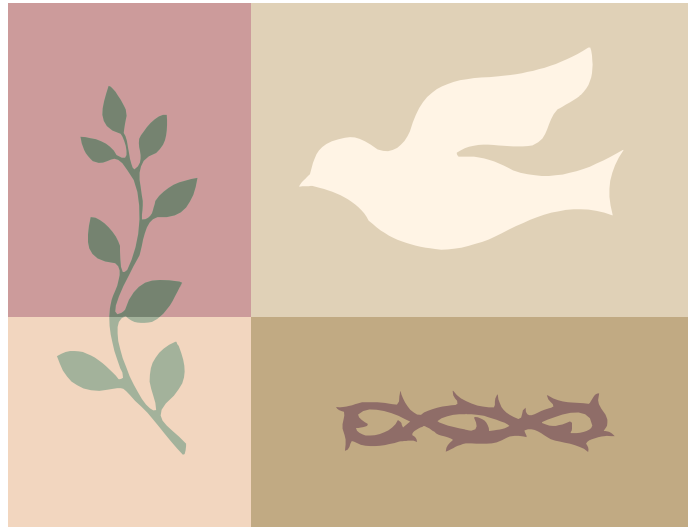


Journey Towards a Simpler Life



A Lenten Reflection Guide

For use by small groups, families
or for individual reflection

Lent 2004

Developed by the St Philip Neri
Peace & Justice Commission

ABOUT “JOURNEY TOWARDS A SIMPLER LIFE: A LENTEN REFLECTION GUIDE”

Why this Reflection Guide?

The Peace & Justice Commission has developed this reflection guide to help our parish community pause and reflect prayerfully on the meaning of the Lenten season in the midst of our busy lives. We feel that the lens of voluntary simplicity is a perfect match with the spirit of the season. Those of you who participated in Disciples in Mission in past years will find that this follows a similar format – reflection on the upcoming Sunday's readings, discussion questions and suggested actions. This is not a formal program, however, and will depend on the initiative of parishioners to form groups or use these resources with their families or even on their own for individual reflection.

Who is this Guide for?

Existing Faith Sharing Groups

We hope that existing small faith sharing groups and Disciples in Mission groups which are still meeting will consider using this reflection guide during Lent.

New Faith Sharing Groups

We also hope this guide will serve as inspiration for new small groups to form this Lenten season. In the spirit of simplicity, we will *not* be creating these groups in the organized fashion we have experienced the past 3 years with Disciples in Mission. Instead, we hope that small groups will be formed by parishioners themselves. We will be facilitating the formation of these groups, however, by offering an “Interest Sign Up Weekend” after all masses **February 21 and 22**. If you would like to participate in forming a new group:

- ❖ Visit the Peace & Justice table after masses February 21 and 22 and sign up on an “Interest sheet” indicating your preferred day/time for a Lenten Faith Sharing Group
- ❖ The Peace & Justice Commission will provide those who sign up for a particular day/time with the names and contact information for others who are interested in that day/time
- ❖ We will leave it up to you (and the others interested in your day/time) to decide the meeting specifics (time, location, and format) that works best for you
- ❖ Those who participated in Disciples in Mission should be familiar enough with the format to then proceed on your own with this reflection guide. We ask that you act as guides for any in your group who are not so familiar with the faith sharing experience

Families/Individuals.

Lastly, we hope that some find this reflection guide useful in their families or on their own.

How to Use this Guide

This reflection guide contains 7 separate reflections on the Scriptures. Each reflection guides lists the readings and offers points for reflection, questions for discussion, and suggestions for action. Each guide closes with a prayer related to the themes of the readings.

The first reflection guide is intended for personal reflection on Ash Wednesday and is meant to introduce the idea of Lenten simplicity. The rest of the reflections are for each Sunday's readings. They can be used to guide group or family discussions, as a basis for personal reflection, or any other way you find useful.

The back of the guide includes a few simple prayers, some additional information about voluntary simplicity, and a list of resources to help you on your journey to a simpler life.

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Credits

This guide was developed by the St Philip Neri Peace & Justice Commission using the following resources:

- ❖ "40 Days to a Simpler Life," "A Journey Towards Understanding," "A Way in the Wilderness," "Simple Living," and "What is Simple Living" from Alternatives for Simple Living (www.SimpleLiving.org)
- ❖ 2004 Lenten Reflection guides from the Center of Concern (www.educationforjustice.org)
- ❖ "A Catechumen's Lectionary," Edited by Robert M. Hamma, Paulist Press, 1988.
- ❖ "Voluntary Simplicity Supplement", St Philip Neri Peace & Justice Commission, 1998.

