

## ***LIVING MORE WITH LESS* Study Calendar**

DAY	TITLE	SECTION FOR GROUP MEMBERS TO READ
1	Introduction	
2	The Legacy of <i>Living More with Less</i>	Read prefaces and chapters 1–3
3	Life Standards Life Standard 1: Do Justice	Read chapters 4–5
4	Life Standards 2 & 3: Learn from the World Community & Nurture People	Read chapters 6–7
5	Life Standard 4 & 5: Cherish the Natural Order & Nonconform Freely	Read chapters 8–9
6	Money and Stewardship	Read chapter 10
7	Homes Homekeeping	Read chapters 11–12
8	Gardens, Farms, and Markets Cooking and Eating	Read chapters 13–14
9	Clothes and Bodies Transportation and Travel	Read chapters 15–16
10	Recreation and Schedules Celebrations and Life Passages	Read chapters 17–18
11	Technology and Media	Read chapter 19
12	Meetinghouses and Churches Strengthening Each Other and Organizing Communities	Read chapters 20–21 and afterword

## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# 1: THE LEGACY OF LIVING MORE WITH LESS

### Opening Prayer:

*God, you know our hearts and our minds, our talents and our possessions. You know what we carry with us, what makes us feel secure. Grant us freedom from always wanting more, and give us humility as we seek to live with less. Be in our words and our thoughts, our testimonies and our questions. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 58:9b-12

### Session Starter:

- Make sure everyone in class knows everyone else—encourage brief introductions if members of the class don't know each other. One way to do this would be to have people say their names and also something that has brought them joy in the recent past. Doris Janzen Longacre and the other contributors often emphasize beauty and joy and hope—in other words, the “more” in “more with less.” Having people name some of those things at the beginning of the first session can help to set a tone of joy and beauty for the rest of your sessions.
- Pass around copies of the 2010 edition of *Living More with Less*, enough for each member of the group or each household to have one. Invite group members to take the books home each week in order to do the reading for the following week and to bring them back for each session so that they can reference them. Allow a few minutes for people to browse through the book and become familiar with its organization and contents. Highlight the fact that this is an updated edition of the original *Living More with Less* book that Herald Press first published in 1980. (Next week's session will focus on the first edition of the book and the story of Doris Janzen Longacre's life and work.)

### Discussion Questions:

*Note to Leader:* The discussion questions in all sessions are best discussed in smaller groups if there are more than about seven people in the class. Use your intuition and knowledge of your group to figure out whether people will feel freer to share in the large group or in smaller groups.

- Invite participants to turn to the chapter in Part Three that interests them the most. Invite them to skim through the entries and find one that stands out to them for some reason. After a period of silence, have participants read their chosen passage aloud to the group and comment on it briefly. This allows the group to become familiar with the

living testimonies in Part Three and to begin reading in that section, even though your group might not get to that section of the book until the second half of the quarter.

- What does the phrase “more with less” suggest to you? More of what? Less of what?
- In what ways do you think our society is moving *toward* a “more-with-less” approach to various issues? In what ways do you think we are moving *away* from it?
- Do you think that the concepts contained in *Living More with Less* are a central part of Anabaptist or Christian identity and thought? Or, are the ideas of simple living and sustainability and living with less tangential to the core of Christian faith?
- In what areas of life do you already try to live more with less? In what areas of life do you hope to be challenged?

#### **Activity Options:**

- *Spectrum*: Have the people in your group stand and create a spectrum regarding how they feel when they think about the idea of living more with less. Have those who feel “energized/joyful” congregate on one end of the room and those who say they feel “tired/guilty” move to the other end. Invite people to share why they placed themselves where they did.
- *Prefaces*: Divide your group into three smaller groups and have each group read one of the following: the foreword and the two prefaces. Encourage them to discuss what they think of each piece and then share with the larger group. One way to do this is to have people name something that they connected with in the piece and something that made them uncomfortable.

#### **Closing Prayer:**

*God of enough, we praise you that we can share our stories with each other and find inspiration and sustenance in them. Help us to share openly, to learn eagerly, and to be moved with passion and compassion to do the work of your kingdom. Amen.*

#### **Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Encourage group members to read pp. 7–32 for next week. This section covers the history of *Living More with Less*, which was originally published in 1980, includes a chapter by Doris Janzen Longacre’s daughter, and includes Doris’s original introduction to the 1980 volume. It includes:

- Foreword and Prefaces, pp. 7–15
- Chapter 1: “*Living More with Less* in Retrospect” by Rachel Waltner Goossen, pp. 19–24
- Chapter 2: “You Wrote What You Lived: A Letter to My Mother” by Cara Longacre Hurst, pp. 25–27
- Chapter 3: “Introduction” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 28–32

### Note to Leader:

If possible, before next week's session try to find a copy of the 1980 edition of *Living More with Less* by Doris Janzen Longacre. Next week's session guide contains several suggestions for incorporating the 1980 version into the group discussion.

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## MORE OF THE SPIRIT

### Resisting the Temptation to Judge

The scripture passage for this session, Isaiah 58:9b-12, begins with the bold claim that when we call on God, the Lord will answer. In this chapter, Isaiah has been talking about right living, how to get the outward life in sync with the inward life. If the people in your group call on God for help with right living, God will answer. That's good news! But take note of the three qualifying "if" phrases. God will help *if* you remove three things: the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, and the speaking of evil.

**If number one:** We can stop laying burdens (a yoke!) on people by giving them a lot of "shoulds." We can stop judging other people, giving them a message that weighs heavily on their shoulders.

**If number two:** We can stop pointing fingers. We can focus on our own lives rather than the easy focus on other people's faults.

**If number three:** We can stop speaking of others' shortcomings with contempt. Rather than speaking with evil intent, we can speak with love.

As we begin this series, can we covenant to resist these three dangers among us, so that we can hear the Word of God?

To make this more vivid, depending on how big your group is, try this silent experience. Have everyone point at one person for ten seconds, then shift to pointing to another person, and then another. This can be an unnerving experience, as both a pointer and a pointee! No words are necessary. Move directly into prayer, inviting people to hold a finger to their own heart.

*God of grace, you see what is in my own heart, the space between how I want to live and the way I do live. In these coming weeks, give me insight into my own life. Keep my eyes focused on areas where I can change, and fill me with love and compassion for those around me who are on a similar journey. Amen.*

—Carol Penner

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# 2: THE LEGACY OF LIVING MORE WITH LESS

### Pages Discussed This Week:

Foreword and Prefaces, pp. 7–15

- Chapter 1: “*Living More with Less* in Retrospect” by Rachel Waltner Goossen, pp. 19–24
- Chapter 2: “You Wrote What You Lived: A Letter to My Mother” by Cara Longacre Hurst, pp. 25–27
- Chapter 3: “Introduction” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 28–32

### Opening Prayer:

*God, we thank you for the witness of those who have gone before. Help us to hear their testimonies through their actions and words, and to be open to how their lives might speak to ours today. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:1-11

### Session Starter:

On page 30, Doris Janzen Longacre writes a journal entry about a simple decision. Give each person a sheet of paper and ask them to write, if they can, about the thoughts that went through their head as they tried to make a “simple living” decision. For someone who can’t think about something they’ve done, give them the option of a decision they might like to make, such as carpooling more, or eating food grown locally. Give them five minutes for this exercise, during which they write down the competing ideas and feelings. When most people are finished, ask people to fold the paper and hold it between their hands in a gesture of prayer, and invite them to pray with you:

*God of the everyday: You know the world in which we live, and the lives we lead. In our hands we hold an example of the thoughts that compete within us. This struggle to be faithful can be exhausting! Thank you for your mercy which accepts the humblest of sacrifices we make. You who know our strengths and weaknesses, give us clarity and purpose as we examine our lives. Give us strength to make everyday decisions that are pleasing to you. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who walks with us every day, Amen.*

### Discussion Questions:

1. Doris Janzen Longacre was working on the first edition of *Living More with Less* in the late 1970s. If you were alive then, what memories do you have of that era? What economic, cultural, and political forces were at work?

