitchen, bathrooms, and laundry](#)

You could also consider reading one of the following books:

- *Freedom of Simplicity* by Richard Foster
- *The More of Less* by Joshua Becker
- *Abundant Simplicity* by Jan Johnson
- *Essential* by the Minimalists

Go Deeper

Read

Giving Is the Good Life by Randy Alcorn

Chapters 5-8 (pages 61-110)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Generosity

Episode 02

Reflect

Before your next time together with the group for Session 03, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

- 01 What aspect of simplifying did I find most difficult?
- 02 What emotions did I experience in simplifying and giving away?
- 03 How do I sense the Spirit inviting me deeper into simplicity going forward?

Discuss (Optional)

For those of you who would like to slow down and integrate this practice more deeply into your life, here is an *optional* group session you can do before you move on to Session 03 of this Practice.

Read this introduction

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” Few verses in Scripture are more popular (and misunderstood) than these 11 words from Paul in his letter to the Philippian church. For Paul this was more than a motivational speech to roll up his sleeves and face life’s circumstances; it was a statement about contentment in spite of them.

Many of us long to experience the content life, but it can feel elusive. We wait for a sense of contentment to trail behind the next thing: a raise, a promotion, keys to a home we can finally call ours; but contentment in Paul’s experience was not derived from his circumstances but pronounced over them; it was not accumulated or purchased, but discovered in Jesus and his way.

In your time together today, we want to give special attention to contentment, one of the more beautiful, counterintuitive by-products of a generous life in Christ.

Discuss (Optional)

Read this Scripture

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

—Philippians 4:10-20

Discuss the text

- 01 Verse 13 is often misunderstood. How does your understanding of this verse change given the context of “content whatever the circumstances”?
- 02 What do you think is Paul’s “secret” for a life of contentment?
- 03 Read Paul’s overview of the persecution and trials he faced in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28. How does this impact your reading of the above passage, especially his contentment?
- 04 In the previous session, you provided a number on a scale of 1-10 to describe your level of contentment. If Paul’s number is a 10, why do you think your numbers might be different or similar?

Discuss the Practice

- 01 Have you noticed any correlation in your own life between how much you own and how content you are? How does one impact the other?
- 02 In what ways do you notice the culture around you fostering discontentment in you?
- 03 Does it feel possible for you to have contentment regardless of your circumstances like Paul says? Why or why not?
- 04 In what ways, if any, did this week’s exercise impact your view on material possessions and their role in your life?