

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Earthcare for Friends

Unit 6

Applied Simpler Living

by Susan Carlyle

Purposes of this unit

THIS UNIT is about making changes in our lives. It will present some concrete ways to examine the how and why of making changes that enhance the integrity of our lives and of the world we share with others. We should recognize that all of us are in different places on our personal path to simpler living and that we each have a unique set of life circumstances. We each should think about what simpler living means to us and be mindful of the many factors that influence our daily decisions.

Although all areas of our lives are interwoven, it sometimes helps to ask this question before buying something, making a trip, or becoming involved in another cause: *“Is this the best possible use of my or the world’s resources?”*

Sacred texts and other inspirational readings

You shall have no other Gods before me.

—Exodus 20:3

Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure. Moths and rust destroy; thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure, which neither moths nor rust destroy nor thieves break in and steal. Remember, where your treasure is, there is your heart also.

—Matthew 6:19–21

If you seek perfection [wholeness], go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven.

—Matthew 19:21

No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

—Matthew 6:24

I saw that a humble man with the blessing of Providence might live on a little, and that where the heart was set on greatness, success in business did not satisfy the craving, but that in common with the increase of wealth, the desire of wealth increased. There was a care on my mind to so pass my time that nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the True Shepherd.

—John Woolman, *A Plea for the Poor*, 1743

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.

—George Fox

I wish I might emphasize how a life becomes simplified when dominated by faithfulness to a few concerns.

—Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*

Hymns and songs

Teach Me to Stop and Listen. *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*, #137.

“What On Earth Are We Doing?”

*What on Earth are we doing today for tomorrow?
Where on Earth are we going if we don't find a better way?
Every little thing we do really makes a difference.
What on Earth are we doing for tomorrow, today?*

*We have the power to claim the future.
We have the knowledge to change our path.
We have love enough to move us
To a vision that can last.*

*What on Earth are we doing today for tomorrow?
Where on Earth are we going if we don't find a better way?
Every little thing we do really makes a difference.
What on Earth are we doing for tomorrow, today?*

*Today is only a fleeting moment.
It will be gone in the blink of an eye.
But tomorrow goes on forever,
As do the footprints of you and I.*

*What on Earth are we doing today for tomorrow?
Where on Earth are we going if we don't find a better way?
Every little thing we do really makes a difference.
What on Earth are we doing for tomorrow, today?
What on Earth are we doing for tomorrow, today?*

—Joyce Johnson Rouse

From the CD “Love Large”

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Issue presentations

BEING A FRIEND for 30 years has given me support for my leading, but the basis of my leading comes from long ago. My parents were role models for fairness, compassion and faith. My college roommate in 1964 was a Quaker who taught me about putting belief into action. A trip to South Africa in 1990 made me re-think how I was to spend my time, money and energy in the future. Over the last 10 years, my husband Kim has been a role model for me by living lightly with ecological integrity. We challenge each other to practice together the Friends testimony on Simplicity.

_____Article 1_____

Ten Reasons for Choosing a Simpler Life-Style

by Jørgen Lissner

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TODAY'S GLOBAL REALITIES call for comfortable Christians to review their lifestyles. Guidelines for a simpler style of life cannot be laid down in universal rules; they must be developed by individuals and communities according to their own imagination and situation. The question of lifestyle changes has major importance in a world where justice has to be understood as eco-justice. The ecological peril has become the context in which justice as equitable distribution must be sought.

[One person can read this introductory paragraph to the group, and then each of the following reasons can be read aloud, going around the circle. Pause between each one for a moment or two. When all have been read, comments and discussion can follow.]