2. How is our context now different from the context in which Doris Janzen Longacre was writing? How is it the same?
3. What experiences did you have, if any, with the original *Living More with Less* book, published in 1980? If some in your group were aware of the *More-with-Less Cookbook* but not *Living More with Less*, you could discuss the cookbook instead.
4. What do you think about Doris Janzen Longacre's distinction between the terms *lifestyle* and *life standard*? What does *lifestyle* call to mind for you? How does *life standard* sound to you?
5. Discuss Doris Janzen Longacre's words on page 30: "The trouble with simple living is that, though it can be joyful, rich, and creative, it isn't simple." So if simple living isn't actually simple, what does the phrase "simple living" mean? And how can it remain "joyful, rich, and creative" instead of disciplined drudgery?

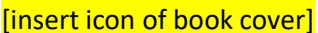
### Activity Options:

1. *Invite a Guest:* If your group is fairly young, invite an older person from your congregation or community to talk about their memories of the Depression or having to live with less. Alternatively, invite someone who grew up economically disadvantaged in your country or in another one to reflect on how it was to live with less.
2. *Journaling:* Invite participants to journal about how their relationship to material possessions has changed over their lifetime. That is, do I hold more lightly or tightly to materials things now or when I was a child?
3. *"Simple Living" Trend:* Bring in some magazines, books, and advertisements that contain the idea of "simple living" or "the simple life." (For example, *Real Simple* magazine.) Invite group members to page through the pieces you bring. How are the visions of simplicity the same or different between the marketers or writers and Doris Janzen Longacre?
4. *Name the Questions:* Have group members call out questions or concerns they or someone else may have about studying a book on living more with less. Encourage people to be honest about the ambivalence or unrest they or others may feel as they approach this topic in a group. Write them on a white board or a large piece of paper, and suggest that the group remember these questions throughout the upcoming discussions in order to help everyone keep in mind the complexity of the topic.

### Closing Prayer:

*O God of the past, the present, and the future, of simplicity and complexity, of those with less and those with more: give us strength and peace as we depart from here. Chasten us, comfort us, and make our paths straight. Amen.*

### Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:

- Chapter 4: "The Five Life Standards: Theology and Household Code" by Malinda Berry, pp. 35–37
- Chapter 5: "Do Justice" by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 38–44  "Guilt: Bringing Us to Our Knees" by Hugo Saucedo, pp. 45–46

**Note to Leader:**

Be aware of and sensitive to members of your group who may not have encountered either *More-with-Less Cookbook* or *Living More with Less* before just a few weeks ago. A dynamic that may develop in some groups is a division between "those in the know"—who may have first-edition copies of both books and have found them to transform their lives—and those who never heard of either. This dynamic may especially emerge during this session, which focuses on the history of the book. If many in your group are unfamiliar with the books, you may want to delete question #3 of the Discussion Questions.

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## **MORE OF THE SPIRIT**

### **Matthew 5 Litany**

*(A leader could read the regular print and the group could read the bolded print, or the group could be split into two parts to read the litany.)*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

**. . . who don't know how to save the world**

**. . . who don't have all the answers**

**. . . who don't have access to much power**

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,

**. . . who cry when they see our earth polluted**

**. . . who lament the franticness of our society**

**. . . who ache with the inequality of our world**

for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,

**. . . who are not always striving to be on top**

**. . . who are not seeking the most or the best**

**. . . who see their place on the planet**

for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

**. . . longing for answers to big questions**

**. . . seeking solutions to moral dilemmas**

**. . . having an appetite for holiness**

for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,

**. . . who understand the temptations we face**

**. . . who are sympathetic to our weaknesses**

**. . . who are realistic about our limitations**

for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

**. . . who are grounded in prayer**

**. . . who are looking to God for guidance**

**. . . who are not trying to be saints**

for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

**. . . who want to end our war on the world**

**. . . who are willing to stand in a place of conflict**

**. . . who are not afraid to suffer**

for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,



**. . . who may be misunderstood**

**. . . who may be called names**

**. . . who may be a target for anger or abuse**

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

**Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

*—Carol Penner*

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# 3: INTRO TO LIFE STANDARDS AND LIFE STANDARD #1, DO JUSTICE

### Pages Discussed This Week:

Chapter 4: “The Five Life Standards: Theology and Household Code” by Malinda Berry, pp. 35–37

- Chapter 5: “Do Justice” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 38–44  
“Guilt: Bringing Us to Our Knees” by Hugo Saucedo, pp. 45–46  
“Making Do: A Perspective from an Urban Dweller” by Leonard Dow, pp. 47–48

### Opening Prayer:

*God of justice and mercy, we ask that you be with us today as we contemplate doing justice. Help us to consider all issues of justice and equality through the lens of Christ, who lived and walked among us. Disturb us, prompt us, and embolden us with your strength. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 58:6-7

### Session Starter:

Consider starting this session with #3 of the Activity Options below, in which group members write down a Morning Inventory of items they used this morning and where they came from. Participants could share their lists and the things they learned from creating them. Then pray and read the Scripture. Alternately, you could start with the prayer based on Isaiah 58:6-7 in the “More of the Spirit” box.

### Discussion Questions:

One way to organize this session is to have people join one of three groups as they come in the door. Designate the groups as follows: 1) One group will talk about Malinda Berry’s chapter, an introduction to the five life standards; 2) One group to talk about Doris Janzen Longacre’s chapter on the first life standard, *Do Justice*. 3) One group will talk about Hugo Saucedo’s and Leonard Dow’s essays on the first life standard.

Have each group center their discussion on the following questions:

1. What is one thing about the chapter or essays that your group is discussing that you really liked, for whatever reason? What one sentence stood out to you, and why?
2. What is one thing that you disagreed with or found disturbing?

Or your group could simply discuss several of the following:

1. Do you agree with Malinda Berry that the five life standards—do justice, learn from the world community, nurture people, cherish the natural order, and nonconform freely—combine to create a “more-with-less theology”? Or does that take the ideas too far?
2. Are there any other life standards that you think should be included in this list that aren’t? You could make a list on the board of additional “life standards” that group members suggest.
3. Longacre tells the story of Marie Moyer and her Hindi teacher’s response when she threw away envelopes. Have you had any similar experiences of being convicted about a wasteful action you’ve taken, either by another person or by your own conscience? How did that experience change (or not change) you?
4. Discuss the connection that Longacre makes between how people in the United States and Canada live and the lives of people in the Global South. Do these connections seem relatively clear to you, or do you question whether how you live affects people in other countries?
5. What do you think about the role of guilt in doing justice? Do you agree with Doris Janzen Longacre and Hugo Saucedo that guilt can be a motivator to action, or do you think it creates more negatives than positives?
6. Which do you think is more important in terms of living more with less: getting your own household in order or advocating for economic and political change?
7. Talk about Karen Klassen Harder’s ideas for addressing global poverty and hunger. Do you agree with her ideas? Would you add any others?
8. In his response essay, Hugo Saucedo writes about the idea of caring about people you don’t know, which he learned from the Mennonite volunteers in the early 1980s. Do you find that a helpful framework for thinking about justice? Is it possible to care about people you don’t know without getting overwhelmed?
9. Leonard Dow makes the point that people of privilege need to listen to the stories of those who have been making do with less for a long time rather than only the stories of those who have *chosen* to live with less. In what ways can this happen?

