

## **DEFINITION**

freedom from complexity; absence of complication, luxury, pretentiousness, or ornament

**SYNONYMS:** plainness; clarity; modesty; restraint; ease; clearness

## **Taking It Home:**

### **Activity: Room for What's Inside You**

simplicity is not just about pruning the world outside of us, but also about making space for the world inside us.

**Your assignment: Make time to listen. It is as simple as that.** As Elaine Konigsburg puts it, “allow what is already in you to swell up.” There are a myriad of ways to make space: meditation, walking in the woods, turning off the radio on your way to work. The goal is to have the experience of simplifying your schedule and your listening.. Come to your group ready to explain how you pulled that off, and what you heard.

**Book:** *Everyday Simplicity: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Growth* by Robert J. Wicks

### **Video: “Towards a Science of Simplicity” (TED Talk)**

Simplicity: We know it when we see it — but what is it, exactly? In this funny, philosophical talk, George Whitesides chisels out an answer.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/george\\_whitesides\\_toward\\_a\\_science\\_of\\_simplicity](http://www.ted.com/talks/george_whitesides_toward_a_science_of_simplicity)

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These materials are part of the small group ministry program at Jefferson Unitarian Church. For more information on using them, or to set up your small group, please contact Rev. Eric Banner.

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# **Jefferson Unitarian Church June 2016 Small Group Session: Simplicity 1.0**

**Opening/  
Chalice  
Lighting**

As we come together,  
I go into myself.  
I dig into myself for a deep answer.  
I have patience with everything that remains  
unsolved in my heart, and I live the question.  
What is required of us is that we love the difficult  
and learn to deal with it.  
In the difficult are the friendly forces, the hands  
that work on us.  
It is clear that we must embrace the struggle.  
Right in the difficult we must have our joys, our  
happiness, our dreams.  
We create this space to go into ourselves and see  
how deep the place is from which our  
lives flow. **(RM Rilke, adapted by Scott Rudolf)**

**Check In:**

Up to 2 minutes per person to share what they  
bring with them since the last time the group met

**Reading:**

Our lives are often filled with a million things to do  
and consume that distract us from simple living.  
When I pay attention and become mindful, I  
marvel at the simple things in life that I once  
passed over. Consuming less and living simply  
are the true conditions of happiness. — **Barbara  
Ann Kipfer in *201 Little Buddhist Reminders***

**Resting in  
the  
Silence:**

Take 2 minutes to just sit. If your group is up to it,  
go longer, as long as you let people know how  
long the silence will be.

**Questions  
and  
Quotes  
From The  
Common  
Bowl:**

Share the quotes and questions for today's  
session in the way that is customary in your small  
group. You can pass the sheet, you can select  
them randomly from a bowl after having cut them  
into individual pieces. Or whatever works well for  
your small group.

**Sharing/  
Deep  
Listening:**

Allow each person up to five minutes to share  
what has come up for them about today's topic. If  
someone does not use the full five minutes, make  
sure you count to ten full breaths before moving  
on to the next person, in case the speaker is not  
truly finished.

**A Second  
Share:**

If time allows, you may have a brief second share  
from those who have found they have more to  
say, keeping in mind your commitment to going  
no longer than ninety minutes.

**Closing  
Reading:**

Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious, and  
adding the meaningful. — **John Maeda**

**Extinguish  
the  
Chalice:**

Join hands and say the following together:  
**May simplicity be our guide, with love in our  
hearts, until we meet again.**  
And then, extinguish your chalice until you meet  
again.

## *What Does It Mean To Be A People of Simplicity?*

*Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent.  
It takes a touch of genius — and a lot of courage — to move  
in the opposite direction. — E. F. Schumacher*

Courage. It's not your typical place to begin. But maybe that's good. It reminds us of what we already know but too often forget: there is nothing simple about simplicity.

Indeed to talk of simplicity requiring courage reminds us that the work of this month is not just about reduction but confrontation. Yes, editing our To Do Lists and eliminating clutter from our lives is part of it, but the deeper challenge involves rejecting our culture's values and attributions of worth. To be a people of simplicity is not just about saying yes to sunsets, walks in the woods and more dinners with those we love. It's also about saying no to status and society's affirmation. And that most certainly requires bravery.

And not just bravery, but honesty too. It's not just society that celebrates status, stuff and overscheduled lives; we cling to them as well. The busyness of our lives is not just overwhelming; it's also *seductive*. Overscheduled lives don't just tip us over; they tempt us. They promise us power, affirmation and proof that we are of more worth than the one standing next to us. There is a reason we go on and on about how busy we are. We aren't just complaining; we're bragging. To be busy is to have made it. To be over-committed is to be wanted and needed. No wonder we have such a hard time giving it all up.

And why is this frame important? Why dwell on how addictive and seductive this crazy game of chaotic living is? Well, because it reminds us that simplicity is not a single-player game. We forget this, you know. We make the work of simplifying our lives all about our own will-power. We treat our cluttered houses and full calendars like our problem and challenge alone. And then we beat ourselves up for being as materialist and status-driven as everyone else.

But the fact is no one stands outside of the status quo by themselves. No one can reject and confront a community of broken values without the promise and support of an alternative community that celebrates a different equation of "worthy living." That courage and genius of which Schumacher speaks: it's just not something any of us can pull off on our own.

That may be the most important and kindest message of this month. May we help each other remember it.

Are you trying to simplify all on your own? Busyness and complexity are too big for what for one person to handle by themselves. Who might be your teammates? Why haven't you asked them to help?

Simple things are always the most difficult. In actual life it requires the greatest art to be simple, and so acceptance of one's self is the essence of the moral problem and the acid test on one's whole outlook on life. — **Carl Jung**

What about your children? Have you allowed your child's/children's life/lives to become too complex? Are you and your hopes for them a source of simplicity or a burden?

I do believe in simplicity. It is astonishing as well as sad, how many trivial affairs even the wisest thinks he must attend to in a day; how singular an affair he thinks he must omit. When the mathematician would solve a difficult problem, he first frees the equation of all encumbrances, and reduces it to its simplest terms. So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run. — **Henry David Thoreau**

Have you already done it? All of our lives include existing simplicity strategies. Maybe your challenge is to notice what already exists and double down.

Simplicity means not only letting go of attachments to material goods, but also to beliefs and judgments about others, and of how I think the world should be. — **Brad Ogilie**

What do wish you could say “no” to in your life? Why haven't you? What would happen if you did?

I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Simple in actions and in thoughts, you return to the source of being. Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world.— **Lao-Tzu**

Does simplicity mean something entirely different for you? We all relate to it in a different way. Our need for it differs from person to person. Are you feeling that room is not being made for your way?

I find my thoughts, increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life—achieving a sense of peace within oneself, I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest. — **Oliver Sacks**