INTRODUCTION

The main inspiration behind this reflection guide is simply this - rather than giving up one particular luxury or habit this Lenten season, why not focus on living more simply each of the 40 days and perhaps even beyond. What daily practice(s) can you bring to your life during these 40 days to move closer to a simpler life as a follower of Jesus Christ?

Throughout much of the history of our church, Lent has represented a time of self-denial and examination, a time to ponder what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. As we begin this Lenten season, we take time to reflect on the challenge and meaning of Lent in our lives. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness preparing for his ministry. Disciples of Jesus follow his example, his life of discipline. *Discipline* and *disciple* both mean *to follow*.

Lent encourages us to look within ourselves to the values of our Christian faith. Through a sustained focus on the life and ministry of Jesus, Lent can help us to remember that we are called to continue his ministry. Lent prepares us for an Easter that is about far more than bunnies or eggs. It prepares us for an Easter when we celebrate God's great act in raising Jesus from the dead.

Living more simply is not easy. It takes discipline. Most disciplines require some kind of self-denial. Consider replacing the denied habit or "thing" with a more positive substitute this Lent. This Lenten reflection guide is designed to help us to use the season of Lent as a time to renew our identification with Jesus and to live more fully in the world as Christian disciples. The Scripture passages take us through Jesus' ministry, from its beginnings in the desert to his death in Jerusalem. Understanding Jesus' ministry is the key to understanding what it is that we celebrate on the third day. After the 40 days of Lent we hope we have simplified our lives a bit more and are ready to continue those disciplines year-round.

This reflection guide encourages us to take time to think and reflect, in small faith sharing groups, with our family, or on our own. In prayerfully reading the Scripture passages, we are called to listen and to discern God's desires for our lives and the world. The reflection for Ash Wednesday is designed to be used for personal reflection on that day. The reflections for each Sunday's readings are meant to be used sometime during the week, preferably the same day of each week. Each week this Lent, you are invited to:

- ❖ Prayerfully read the Scripture passages for the coming Sunday.
- ❖ Reflect on the passages and reflection points.
- ❖ Use the discussion questions to share how the passages relate to your own daily life.
- ❖ Try to take your reflections further, applying them to your every day life and actions.

We hope that this guide will allow you to prayerfully reflect on the Scriptures and help you journey towards a life that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich this Lenten season.

In Peace,

St Philip Neri Peace & Justice Commission

READINGS

Joel 2: 12-18

Psalm 51: 3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17

2 Corinthians 5: 20- 6:2

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

REFLECTION POINTS

- ❖ Joel calls his people to renew their efforts to live a holy and pleasing life, turning to God as central in their lives.
- ❖ Paul reminds the Christian community at Corinth – “We are ambassadors of Christ.” Our very lives are to be evidence of the grace of God active and fruitful within us.
- ❖ Jesus’ message is that we are to do this in simplicity, in our ordinary lives, looking only to God.
- ❖ As we prepare for Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Lenten season, we reflect on our lives, examining our values and lifestyle in comparison with Gospel values. To be signed with ashes, to hear the prayers of the liturgy, is to renew personally our covenant with God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Psalm 51, we pray for a clean heart and the joy of salvation. What daily practice(s) can you adopt this Lenten season to live more faithfully as a follower of Jesus?
2. What things are central in your faith journey: a spirit of prayer, service to others, simplicity or other qualities? What needs to be changed or strengthened?
3. What does simplicity mean to you? Is it the same as lack of complexity? Or is it something more than that?

PRAYER

God of dust and ashes, God of life and love, help us walk into the life you revealed to us and for us in Christ Jesus. Open our minds and hearts to the truth of who we are that we might journey toward change, becoming who it is you are calling us to be. Amen.

READINGS

Deuteronomy 26: 4-10

Psalm 91: 1-2, 10-15

Romans 10: 8-13

Luke 4: 1-13

REFLECTION POINTS

- ❖ Each year on this Sunday the Church gives us the story of the temptation of Jesus as he begins his public life. Right after his baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus spent time alone fasting and praying – a soul searching time during which he faced temptations.
- ❖ These are temptations present in our lives as well: to make material comforts foremost in our lives, to seek power and influence for our own use, to be reckless or thoughtless in our own self-sufficiency and pride. Discerning and resisting our own temptations requires a decision to remain faithful to God within and among us.
- ❖ We are reminded in the 1st reading and the Psalm of God's continuing presence and care for God's people. Paul's Letter to the Romans extends this to us as well. Our belief in Jesus Christ as the Lord, risen from the dead, leads us to salvation. Our profession of faith affirms our direction toward a life according to Gospel values.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What temptations are present in your life? What are you most attached to? Nice house? Clothes? Status? Financial Security? Independence? Privacy? Comfort? Has this attachment brought discontentment into your life?
2. What other temptations do you find in US culture that keep you from responding wholeheartedly to God's invitation?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. If you do not already have one, establish a time and place for your own 'desert experience' of solitude, prayer and reflection.
2. Keep track of your activities this week. To what do you give the most time and attention? Do these activities help you live your life your faith in the world? Do they reflect your values?