#### **Activity Options:**

1. *Journaling*: Invite participants to spend time writing about Longacre’s memorable line, “Because they have little, I try to take less.” How do you try to take less? Does this sentence go far enough in addressing inequality and injustice?
2. *Hunger Meal*: Talk with the group about the idea of hosting a meal at your church that reenacts world hunger realities. (Oxfam has online resources for a Hunger Banquet®.)
3. *Morning Inventory*: Write down all the things that you use to get ready for your day on a typical morning: food, clothing, electronics, toiletries, furniture, etc. Try to trace each item to its source and to imagine its producer, at least in a general way (for example: where was your shirt made? Who might have made it?). Make a list. For each item, make a guess as to whether the producers who made the item were treated justly. Share your lists with others in the group.
4. *Community Actions*: Talk together about Karen Klassen Harder’s ideas on pp. 43–44. Are there any projects that your group would like to initiate in your church or community with regard to poverty and global hunger?

**Closing Prayer:**

*God, we commit our conversations and our actions this next week to you. Help us to enact justice in our daily lives in whatever small and large ways that we can. Help us to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you. Amen.*

**Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 49–69 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 6: “Learn from the World Community” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 49–55  
“The Earth as Seen from Kaguya” by Yorifumi and Mitsuko Yaguchi, pp. 55–58  
“Celebrating the Fruit of the *Mkhuna*” by Doris Dube, pp. 58–60
- Chapter 7: “Nurture People” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 61–65  
“What if We Snapped Beans Together?” by Dorcas Smucker, pp. 65–67  
“Fragments from the Feast” by Carol Penner, pp. 67–69

**Note to Leader:**

The material in this session has the potential to be divisive, in part because issues of globalization and justice are so complex and in part because the discussions growing out of such topics can quickly turn political. If your group members hold a diversity of political opinions, spending some time in prayer and silence before you begin the session may be particularly important. You may want to read Isaiah 58:6-7 several times aloud, with periods of silence in between each reading for people to pray and reflect on what phrases or words jumped out at them.

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## **MORE OF THE SPIRIT**

**Prayer from Isaiah 58:6-7**

Open our eyes, Lord, to the modern yoke;  
the burden of our consumer culture,  
the debt that holds people fast,  
the myth of success which has us by the throat.  
You offer the possibility of release;  
unloosing the shackles of greed,  
freeing us from the urge to acquire at any cost,  
relieving us from the treadmill of busyness.

We are your new releases,  
telling a story for this generation.  
Feeding the hungry we whisper peace,  
clothing the naked we murmur hope,  
sheltering the homeless we declare your faithfulness.

—*Carol Penner*

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# **SESSION GUIDE 4: LIFE STANDARD #2, LEARN FROM THE WORLD COMMUNITY, AND #3, NURTURE PEOPLE**

### **Pages Discussed This Week:**

- Chapter 6: “Learn from the World Community” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 49–55  
“The Earth as Seen from Kaguya” by Yorifumi and Mitsuko Yaguchi, pp. 55–58  
“Celebrating the Fruit of the *Mkhuna*” by Doris Dube, pp. 58–60
- Chapter 7: “Nurture People” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 61–65  
“What if We Snapped Beans Together?” by Dorcas Smucker, pp. 65–67  
“Fragments from the Feast” by Carol Penner, pp. 67–69

### **Opening Prayer:**

*God of all people everywhere, of all nations and tribes and cultures, give us hearts of humility and ears to hear the voices of our brothers and sisters around the world. Lower our defenses, heighten our sensitivity, and broaden our definitions of family. Help us to nurture and to be nurtured, to offer care and to receive it, and to make decisions always with your people in mind. Amen.*

**Scripture:** James 2:5 and Isaiah 55:1-3

### **Session Starter:**

As people arrive, hand out pencils and half-sheets of paper with the following instructions on them. If there is time, invite people to share some of what they wrote with a partner or a small group.

Choose one of the two quotations below and do some free-writing about it (use the back if you need to). What does the quotation make you think of in your own life? How does it strike you?

1. “The best reason for listening to and learning from the poor is that this is one way God is revealed to us. As the conference of Latin American Catholic bishops affirmed in 1979, ‘The testimony of a poor church can evangelize the rich.’” —*Doris Janzen Longacre* (p. 55)
2. “We have the options of going and doing and being. Our heavy energy investment provides the ever-ready car and airplane. Most people in our generation don’t have to milk the cows or keep the hearth fire burning or stay home to cook for Grandpa.

We can run. But accepting these options without control is destructive. It sounds too simple, even for a book on simple living. But when we are more content to stay at home, to think, and to pray, we are better able to nurture each other.”—*Doris Janzen Longacre* (p. 65)

**Discussion Questions (about chapter 6, “Learn from the World Community”):**

*Note: You will probably want to split into two groups so that one group can focus on each of these sets of questions.*

1. Share ways that you, either personally or as a congregation, have learned from the world community.
2. Are there ways to learn from the world community without doing a lot of world traveling? In what ways could you make connections to the global community without leaving your home community?
3. Talk about the development projects collected in this chapter. How do you respond to the idea of development projects for the United States and Canada—that there are ways in which we have “*maldeveloped*” or “*overdeveloped*”? Do you think any of these are more important than others?
4. How can those on our continent learn from others in the global community without romanticizing or oversimplifying their lives?
5. Do Longacre’s words about learning from the world community make sense in a globalized world? That is, do globalized trade, dispersed wealth and technology, and transnational cultural exchange make her words obsolete?
6. Discuss Yorifumi and Mitsuko Yaguchi’s sentence on p. 56: “The more we have, the more we want to have, and the less spiritual we become.” Is this true in your experience, or do you think that this statement is too strong?
7. Doris Dube relates her friend’s comment that the *mkhuna* fruit became her community’s manna—a very real symbol of God’s provision. Have you had experiences of God’s provision in your life, or do you question the idea of God’s tangible provision in light of the reality of starving people in the world?

**Discussion Questions (about chapter 7, “Nurture People”):**

1. What decisions have you made that have nurtured people? Keep in mind Doris Janzen Longacre’s definition of nurture as “all actions that bring others to this full life and growth in the kingdom of God.”
2. Do you think “nurture people” is a message helpful to everyone, or are some people prone to nurture *too* much?
3. How do you and/or your family prioritize nurture and caretaking work? What conflicts or stressors affect your decision making regarding nurture?
4. What thoughts do you have on the question of the importance of work versus the convenience of labor-saving devices? How do you resolve that dilemma in your personal or household life?
5. Reread Willard Unruh’s statement about overstimulation (p. 64). Do you identify with this, and if so, what ways have you found to deal with it?

6. How do you experience the tension between nurturing people and working efficiently about which Dorcas Smucker writes?
7. Carol Penner writes honestly about mobility and its impact on her family, their finances, and the planet. How does job and geographic mobility affect you and/or your family?

#### **Activity Options:**

1. *Nurture list:* Write a fairly detailed list of all the commitments you have in life in categories such as job, family, church, committees, etc. When you're finished, go through your list and label your commitments according to how they nurture people and in what ways. Keep in mind Doris Janzen Longacre's definition of nurture as "all actions that bring others to this full life and growth in the kingdom of God."
2. *Journaling:* Write about one area of your life in which you'd like to make "learn from the world community" or "nurture people" a greater priority.
3. *Name the Questions:* Invite people to call out responses to the question, "What are the things that constrain you from living more simply or sustainably?" What are the factors in your life that prevent you from living out a more-with-less life?
4. *Community Actions:* Pick one of the "development projects" named in Doris Janzen Longacre's chapter and talk about how you as a group could work on it. Pray together and try to discern whether to pursue any of these in a more focused way.