1. As an act of faith performed for the sake of personal integrity and as an expression of a personal commitment to a more equitable distribution of the world's resources.
2. As an act of self-defense against the mind- and body-polluting effects of overconsumption.
3. As an act of withdrawal from the achievement-neurosis of our high-pressure, materialistic societies.
4. As an act of our solidarity with the majority of humankind, who have no choice about lifestyle.
5. As an act of sharing with others what has been given to us, or of returning what was usurped by us through unjust social and economic structures.
6. As an act of celebration of the riches found in creativity, spirituality, and community with others, rather than in mindless materialism.
7. As an act of provocation (ostentatious under-consumption) to arouse curiosity, leading to dialogue with others about affluence, alienation, poverty, and social injustice.
8. As an act of anticipation of the era when the self-confidence and assertiveness of the underprivileged force new power relationships and new patterns of resource allocation upon us.
9. As an act of advocacy of legislative changes in present patterns of production and consumption, in the direction of a new economic order.
10. As an exercise of purchasing power to redirect production away from the satisfaction of artificially created wants, toward the supplying of goods and services that meet genuine social needs.

THE ADOPTION OF A SIMPLER LIFESTYLE is meaningful and justifiable for any or all of the above reasons alone, regardless of whether it benefits the underprivileged. Demands for "proof of effectiveness" in helping the poor simply bear witness to the myth that "they the poor" are the problem and "we the rich" have the solution.

Here is a list of things that have worked for me. You can try some:

- ❖ Embracing silence daily.
- ❖ Connecting with nature and the planet.
- ❖ Staying home more and being less busy.
- ❖ Driving less and advocating for better transportation options.
- ❖ Being a non-consumer.
- ❖ Spending mindfully and locally.
- ❖ Giving stuff away—less to care for or insure.
- ❖ Eating food in season, grown locally.
- ❖ Unplugging the T.V.
- ❖ Installing a clothesline.
- ❖ Sharing tools and seeds.
- ❖ Using less water.
- ❖ Buying energy-efficient appliances.
- ❖ Using non-toxic cleaning materials.
- ❖ Exploring low-cost leisure, such as hikes and potluck meals.
- ❖ Buying in bulk to minimize wasteful packaging.
- ❖ Using compact fluorescent bulbs.
- ❖ Fixing instead of replacing.
- ❖ Examining all holiday practices to see if they are in line with my values.
- ❖ Being grateful.
- ❖ Getting support from others.

_____Article 2_____

Patterns and attitudes of simpler living

THERE IS NO “RIGHT” WAY to live more ecologically. Although there is no formula for defining a life of conscious simpler living, there is a general pattern of behaviors and attitudes that is often associated with this approach. Those choosing simpler living tend to:

- ❖ Invest time in partners, children, family, volunteering, and civic affairs.
- ❖ Work on all of their potential: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual.
- ❖ Feel an intimate connection with the earth.
- ❖ Have compassion for the world’s poor and have concerns for social justice.
- ❖ Lower their level of personal consumption.
- ❖ Buy things that are durable, repairable, less polluting, and energy efficient.
- ❖ Shift their diets from processed foods and meat.
- ❖ Reduce clutter and complexity by giving things away.
- ❖ Use consumption politically through boycotting.
- ❖ Recycle and reduce the need for material resources.
- ❖ Pursue right livelihoods.
- ❖ Develop skills for self-sufficiency.
- ❖ Prefer smaller dwellings and work-places.
- ❖ Creatively adapt male-female roles.
- ❖ Appreciate silence and non-verbal communication.
- ❖ Participate in holistic health care.
- ❖ Involve themselves in compassionate causes.
- ❖ Adopt more efficient transportation modes.
- ❖ Better integrate their inner/outer lives.

Applied Simpler Living

“False gods”—worldly distractions from our spiritual life

“False gods” interfere with our spiritual life: The craving for and attachment to worldly things can lead to injustice and great human suffering. Simpler living enables us to establish proper priorities. Discuss in small groups how we might keep these idols out of our own lives. What other such “false gods” get in your way?