PRAYER

God of the wilderness, as we are led by your Spirit, so may we be nurtured and fed by your grace and upheld by your power over sin and evil in our lives. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

March 7, 2004

READINGS

Genesis 15: 5-12, 17-18

Psalm 27: 1, 7--9, 13-14

Philippians 3: 17 – 4: 1

Luke 9: 28-36

REFLECTION POINTS

- ❖ This Sunday the readings connect the covenant between God and Abram (Abraham) with the transfiguration of Jesus. Having faced our vulnerability with the temptations episode last week, we are now assured that we are rooted in the long-standing covenant of God's presence and care.
- ❖ The event of the transfiguration of Jesus is, in a sense, a promise to his followers. Through Jesus we are called to prayer, to a deeper relationship with God. Our reflection on the transfiguration of Jesus is also a call to a process of transformation in our lives.
- ❖ Our lives will become recognizably different – the spiritual energy and growth we experience will make our faith shine. The transfiguration will become real in our lives. The promise from ancient times is renewed through us today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Transformation of our lives is an outcome of a process of spiritual growth. How is your life being transformed as you take time for prayer and reflection this Lenten season?
2. How would your life be altered if you carved out specific "prayer time" for yourself each day? Would you fall behind in your to-do tasks? How would it affect your personal relationships?
3. Did you keep track of your activities last week? Do they reflect your faith and values? Are there ways you could simplify your life to better live out your faith in the world?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. This week as you meditate on Jesus' impending suffering, list ten ways in your own life to practice self-denial rather than self-indulgence.
2. Give up TV viewing one day a week until Easter - or cut your viewing in half. Instead, spend that time 1) with family members in activity or conversation or just being together; 2) in additional spiritual pursuits, such as prayer, meditation, Scriptural reading or Bible study; or 3) in service to a needy individual or worthwhile group.

PRAYER

God, you who are present in the mountains and on the plains of our lives, teach us and lead us and keep us wakeful to your revelations in Christ for our lives. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 14, 2004

READINGS

Exodus 3: 1-8; 13-15

Psalm 103: 1-4, 6-8, 11

1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12

Luke 13: 1-9

REFLECTION POINTS

- ❖ Throughout the readings this week, we are reminded of the need for ongoing reform in our lives. Persistence and patience are key in a true formation.
- ❖ While tending his flock, Moses encounters God through a burning bush. It is in the midst of ordinary tasks that we come to recognize the presence and voice of God.
- ❖ The parable of the fig tree brings a stark reminder. There is only so much time. This is the only life we have in which to live faithful to God. Lent is a time of reckoning for us. We must look at our lives and ask what fruit we are bearing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are we doing (as a community and as individuals) to shape our actions and lives to Jesus' teachings? Where is God in our lives? How central is our relationship with God in the formation of our values?
2. Are you responsive to God in your ordinary life? How do you see God in and through your daily tasks?
3. What do you want to remember about your life when you look back? Do your daily actions reflect this?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. Living simply can be lonely, especially if family and friends do not understand its value and don't cooperate. To empathize with another's loneliness, reach out to a lonely person, like inviting the person to share a meal with you and your family.
2. Instead of dwelling on any "sacrifices" you are making this Lenten season, try to witness to others of the benefits of living more simply.

PRAYER

God of the vineyard, root us in your truth, nurture us with your grace, that we may yield fruit of faith through the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

READINGS

Joshua 5: 9-12

Psalm 34: 2-7

2 Corinthians 5: 17-21

Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

REFLECTION POINTS

- ❖ In the first reading we hear of God's continuing care for God's people. God had indeed led them into the promised land, and now they are again experiencing God's blessings.
- ❖ Paul's letter tells us that we are a "new creation." We are reconciled to God through Christ. In return, we are to be "ministers of reconciliation," sharing this message of forgiveness and redemption.
- ❖ The parable in this week's Gospel reading is the story of a loving and compassionate father, a clear image of God. Do we understand the measure of God's deep and constant love for each of us, no matter who we are or what we have done in our lives to this point?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Put yourself into the Gospel parable – perhaps as the runaway son, the stay at home son or an observer. How do you feel about your life? About yourself? About what is going on around you?
2. In this week's Gospel, we hear the Pharisees and scribes complaining that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. How can you reach out to those whose opinions and lifestyles differ from yours?
3. What actions have you taken this Lenten season to lessen your attachment to possessions, status or success? Have you been able to live more simply? What impact has this had on your life? On your family? On your relationship with God?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. Pray for a spirit of openness and sensitivity. Ask God to help you see how your lifestyle affects those around you and sisters and brothers who are poor throughout the world
2. Go through your closet this week and give unused clothing away. Learn to live with less. Reactivate old clothing instead of buying new.