#### **Closing Prayer:**

*God, we acknowledge that you know no boundaries. Help us to learn the stories of those around the world and to be open to the lessons those stories might teach us. Help us, when we encounter those from different places and cultures, to be as open to learning as we are to teaching. Give us strength to make choices that nurture rather than exploit. In the name of Christ, who nurtures and carries all things, Amen.*

#### **Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 70–90 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 8: "Cherish the Natural Order" by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 70–74  
     "Finding the Point in a Cornfield" by David Kline, pp. 75–77  
     "How Many Chickens Can you Cherish?" by Bethany Spicher Schonberg, pp. 77–79
- Chapter 9: "Nonconform Freely" by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 80–86  
     "Experiments in Nonconformity" by Aiden Enns, pp. 86–89  
     "Confident Enough to Be Compassionate" by Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, pp. 89–90

#### **Note to Leader:**

Be aware of how prepared your group members seem for the discussions; in most groups, some people will have read the assigned readings and others won't have read them. If you sense that



a lot of your group members are not doing much reading in the book between sessions, you may want to summarize the chapters briefly at the beginning of each session. Another option would be to start the session with a short period of time in which people can skim through the pages for that day. Even if they've already read the chapters, they may still find it helpful to review the material before they begin discussing it.

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## MORE OF THE SPIRIT

### Litany of Nurture

*(A leader could read the regular print and the group could read the bolded print, or the group could be split into two parts to read the litany.)*

God nurtures us. God creates us. God welcomes us in.

**Jesus washes our feet. He feeds us the bread of life.**

The Holy Spirit fills us and sustains us.

**We are constantly faced with choices: choices to nurture our loved ones and choices to nurture the person on the side of the road, God's loved one.**

We pay attention and give thanks for God's nurturing presence in our life.

**Having been nurtured ourselves, we listen to the call to care for and tend others. "Feed my sheep," Jesus said.**

God works in many ways. A caregiver gives care. A mother encourages.

**A father fosters. A friend provides. A neighbor tends.**

As for money, it shall fail.

**As for possessions, they shall cease.**

As for a career, it shall vanish away.

**But faith, hope, and love abide.**

And the greatest of these is love.

—Carol Penner

## **LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION**

# **SESSION 5: LIFE STANDARD #4, CHERISH THE NATURAL ORDER, AND #5, NONCONFORM FREELY**

### **Pages Discussed This Week:**

- Chapter 8: “Cherish the Natural Order” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 70–74  
“Finding the Point in a Cornfield” by David Kline, pp. 75–77  
“How Many Chickens Can you Cherish?” by Bethany Spicher Schonberg, pp. 77–79
- Chapter 9: “Nonconform Freely” by Doris Janzen Longacre, pp. 80–86  
“Experiments in Nonconformity” by Aiden Enns, pp. 86–89  
“Confident Enough to Be Compassionate” by Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, pp. 89–90

### **Opening Prayer:**

*God of the earth and sky, we are so grateful for this planet, our home. You give us many gifts through your good earth, and we confess that the way we live too often does damage to this gift. Help us to look squarely at the ways we fail to cherish the natural order, and turn our eyes and our ears to the teeming life of your creation. Give us also courage to conform ourselves to you instead of to the world and wisdom in finding the communities and relationships that will help us sustain such nonconformity. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 24:1 and Romans 12:2

### **Session Starter:**

These two chapters seem, at first, to be on quite different subjects. The first is “Cherish the natural order” and the second is “Nonconform freely.” Perhaps the link is Romans 12:2. We find renewal in God, who refreshes our relationship to the earth and gives us strength to be different, freely. Invite your group to take a few minutes to think about someone they have admired who has or had a close relationship with nature. It doesn’t have to be someone who is outside all the time, like a farmer; perhaps it is someone in an urban area who cherishes nature in the city. What are some practices that you have seen that person engage in? How are you like/unlike that person? How would your life have to change to be more like that person?

### **Discussion Questions (about chapter 8, “Cherish the Natural Order”):**

1. Reflect on the experience of reading Longacre’s chapter thirty years later. In what ways were her words prophetic in terms of environmental realities?

2. Longacre writes about the tendency of some people to trust science to get us out of any ecological danger rather than changing our ways. What do you think about the promise of science to help us solve our most pressing environmental issues?
3. "I am here for only a season as a steward of the mysteries of God," writes David Kline on p. 75. What ways do you find to remind yourself of this?
4. Bethany Spicher Schonberg remarks that saving the environment might be a less helpful goal than taking care of a small plot of land that you know intimately and that you care for daily. Do you agree, and if so, what ways do you find to cherish a small part of the earth?
5. How can people who live in urban and suburban areas, with less access to the natural world than those who live in rural areas, care for creation?

**Discussion Questions (about chapter 9, "Nonconform Freely"):**

1. Doris Janzen Longacre suggests that advertisements create a kind of enslavement for people who live in consumer cultures. In what ways does this happen?
2. What intentional communities have you participated in or observed? In what ways do intentional communities help people "nonconform freely"?
3. Aiden Enns writes about his church community's experiments with various types of simplicity or sustainability. Do you have ideas about how your church community might support each other in living more with less?
4. Christians differ as to what areas of life require nonconformity. To what areas of nonconformity do you think the church should be calling its members? In what ways can the church call members to nonconformity without being legalistic?
5. Nekeisha Alexis-Baker writes about her own journey toward being "free from the need to dominate others and demand that they accept my point of view." What has been your experience with judgment, both your own and that of others, in this area of life?

**Activity Options:**

1. *Outdoor Class:* If possible, hold class or your small group session outside today. If you do, spend a few minutes at the beginning of the session in silence. Invite people to share their favorite place in nature and why they enjoy spending time there.
2. *Name the Joys:* Invite people to name the *joys* that they have found in simple living. Have people share the various ways that living simply or sustainably has brought them joy.
3. *Community Actions:* How might your group or your congregation become communities that support nonconformity to the world? Are there any small, particular actions that you might agree to take together that would lead your group toward being conformed to Christ rather than to the patterns of the world?
4. *Wordless Time:* Do you know someone who likes to take photographs of your community or your local conservation area? Invite them to bring twenty or thirty pictures to share with the group. This will work best if the pictures are local and

focused on one geographic area, perhaps in different seasons. Close your session today with a wordless time, in which you just absorb the beauty of one place. Having a wordless time gives you space to absorb all the other words you've said. Having a wordless time can allow God the space to speak to your heart.

### **Experiments in Living More with Less:**

This is a new section that you can add to your class, starting next week. At the end of each session, beginning next week, reserve ten minutes (or more) for people to talk about "experiments" that they might do in living more with less, based on the stories and tips in the book and online. Tell people this week if you plan to start this next week, so that as they read the chapter on money and stewardship, they can be thinking about what experiment they might like to do in this area, beginning after next week's session.

### **Closing Prayer:**

*God of all living things, remind us of our place in the world you have created. Help us to see creation through your eyes and to become faithful stewards. Show us the freedom that is ours through choosing limits, and surprise us with your grace and redemption. Amen.*

### **Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 93–104 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 10: "Money and Stewardship" by Beryl Jantzi and contributors (pp. 93–104)

### **Note to Leader:**

It is possible that not everyone in your group will agree on the level of concern or action required in the face of climate change, or even on the question of whether climate change is human-induced or not. If this is the case, it might be easy for this session to turn into a debate about global warming, which, depending on the level of openness and trust among your group, might be productive and might not. You may have to redirect the conversation back to the material at hand. One way to handle this would be to read aloud Doris Janzen Longacre's summary of Willard Swartley's study, "Biblical Sources of Stewardship" (pp. 71–72). Even people who don't think that the world is warming or who think humans have nothing to do with it can agree that the earth is the Lord's and that we are merely caretakers of it.

Another possible session starter that would address this issue would be to show a short video that Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg made that displays 350 Bible verses that show God's love for creation (available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7TFBqUmfNw>).