A grid of 40 ovals arranged in 10 rows and 4 columns. Each oval contains a worldly distraction. The words are: Row 1: Notoriety, Addictions, Novelty, Safety; Row 2: Simplicity, Fashion, Career; Row 3: Collectibles, Fear, Work, Food; Row 4: Comfort, Celebrities, Alcohol; Row 5: Heroes, Speed, Excitement, Danger; Row 6: Efficiency, Recognition, Power; Row 7: Possessions, Technology, Money, Fame; Row 8: Sex, Property, Status; Row 9: Prestige, Drugs, Vanity, Fitness; Row 10: Obsessions, Pride, Knowledge; Row 11: Rock 'n' Roll, Lust, Toys, Wealth; Row 12: (empty ovals); Row 13: (empty ovals).

_____Article 3_____

Freeing Ourselves from Possessions

by Tom Small

(Reprinted from “Leadings,” Vol. 1, No. 3, October 1994,

BeFriending Creation readers sharing their thoughts on spirit-led action)

Simplicity does not seek the security of things but opens the soul to both the vulnerability and wonder of creation.

—Michael Hechmer, Burlington (Vt.) Friends Meeting

FOR SOME TIME now, my house has been becoming more transparent. I can see across it, sometimes almost through it. There’s a little more clarity. More space.

Every few days I walk through it, very slowly. It’s a kind of spiritual exercise: I try to see more clearly a few of the things that are in it, without the veil of custom that ordinarily obscures them. I ask them a few nosy questions: What are you? What do you mean? Who do you belong to? Perhaps I move something away, into some other space; then I check a few days later to see how much of a shadow it left behind. Or perhaps the space it occupied has now become clear, transparent.

I discovered that many objects in my house have become accidental. They no longer belong here or to me (perhaps they never did). They are images of a self that I dreamed, a self that never fully emerged from the shadows. Once I know this, I’m free—to give the image away, as a gift for the person it really belongs to: my stepdaughter, my neighbor, the poor person on the street. Or I can exchange it for something I need.

“Such Stuff as Dreams”

WE DREAM many selves during our lives. We accumulate objects/images which make these selves visible; thereby we gain status. It’s difficult, then, to part with the image, even if the self for which it stands has always been only a dream. “We are such stuff as dreams are made on,” says Shakespeare’s Prospero; and our “stuff” is made from dreams. When the dream, however, becomes only an object filling space, then it stands in our way.

Gifts, too, are embodiments of dream—somebody else’s dream of who we are. Perhaps we keep the gift in recognition of the giver and her dream. But the ancients were wiser. For the receiver of a gift to retain it for his own aggrandizement is to invite misfortune. The gift is in the giving, the action, not the thing itself, which must move. Or else lose its identity as *gift*.

An object is static; a relationship grows. Not to change is to falsify and atrophy. And yet the images that we dream or that dream us are so potent that we are charmed by them, transfixed. We are addicted. “All change is a miracle to contemplate,” says Thoreau; “but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant.” How shall we participate in this miracle? How shall we escape our addictions? Possibly the same way that I stopped smoking some years ago: I changed my image of myself and so changed my behavior. Can we re-imagine our status as depending not on things but on space, open to action and possibility?

What then shall we do with our surplus of images?

The Art of Transparency

- ❖ Try a spiritual journey through your home, just for the exercise. Meditate on your space as an ecosystem, a complex entity that consists entirely in relationships and endures by changing.
- ❖ Look past the shadows. Try to see through the object, into the space it displaces. Possibly the walls will seem farther away, clearer, even transparent. Perhaps you will breathe more easily. Perhaps you will be free to act.
- ❖ Simplicity is not a noun; it’s an active verb.

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- ❖ Discover who these things that stand in your way belong to now. The coat that won't fit in the closet: It belongs to the poor. The antique too precious to use: That's for the museum, for everyone. The boxes you never unpacked: straight to the fund-raising rummage sale.

Most times it's not so easy; it takes a shock to make us see. A dozen years ago a visiting Episcopalian abbot, admiring my house, commented on how many "icons" I possessed. Startled to hear them so described, I worried, for a long time, over what he meant. It was a much greater shock when, a few years ago, I returned from travel in Africa to find that my ex-wife had moved out half the contents of the house. I was stunned. I made up lists of things I had to have back. Three weeks later I tore up all the lists—I realized I didn't need any of those things.