PRAYER

God of boundless giving, open our eyes to see and our hearts to receive the gift of life redeemed and restored in Christ Jesus. Amen.

READINGS

Isaiah 43: 16-21

Psalm 126: 1-6

Philippians 3: 8-14

John 8: 1-11

REFLECTION POINTS

- ❖ This week's readings assure us of God's continued presence and especially God's forgiveness. What is made new may well be *us* – we put our past behind us and move on to what is ahead.
- ❖ The first two readings and the Psalm go on to assure us that God has formed us, blessed us, called us to God's presence. We are forgiven and beloved.
- ❖ In the Gospel passage, Jesus speaks not only to the people of his time but to us also. With very few words and a simple action, he teaches us about honesty, forgiveness, and conversion as he challenges the complacent and self-righteous while he accepts and forgives the accused.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul's letter to the Philippians reveals the deep faith and conviction he has about what is most important in his life. What is most important in your life? Does your daily life reflect this value?
2. Consider the Gospel story and identify your role – are you the accuser, the accused or an observer?
3. This week's Psalm proclaims our joy at the wonderful things God has done for us. What are some of the good things God has brought to your life?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. Be mindful that the final week of Lent is approaching. Has the spirit of change taken hold of your life? Remember it is never too late to begin again.
2. Give thanks to God for both the challenges and choices you have in your life. Ask God's spirit to fill all with compassion, insight and concern when making personal decisions which may affect the lives of others.

PRAYER

God of hope and power, it is in you that we find the will and way to bring hope and power to others. Set in us that will, show us that way, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

READINGS

Isaiah 50: 4-7

Psalm 22: 8-9, 17-20, 23-24

Philippians 2: 6-11

Luke 23: 1-49

REFLECTION POINTS

- ❖ The readings preceding the Gospel narrative share a common vision – Trust in God.
- ❖ Luke's passion narrative holds in contrast Jesus' obedience to the will of God the Father and the injustice that condemns him to death. Over and over again, Jesus is presented with the opportunity to strike back or to run away. Instead, he remains faithful, refusing to compromise God's values.
- ❖ Again and again in Luke's account we see Jesus' choice for self-sacrificing love. When faced with the choice of the reign of God or self-preservation, Jesus chose the reign of God. He lived from his deepest center – God-within – and responded to all life in this way, whatever the cost.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Recall a time in your life when you felt abandoned by God. Looking back, are you able to see how God was truly present with you in this pain?
2. Have there been times in your life where you have been the recipient of self-sacrificing love from another person? Were you changed by this experience? How is God present in this love?
3. In what ways were you able or not able to simplify your life for yourself, for others, for your relationship with God this Lent.

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

1. Offer prayers of petition for the women and men of the world who stand up for truth and justice, even at the cost of their own lives.
2. Your journey to a simpler life does not need to end as Easter Sunday approaches. As the opportunities arise, share and celebrate the rewards of discipline and simpler living with your co-workers, fellow parishioners, friends, and relatives.

PRAYER

God of all times of our lives -- both the shouts and the silences -- help us to remember, help us to act as you have directed us, that Christ's saving truth might be made real in our lives and in our world. Amen.

Prayers

A Litany of Generosity

(Response to each: Gracious God, give us generous hearts)

to share whatever gift it is that you have given us

to acknowledge you as the giver of all good gifts

to give without counting the cost

to share without expecting something in return

to be wise in the way of caring for ourselves and others

to hold all of our treasures and values with open hands

to have gospel priorities and to align our life, love and time in their light

to be gracious and unbegrudging in our giving

to recognize the abundance of blessings in each passing day

to know the freedom that comes with true generosity

to accept our talents, whether many or few, and to use them in service of the kingdom

to grow in giving thanks for everything

to be happy with having what we need and to be wise enough to know what it is that we want and do not need

to fall more deeply in love with the God of all generosity so that our hearts are strong enough to give away freely whatever is asked

O gracious God, who so generously lavishes our lives with goodness, remind us often of how much you cherish us, of how abundantly you have gifted us. Create in our hearts a deep center of gratitude, a center that grows so strong in its thanksgiving that sharing freely of our treasures becomes the norm and pattern of our existence. May we always be grateful for your reaching into our lives with surprises of gift and growth, joy and unearned love. Amen.