Next week we're suggesting that you add an "Experiments in Living More with Less" section to the end of each session. If your group is very interested in trying out ideas in the book or other ideas for living more simply and sustainably, you may want to expand this section of each

session. You could even combine *Living More with Less* with some ideas from another resource, such as *Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5,000 Pounds* (by David Gershon, Empowerment Institute, 2006). *Low Carbon Diet* contains a wealth of ideas for reducing your carbon footprint and has a well-developed action plan for reducing one's impact on the environment. Even if you don't use the entire plan that the book suggests, you will find great ideas that you can bring into your class.

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## MORE OF THE SPIRIT

### **This Mutual Life: Meditation on Psalm 24:1**

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.

The earth's crust, the earth's surface  
the earth's atmosphere.

From molten rock to glaciers,  
all this, everything is the Lord's.

The world is the Lord's.

The working world, the academic world,  
the old world and the new world order  
the worldwide web, the real world,  
the whole world is the Lord's.

And those who live in it:

all creatures great and small,  
all swimming, flying, crawling, creeping beings.

Humankind cheek by jowl with lemurs  
and microbes, replicating;  
all belonging to God.

God of the world,

God of this great blue globe,  
God of mystery and infinite variety,  
we are yours, together.  
Help us live this mutual life,  
conjoined, inseparable, intimate.

—*Carol Penner*

## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

### SESSION 6: MONEY AND STEWARDHIP

#### Pages Discussed This Week:

- Chapter 10: “Money and Stewardship” by Beryl Jantzi and contributors (pp. 93–104)

#### Opening Prayer:

*God of our talents, our time, our possessions, and our cash: we offer these things back to you. Help us discern your soft voice among many louder voices as we spend and save, earn and give. Guide us into wise choices so that our resources are freed up for our sisters and brothers who are in need. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:19-21

#### Session Starter:

Hand out scrap paper and pencils, and invite group members to begin the session today by journaling about one of the following sentences: “I am at peace with how I steward my financial resources” or “I am *not* at peace with how I steward my financial resources.” Encourage them to write honestly and specifically; they will not need to share what they wrote with others.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Invite participants to page through chapter 10, “Money and Stewardship,” and to pick out the two entries that they found to be most challenging.
2. Beryl Jantzi writes that he didn’t receive much formal training in money and stewardship at all. What kind of training did you receive in financial stewardship as you were growing up? What kind of training do you offer now, if you have children?
3. Churches talk about tithing but not much about the other 90 percent, Beryl Jantzi writes. In what ways does your church community address issues of finances? How could your church address the “90 percent” even more?
4. Have you ever made a decision to significantly increase your giving? How did you decide to do that, and what was the experience like?
5. Talk about the issue of “cheaper is not always better” that Dave Hockman-Wert raises on pp. 97–98. How do you experience the tension between frugality and ethical purchasing?
6. Have you ever taken a Sabbath from buying “nonessential” items—either a year, as Sue and Victor Klassen tell about on p. 104, or a shorter period of time? What was it like?
7. Have you ever been or are you part of a small group or community in which people openly shared their finances? What was it like? Or if you haven’t, talk about why you would or wouldn’t want to do that.

8. If you care to, talk about how you and your household manage money—whether you have a budget and track expenses, whether people in your household have different approaches to money in your home, how you pass on stewardship values to children, etc.
9. Talk about the entries about investments on pp. 101–2. If you have investments, what are the criteria you use when deciding where to invest? How can our investments help or hurt the poor and the earth?

#### **Activity Options:**

1. *Journaling*: Write about the purchases you made during the past week. Try to remember some of the places you spent money, the approximate amounts, and how you felt when you were buying the item.
2. *Buy-Nothing Week*: Group members who are interested could meet together in a small group to talk about not buying anything nonessential during the coming week. During class time they could set parameters for themselves (what is essential, what is nonessential) and plan for how they're going to support each other throughout the week.
3. *Journaling*: What would it look like for you to live *below* your means, as Beryl Jantzi suggests on p. 95? What would you have to give up or add to your life to make that possible?
4. *Name the Difficulties and Benefits*: What are the difficulties involved in openly discussing finances in a church community? What might be the benefits?

#### **Experiments in Living More with Less:**

*Plan*: Now that your group is moving into Part Three of the book, reserve ten minutes or more at the end of class to brainstorm together about experiments in the area of life at the center of the chapters you've read for that day. Invite people to commit to one small action during the coming week. (You can use this time to reflect on experiments that people did during the past week as well.)

This week, brainstorm together about what experiments in stewardship/giving/money issues people could do during the coming week. They might base their experiment on an idea or story in the book. Encourage people to choose something relatively small and achievable in a week's time. (See #2 of Activity Options as one possibility.) Encourage people to think collaboratively about experiments, too; that is, is there an experiment that several households or individuals would want to tackle together? You may want to spend this "experiments" time in small groups. Or, if your group is up for it, your entire group could choose one idea to work on together. Make sure, however, that people don't feel manipulated into agreeing to do an experiment that they don't want to. Any idea that feels imposed on someone might actually turn her/him off of the whole concept of changing habits.



If there's time, you may also want to give a period of silence in which people can pray and reflect on what they might feel called to do in this arena during the coming week.

**Closing Prayer:**

*O God, you have been in our thoughts and conversations this day. Strengthen us as we contemplate the week ahead, and give us steadfastness as we commit ourselves and our resources once more to you. Amen.*

**Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 105–29 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 11: “Homes” by Renee Holsopple Glick and contributors (pp. 105–16)
- Chapter 12: “Homekeeping” by Doris Janzen Longacre and contributors (pp. 117–29)

**Note to Leader:**

Now that your group is entering Part Three of *Living More with Less*, which focuses on various categories of life, you may want to remind people to view these sessions as opportunities to learn from and share with each other things that they've learned about living more with less in these different areas. Just as the book itself is a “testimony meeting” of sorts, as Doris Janzen Longacre calls it in her introduction, so your sessions together can become testimony meetings as well. Encourage people to both talk and listen with openness and humility, and not to be afraid of sharing what they've learned. You as the leader can help to set a tone of openness and nonjudgmentalism by your manner, and also by reiterating that everyone will find their own ways to live out more-with-less ideas, and that there is no one right way to do this. At the same time, planning collaboratively for “experiments” in more-with-less living might be helpful for people.

Sharing honestly about money makes many people nervous. You will want to be sensitive to members of your group who don't feel comfortable talking openly about finances. If you find that many people in your group seem to be seeking financial advice, consider what resources your congregation holds or what resources you could connect people with—an advisor from Everence (formerly Mennonite Mutual Aid), Stewardship University, or other local Christian financial planners—or whether there's something more your congregation could be doing to help members prayerfully approach issues of stewardship.

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## MORE OF THE SPIRIT

### The Treasure Worth Keeping

You are the God of full pockets  
and the God of pockets zipped shut;  
the God of empty pockets and pockets with holes,  
the God of inside-out pockets,  
and pockets stuffed with treasures.

You are the God of our pockets.

You came to show us that life is not to be pocketed  
but to be given freely, joyfully, sacrificially.

You are the God of full hearts  
and the God of hearts that are hard;  
the God of empty hearts and hearts that are closed,  
the God of the heartsick  
and those who have lost heart.

You are the God of our hearts.

You came to show us that we need not be disheartened  
by the stress of financial worries.

You who know our inmost being,  
connect our hearts with our pockets.

Be the pacemaker which fills our lives  
with the steady rhythm of generosity,  
our pockets opening and closing in love.

Even after a lifetime, they'll still be filled with grace,

pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing.

A treasure worth keeping.

—Carol Penner

## **Introduction to the Offering**

*(can be used in a worship service or as a closing prayer for this session)*

God calls us to be generous

not when all the bills are paid

not when we have everything we need

not when we see our way clear.

God calls us to be generous now,

in this present moment,

trusting in God who is our Provider.

And so we give freely, as we have received freely,

we love fully as we have been fully loved.