Such shocks seem extraordinary, but I think they come to us often: an unexpected word; a sudden change, loss, or separation; a flash of insight. If we open ourselves to its ministry, the shock releases energy, a new possibility. Suddenly we see things in a new light.

What has all this to do with the environment? Everything is environment. Our home. We must find out who it belongs to. Long before we die, we are called on to pass it along to our heirs—even to the seventh generation. ❖

Questions for reflection

- ❖ Do any of my interests, important though they may appear, unduly absorb time and energy and interfere with my growth in grace and my service to God?
- ❖ Do I make a place in my daily life for inward retirement and communion with the Divine Spirit? Does my daily schedule need review and revision at this time? To what extent am I trying to make changes?
- ❖ Do I choose those activities that will strengthen me physically, mentally, and spiritually and avoid those which are harmful to me and to others?
- ❖ Am I careful to wait upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all my ways? Have I learned to distinguish inspiration from impulse?

Illustrative activities

An examination of needs versus wants

WE HAVE NEEDS that are essential to our basic health and survival. We also have needs that help us reach our full human potential. Then we have wants. Make a list of those essential, survival needs. Make a second list of the needs for full human potential. Then begin a list of wants. Ask the following questions of the wants:

- How will I feel when I get it?
- What are its costs in terms of time and finances?
- Is there a "greener" alternative?

General queries

How do these needs and wants affect the environment? My relationship to others? My spiritual life?

Consumption audit

THIS IS AN EXERCISE that can be done by individuals or by groups. It is a method of looking at our use of resources. It looks at where the resources come from, how they are used, and then how they are disposed of. All the products and services we use have costs other than dollars. It is a sort of "before, during, and after" look at the things that we use in all phases of our lives. The form can be used to examine an individual household or a meetinghouse, or a school or workplace. This is a "free form" form. Use the blank spaces to make notes, enter dollar amounts, kilowatt-hours, miles driven, miles per gallon, quantities, etc. Add more items as needed.

Earthcare for Friends—A Study Guide for Individuals and Faith Communities

Consumption Audit			
Item	Before: When and how was it made? How much energy was used? How did it get to you? What are the alternatives?	During: What is your daily usage? Monthly? Yearly? Can you get by with less? What are the effects of its use?	After: Where and how is it disposed of at the end of its useful life? How much energy is used? What are the effects on future generations?
Food and drink			
produce			
meat			
fish			
processed food			
beverages			
packaging			
Paper products			
stationery			
toilet paper & towels			
periodicals & books			
junk mail			
diapers			
copy & computer			
Ongoing			
cleaning products			
lawn & garden			
other			
Personal			
clothing & shoes			
cosmetics			
other			
Energy & utilities			
water			
electricity			
propane/natural gas			
gasoline--home			
gasoline--auto			
other			
Appliances/furnishings			
kitchen			
laundry room			
garage/workshop			
recreational			
other			
Transport & travel			
automobile			
local transit			
airplane			

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Steps that I can take to move toward simpler living

(Try making one change each month.)

	<u>Right away</u>	<u>Within six months</u>
1. Home		
2. Food		
3. Time/money/work		
4. Transportation/ recreation		
5. Institutions		
6. Disconnecting from the consumer culture		
7. Habits that conserve natural resources		
8. Becoming self-reliant and community-oriented		
9. Buying habits and possessions		
10. Enlisting the understanding/ cooperation of family members and friends		

Prayers and responsive readings

God, it is so difficult not to worry.
Help me to trust in you and to seek your Kingdom first.
Help me seek the ways that I might respond to your call in my life.
Help me to know that “enough is enough and balance is best.”
Help me to not fear change.
Grant me stillness, turn me from frantic striving, and calm me.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
For you are with me;
Your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

—Psalm 23

Unit 6. Applied Simpler Living

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