Prayer of St Francis

Lord make me an instrument of your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light; and
Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change, courage to change the things I
can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at
a time; accepting hardship as the pathway to
peace. Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it
is, not as I would have it. Trusting that he will
make all things right if I surrender to his will; that I
may be reasonably happy in this life, and
supremely happy with him forever in the next.
Amen

Voluntary Simplicity 101

WHAT IS VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY?

The essence of voluntary simplicity is living in a way that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich.

VALUES CENTRAL TO VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

- ❖ Material Simplicity: Simplification of the material aspects of life
- ❖ Human Scale: A preference for human-sized living and working environments
- ❖ Ecological awareness: A sense of ecological awareness which acknowledges the interconnectedness of people and resources
- ❖ Personal growth: For many persons taking up a materially simple way of life, the primary goal is to clear away external clutter so as to be freer to explore the "inner life."

CRITERIA FOR SIMPLICITY

- ❖ Does what I own or buy promote activity, self-reliance, and involvement, or does it induce passivity and dependence?
- ❖ Are my consumption patterns basically satisfying, or do I buy much that serves no real need?
- ❖ How tied is my present job and lifestyle to installment payments, maintenance and repair costs, and the expectations of others?
- ❖ Do I consider the impact of my consumption patterns on other people and on Earth?

PATHS TO SIMPLICITY

- ❖ **Secular, which is called "downshifting"**: A young executive is cruising along in high gear, peddling her sports car as fast as she can. She thinks, This is a lot of work! So she downshifts, maybe she takes a different job that has a smaller income but less stress. Maybe she moves into a smaller house in a rural area and grows her own food. Maybe she gets smart, gets control of her credit card and pays off her debts. Basically she's downshifting to increase her personal happiness.
- ❖ **Christians adopt Simplicity for the same reasons**: Personal happiness is good. But there's more. We adopt Voluntary Simplicity also to be in touch with God and to help others. Voluntary Simplicity is a lifestyle of integrity, living as a disciple of Jesus, walking our talk.

Voluntary Simplicity Resources

PLEDGE TO CHANGE YOUR LIFESTYLE: *To make an affirmative life-long response to hunger and poverty, many individuals and groups are writing their own pledge. The Shakertown Pledge is an example:*

Recognizing that the earth and the fullness thereof is a gift from our gracious God, and that we are called to cherish, nurture, and provide loving stewardship for the earth's resources, and recognizing that life itself is a gift, and a call to responsibility, joy and celebration, I make the following declarations:

1. I declare myself to be a world citizen.
2. I commit myself to lead an ecologically sound life.
3. I commit myself to lead a life of creative simplicity and to share my personal wealth with the world's poor.
4. I commit myself to join with others in reshaping institutions in order to bring about a more just global society in which each person has full access to the needed resources for their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth.
5. I commit myself to occupational accountability, and in so doing, I will seek to avoid the creation of products which cause harm to others.
6. I affirm the gift of my body, and commit myself to its proper nourishment and physical well-being.
7. I commit myself to examine continually my relations with others, and attempt to relate honestly morally, and lovingly to those around me.
8. I commit myself to personal renewal through prayer, meditation and study.
9. I commit myself to responsible participation in a community of faith.

WEB SITES:

- ❖ www.simpleliving.org – Alternatives for Simple Living
Alternatives is a non-profit organization that equips people of faith to challenge consumerism, live justly and celebrate responsibly. Started in 1973 as a protest against the commercialization of Christmas, their focus is on encouraging celebrations that reflect conscientious ways of living.
- ❖ www.nwei.org – Northwest Earth Institute
Headquartered in Portland, the Northwest Earth Institute develops programs that motivate and educate individuals and organizations to protect the earth. Their discussion courses on sustainability, deep ecology, sense of place, and the practice of simplicity are available for use in workplaces, centers of faith, homes, and neighborhoods in the Northwest and across the US.

BOOKS:

- ❖ **Affluenza**, by John de Graaf, David Wann, Thomas H. Naylor & David Horsey
- ❖ **Holy Way: Practices for a Simple Life**, by Paula Houston
- ❖ **Living The Simple Life: A Guide To Scaling Down & Enjoying More**, by Elaine St James
- ❖ **Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective**, by Michael Schut, Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, Cecile Andrews & others.
- ❖ **Voluntary Simplicity**, by Duane Elgin