—Carol Penner

## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

### SESSION 7: HOMES, HOMEKEEPING

**Pages Discussed This Week:** [insert icon of book cover]

- Chapter 11: “Homes” by Renee Holsopple Glick and contributors (pp. 105–16)
- Chapter 12: “Homekeeping” by Doris Janzen Longacre and contributors (pp. 117–29)

#### Opening Prayer:

*O God, you have been our dwelling place through many generations. You are our true home, our safe haven, our place of comfort. Teach us how to make homes that are open to others, committed to your service, and respectful of creation. We invite you now into our thoughts and our conversations. Amen.*

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 6:6-8

#### Session Starter:

Scatter magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Martha Stewart Living* and other magazines about houses/homemaking around the room before people arrive. Invite group members to page through the magazines and call out what messages they give about what a “home” is or requires. Write these down on a white board or large sheet of paper. Invite people turn to p. 119 and read the first four paragraphs. Then talk together about the questions that Doris Janzen Longacre suggests we ask about our homes: rather than asking “What will make this place pretty?” she suggests that we ask, “Who are we?” and “What will we do in this room?”

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Talk about Renee Glick’s four main suggestions for living more with less with regard to homes (pp. 106–7). Do you think any of these are more important than others?
2. Several of the entries in chapter 11 talk about altering expectations for what a house requires, in terms of space, size, privacy, how many generations it contains, etc. Have you ever considered altering your housing arrangements or expectations in any of these ways?
3. What changes, if any, have you made to your home and to your homekeeping practices to try to make them more ecologically friendly? Do any of the entries give you ideas for how to retrofit your home or make it more energy efficient?
4. Talk about Doris Janzen Longacre’s statement on p. 118, “[W]e can’t afford to act too independently in our homekeeping. As long as one house is connected to every other house through power lines, water and sewer pipes, garbage trucks, and the incessant stream of products and services moving in and out, how we keep our homes is the affair of everyone.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

5. Look at the guidelines for homekeeping on p. 121. Which of these would you like to work on?
6. How does the idea of “making do” strike you? Does it appeal to you or not? What are ways that you could “make do” more frequently?

#### **Activity Options:**

1. *Journaling*: Write about what you are dissatisfied with about your house or apartment. Reflect on why you are dissatisfied with it, and whether there are ways to address your dissatisfaction that don’t cost a lot of money or require a lot of energy.
2. *Homekeeping Circles*: Organize the group into five circles, each organized around an element of homekeeping: 1) Water usage; 2) Laundry; 3) House cleaning; 4) Energy use; 5) Trash/recycling. Invite people in each group to share ideas with each other within each category. They can reread the entries in chapter 12 that have to do with their area, and then talk about ideas together. Try to make sure that all groups have both genders represented.
3. *Material World*: Find a copy of *Material World: A Global Family Portrait*, by Peter Menzel, which contains photographs of households and all their material possessions outside their homes. This book would be a good session starter.
4. *Homes for Others*: Are there people in your church community who are struggling with homelessness or the possibility of losing their home? How can your congregation help them? You might also want to explore options for volunteering at a local shelter or transitional housing program.

#### **Experiments in Living More with Less:**

*Reflect*: Invite people to share any experiments in money/stewardship that they did last week. What worked? What didn’t? Do they plan to extend those experiments in any way?

*Plan*: Give time for people to silently reflect on, and then discuss and plan, ideas for living more with less in the area of homes and homekeeping. (A few examples [there are lots more in the book]: running dishwashers only when there’s a full load, washing dishes by hand more efficiently, reducing showering time, installing low-flow showerheads, taking cloth bags to the grocery store, reducing your weekly trash, washing clothes in cold water, using a clothesline instead of a dryer, turning down the heat, unplugging appliances when not in use, researching green power providers, determining your annual kWh usage from utility bills, etc.)

#### **Closing Prayer:**

*God, you are still our dwelling place. Strengthen us as we seek to serve you in the ways we build and maintain our homes, the ways we clean and care for them. Make us mindful of those without homes, and help us to share our homes with others. Amen.*

### **Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 130–54 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 13: “Gardens, Farms, and Markets” by Greg Bowman and contributors (pp. 130–42)
- Chapter 14: “Cooking and Eating” by Mary Beth Lind and contributors (pp. 143–54)

### **Note to Leader:**

This session might raise tensions in your group, especially if there is a disparity in the types of homes people live in. Some people may not own their own homes, some may be in danger of losing their homes, others may live in modest homes or apartments, and still others may live in large and expensive houses. Some may live in community or with extended family, while others may live alone. If your group contains a wide disparity of home ownership, household composition, and house styles, you may want to mention that reality at the beginning of the session (without mentioning particular people or their living arrangements!). Group members may feel a sense of relief if you make a general acknowledgment of the differences contained in your group, and they may feel more comfortable speaking about their own experiences of trying to live more with less within their homes.

Also, because they require such a large investment of time and resources, our homes are often sources of pride and identity. Be aware that some people in your group might feel threatened by the idea of changing their expectations about homes or their homekeeping practices. And since homekeeping has traditionally been considered “women’s work,” also be aware of the gendered understandings of whose responsibility it is to take care of the home that might slip into conversation. Challenging such assumptions is important.

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## **MORE OF THE SPIRIT**

### **Confession**

Here’s a prayer for the corners of my life

messy with yesterday’s business.

There’s the guilt about what was thrown in the garbage,

the regret about spending too much on extra things,

the time that was frittered away agonizing about details,

the energy wasted on trying to meet someone else’s standards.

The memories of happy times are cobwebbed over with regret  
of how it could have been different:

it could have been more perfect,  
neater, tastier, more organized, more healthy, more something.

Even now, looking forward, there's the sinking feeling  
that bulldozers will not be able to clean up the mess I'll make.

I need a prayer like a woman cleaning in May,  
opening windows, pulling down dusty drapes,  
chairs and rugs dragged out onto the lawn.

Every surface of my life open and revealed  
scoured by soap and spring winds.

The Spirit at work,  
hope and new directions moved in like furniture.

Create in me clean corners, Lord,  
ordered, uncluttered, functional.

A mind clarified, set to rights  
filled with the freshness of new beginnings.

## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# SESSION 8: GARDENS, FARMS, AND MARKETS & COOKING AND EATING

### Pages Discussed This Week:

Chapter 13: “Gardens, Farms, and Markets” by Greg Bowman and contributors (pp. 130–42)

- Chapter 14: “Cooking and Eating” by Mary Beth Lind and contributors (pp. 143–54)

### Opening Prayer:

*God of fields and gardens, of our kitchens and our tables, thank you for the abundance of your creation that feeds us and sustains us. Thank you for the gifts of labor and of food, of soil and of sun. Help us to honor your creation as we shop and garden and cook and eat, and to always remember those who do not have enough to eat. Prompt us to action on their behalf. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 65:9-13

### Session Starter:

If possible, bring in two carrots: one that was grown locally and one from the grocery store. Invite people to guess how many miles each carrot traveled to make it here. A conventionally grown and marketed carrot travels an average of 1,838 miles (2,958 km), while a locally grown carrot often travels less than 100 miles. For more examples of food miles comparisons between locally grown produce and conventional produce, go to p. 4 of “Checking the Food Odometer,” found at [http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/files/food\\_travel072103.pdf](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/files/food_travel072103.pdf).

Another possible session starter would be to invite people to bring produce to the class that they have grown and/or preserved themselves. Have people bring items to a table in the center of the room as the group sings “God, Whose Farm is All Creation” (p. 391 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.)

### Discussion Questions:

1. Talk about Greg Bowman’s statement on p. 131 that more and more people are “yearning for some kind of meaningful human connection with food producers and [desiring] food that is healthy in what it contains, in what it is free from, in how it was produced, and in what it represents as a force for good.” Do you resonate with this statement or not?
2. Share any experiences you’ve had with gardening. If you have done gardening, do you identify with Greg Albright’s description of gardening as prayer (p. 141)?



3. Which ideas in the two chapters appeal to you most? Are there any that feel possible to you?
4. Talk about family meal times. Find out how other households in your group prioritize family mealtimes.
5. What prevents you or others from cooking and eating in more-with-less ways? Are there ways to remove any of those impediments?
6. What feelings emerge for you as you consider growing, purchasing, cooking, and eating in more-with-less ways?
7. Are there pitfalls to prioritizing food as an arena in which we practice our faith?

### **Activity Options:**

1. *Invite a Farmer:* Invite an organic farmer or gardener from your area (or your congregation) to speak to your group about their work. Encourage them to offer helpful hints to class members about home gardening, but also to connect their work to their faith.
2. *Saving the Seasons Night:* If someone in your group preserves food and if others would like to learn, hold a canning/freezing night in your church's kitchen or in someone's home. Offer it as a learning opportunity for the whole congregation. Get a copy of *Saving the Seasons: How to Can, Freeze, and Dry Almost Anything* by Mary Clemens Meyer and Susanna Meyer.
3. *More-with-Less Potluck:* See if your group is interested in hosting a "more-with-less" potluck at church. Invite people to bring dishes made from recipes in the *More-with-Less Cookbook*, *Extending the Table*, or *Simply in Season* cookbook. Make sure that people who don't own any of the cookbooks or who aren't familiar with them either have access to recipes or some suggestions as to dishes to bring.
4. *Gardening Classes:* If some in your group are knowledgeable about gardening, talk about the possibility of holding gardening classes for others in your church or community. You could spend some of this session planning for an event like this.
5. *Volunteer on a Farm:* Check into volunteer opportunities for your group at local CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) or other farms or community gardens. You might also find a surprising number of resources in your area about local foods. If you're near a city, look into urban farm options.
6. *Hungry Planet:* Find a copy of *Hungry Planet* by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio, which shows what people around the world eat. Use it as a discussion piece during the session, and as a reminder of the very real and present problem of hunger in the world.

### **Experiments in Living More with Less:**

*Reflect:* Give members a chance to share any experiments they did in terms of homes and homekeeping during the past week.

*Plan:* Invite them to share and plan what they might feel called to do during the coming week (or months) in terms of living more with less in the areas of gardening/food production and cooking and eating. Encourage people to think collaboratively (two families sharing a CSA membership, three households beginning a meal-sharing plan, etc.).

**Closing Prayer:**

*We offer you now, God, our habits and our appetites, our work in garden and kitchen. You who have nourished us with all good things, help us to now go and feed others in a spirit of generosity and kindness. Turn our labors into prayer, and sustain our efforts to till and keep the garden of your earth. Amen.*

**Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 155–77 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 15: “Clothes and Bodies” by Doris Janzen Longacre and contributors (pp. 155–66)
- Chapter 16: “Transportation and Travel” by Nancy and Robb Davis and contributors (pp. 167–77)

**Note to Leader:**

Try to feel out your group for how much “action” they’re interested in doing during the course of this study. Some people might not like to have much expected of them in terms of participating in events (such as a *Saving the Seasons* Night or gardening classes) outside of your sessions. Encourage people to participate at whatever level they feel comfortable.

If, on the other hand, your group is excited and motivated to spend more time investigating these issues, talk together about how to extend your study and action. Consider whether you’d like to spend more time as a group reflecting on these issues. One good resource to consider is [Simply Enough](http://www.tonycampolo.org/store.php), (<http://www.tonycampolo.org/store.php>) a DVD and study-action guide on voluntary simplicity produced by Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo.

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## **MORE OF THE SPIRIT**

**Humble Thanks**

For all that I put in my body,  
every morsel, crumb, piece,  
every tidbit, chunk, mouthful,

food in all its delight,  
something solid, an apple  
changed—who knows how—  
into the swinging of an arm  
into my body bending, leaping.  
the earth's rich harvest,  
fodder for the body's slow burn.  
For hunger, the quiet gnawing:  
the blood talking to the brain  
talking to the stomach,  
the need for food,  
the insistence of this wanting.  
Created to be like this,  
desiring what we cannot live without

God of grocery stores and markets,  
God of farms and fields,  
God of the sun and the rain and the soil,  
God, you Great Provider,  
each day my body meets you  
in tabletop worship.  
Humble thanks to a God who has food for life,  
for my body's deepest hunger.

—Carol Penner

## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# SESSION 9: CLOTHES AND BODIES, TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL

**Pages Discussed This Week:** [insert icon of book cover]

- Chapter 15: “Clothes and Bodies” by Doris Janzen Longacre and contributors (pp. 155–66)
- Chapter 16: “Transportation and Travel” by Nancy and Robb Davis and contributors (pp. 167–77)

### Opening Prayer:

*God, you have clothed us with your truth and wrapped us with your love. Hear now our questions and ambivalence and concerns about how to live, and about how we fall short of our ideals. Give us new vision and new strength for finding ways that we might choose more by taking less. Calm our restless spirits, and turn our attentions to you. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:25-34

**Session Starter:** Pass out pieces of paper and invite people to write down the trips away from home that they took this week (or as many as they can remember). They can write down their destination, the approximate distance, and how many people were in the car or bus (or, if they rode bike, maybe how many other bikers they saw!). After everyone has created their list, invite participants to reflect on their lists and, if they’re comfortable doing so, to share them with a partner or small group. What do their lists reveal about them and their methods of transportation? What do they learn about themselves from reading them? What factors affect their choice of transportation?

### Discussion Questions (about chapter 15, “Clothes and Bodies”):

1. Reflect on the guidelines for clothing that Doris Janzen Longacre offers on p. 158. Do you agree with these guidelines? Do any strike you as more important than others?
2. How can people in a church talk about clothing without becoming legalistic or returning to days past in which clothing issues split apart congregations?
3. Much has been written recently about fashion trends and the movement toward more revealing clothing. Are there ways that the church can help young men and women think through clothing and modesty issues without making them ashamed of their bodies or resentful of intrusion on their personal lives? What other ideas do you have with regard to living more with less when it comes to bodies?
4. What entries from chapter 15 strike you as especially important? Which ones do you have trouble connecting with?

### Discussion Questions (about chapter 16, “Transportation and Travel”):

1. Among those in the United States, the propensity to travel is a sign of restlessness, write Nancy and Robb Davis, and this restlessness has costs “in terms of pollution, overuse of increasingly scarce resources, carbon emissions, dislocation, and fatigue” (p. 168). Do you agree with this connection between restlessness and the costs of travel to our planet and to our selves?
2. Nancy and Robb Davis write about the importance of examining “what living *more* looks like when we commit to traveling *less*”: this includes “making decisions to live closer to home; to be part of our communities; to commit to life in the “nearby”; and to spend most of our time being present in places we know well” (p. 169). What about this statement excites you? What about it makes you anxious?
3. Have there been times in your life when you’ve biked, walked, shared a car, or taken public transportation more often than you do now? What memories do you have about your quality of life from that time?
4. Do you agree that our relationship with our cars are “sacred” (p. 168)? If so, are there ways that you can think of that we can change our relationship to our automobiles?

### Activity Options:

1. *What are You Shopping For?*: Invite participants to think about their latest shopping trip. What items did they buy? Why did they buy them? How did they feel when they bought them? Invite people to reflect on what emotions are connected to shopping for them. This could be a journaling or discussion activity.
2. *Closet Inventory*: Invite people to mentally walk through their closet and write down which items came from thrift stores, which ones were gifts, which ones they purchased for themselves, etc. When they get home, they could also check the tags to see where their clothing was manufactured.
3. *Journaling*: As Robb and Nancy Davis suggest, start a journal of all the opportunities there are within a 25-, 50-, or 100-mile or kilometer radius of your home. If you do this in class, participants could share their lists.
4. *Sabbatical from Car/Air Travel*: Talk together with the group about what it would take to do a sabbatical from air or car travel. Are there impediments to this idea? How might people in the group implement such a sabbatical?
5. *Investigating a Voluntary Gas Tax Group*: Is anyone in your group interested in forming a voluntary gas tax group? Go [here](#) to get more information.

### Experiments in Living More with Less:

*Reflect*: Invite reflections from any experiments people did with food production, preparation, or consumption during the past week.

*Plan:* Give individuals and small groups within your class time to plan an experiment in living more with less in terms of clothing or bodies or transportation or travel. See if anyone is interested in trying Nancy and Robb Davis's idea of taking a "sabbatical" from their car or from air travel (see also #4 of Activity Options). Is it even possible for them? If not, perhaps there's still interest in trying to use their cars less frequently during the coming week. Give people the opportunity to plan ways to travel more efficiently.

**Closing Prayer:**

*God, we ask for creativity and grace as we examine our habits, confess our failings, and open ourselves to your Spirit. You are the more that we seek, the home that we long for. Teach our restless spirits to rest in you. You have been in our conversations and our thoughts; now accompany us on our way. Amen.*

**Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 178–99 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 17: "Recreation and Schedules" by Doris Janzen Longacre and contributors (pp. 178–86)
- Chapter 18: "Celebrations and Life Passages" by Rebecca Seiling and contributors (pp. 187–99)

**Note to Leader:**

Be aware that by this point in the quarter, participants might be getting weary of talking about changes to their personal and household lives in light of what they're reading. The cumulative effect of reading so many contributions in a variety of areas might mean that group members' eyes are glazing over or that they're no longer able to engage the ideas in the book as fully as they were at the beginning. You may want to address this "more-with-less" fatigue that people might be feeling by now and invite ideas from the group on how to address it. Now might also be a time to use the reflection/prayer component of the session (see box) if you haven't yet done so. Helping the group to refocus on the spiritual, Christ-filled undergirdings of a more-with-less life will help them to sustain any actions or experiments that they plan during this quarter.

A resource on bodies/health that your group may have interest in is [Body Talk: Speaking the Words of Health](#), a twelve-week Bible study by Ingrid Friesen Moser.

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# MORE OF THE SPIRIT

## Clothing Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for clothing us;

we all have something to wear.

This despite the fact

that some of us have stood at our closets

lamenting, "I have nothing to wear."

We come to worship with expensive Italian shoes

and twenty-year-old Birkenstocks

and running shoes from the thrift store.

We come to church with ironed pants,

skirts and dresses, short and long;

we even come with holey jeans.

Consider the clothes of our congregation,

how they glow!

Clothes of every color, light and dark, bright and muted,

a rainbow of raiment as varied as the lilies of the field.

Few of us toil and spin to make our clothes,

and we confess, Lord, that we give hardly a thought

to those who clothe us with their labor.

In a world where disconnection breeds contempt,

where ignorance leads to neglect,

and apathy can mean the difference between life and death,

clothe us, Lord, with wisdom.

Show us the connections between:

what we wear and what we believe,

who we are and who we affect,

how we love and how we spend our money.

Help us to read the labels and to know our origins.

You are our Designer, we are fashioned by you.

Your garment of love, tailor-made,

a design lovely in every season.

—*Carol Penner*



## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# SESSION 10: RECREATION AND SCHEDULES, CELEBRATIONS AND LIFE PASSAGES

### Pages Discussed This Week:

- Chapter 17: “Recreation and Schedules” by Doris Janzen Longacre and contributors (pp. 178–86)
- Chapter 18: “Celebrations and Life Passages” by Rebecca Seiling and contributors (pp. 187–99)

### Opening Prayer:

*O God who makes all things new, teach us the true meaning of recreation and celebration. Be in our laughter and our tears, our leisure and our work. We offer our calendars to you, and ask that you would redeem our time, sanctify our schedules, and transform our holidays so that we find beauty in the simple and abundance in enough. Amen.*

### Scripture: Genesis 2:2-3

**Session Starter:** Have people call out a list of common recreational pursuits (could include things like watching TV, hiking, reading a book, playing video games, cooking, going on vacation, reading the Bible, etc.). After you have written down the list on a white board or large piece of paper, go through the list and ask the following questions about each item: “Does this strengthen my own spirit and my relationships with others?” and “Is it expensive in terms of money, energy supplies, or the natural environment?” (p. 181). Emphasize that people may have different responses about the same item and that depending on the context, different activities might have different effects on people.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Talk about the “busyness” that pervades our culture. Does your life feel too full of activities or not full enough? How can you tell when you’re beginning to feel too busy?
2. Is your discussion group multigenerational? Have people from different age groups share, and see whether the “culture of busyness” of our society is as prevalent in the lives of these different groups. How does the wisdom of age play into the choices of how much or what to do?
3. “Rarely in a discussion on simple living have I heard the question, ‘But what can we do for fun?’” Doris Janzen Longacre writes. “The more critical danger is that those who allow themselves everything they want become unable to enjoy it” (p. 180). In what ways do you limit yourself when it comes to recreational or entertainment activities? Do you feel out of sync with culture if or when you do so?

4. What do you think of Doris Janzen Longacre's idea to "blur the distinction between work and recreation" (p. 181)? She writes that you can "invent ways to make dull work enjoyable." What ways have you found to do this?
5. In what ways do you and/or your family try to manage your schedules? What criteria do you use to determine what to say yes to and what to say no to?
6. Talk about David King's list of ideas for balancing kids' sports time with family time (p. 185). Do you agree with this point, and have you tried any of them in your own life?
7. Turn to the list of guidelines for celebrations that Doris Janzen Longacre makes on p. 189. Which of these feel particularly important to you?
8. What holiday traditions have you and/or your family found to be meaningful? What made or makes them special? In what ways are they sacred?
9. What factors prevent you from making holiday celebrations more simple or sustainable? Is there anything you can do to address these impediments?
10. When celebrating life passages such as births, weddings, or funerals, what have you observed in terms of cultural trends? What ideas do you have for countercultural, nonconsumptive ways to celebrate such major life transitions?

#### **Activity Options:**

1. *Where Does My Time Go?*: Make a list of your various activities through the week, in categories (for example: studying, working, watching TV, taking care of children, housework, etc.). Estimate how much time you spend doing each one. After you've made the list, think about whether the way you actually spend your time is in line with your values. If not, what changes can you make?
2. *'Celebration Brainstorming'*: If you are nearing a holiday as you study *Living More with Less*, spend some time talking about the upcoming holiday and brainstorming about alternative ways that people might celebrate it. If your group is big enough, you could also create "working groups" that focus on different holidays and draft lists of alternative, simple ways to celebrate them. The groups could then share their ideas with the larger group.
3. *Holiday Help*: Have available a variety of resources on how to celebrate holidays more simply and sustainably. Invite group members to page through books that you've brought in on the topic. Possibilities include ["Whose Birthday Is It Anyway?"](https://connect.computility.com/form/index.php?id=6cf035cefde0f5a31f1c05ae610128e9) <https://connect.computility.com/form/index.php?id=6cf035cefde0f5a31f1c05ae610128e9> (if you think your group would benefit from this booklet, copies can be ordered in bulk), *Hundred-Dollar Holiday* by Bill McKibben, *Gifts from the Heart* by Virginia Brucker, and *A Simple Christmas: A Faith-Filled Guide to a Meaningful and Stress-Free Christmas* by Sharon Hanby-Robie.
4. *Simple Christmas Workshop*: Many people are hungry for alternatives to consumer culture's Christmas frenzy. Members of your group may want to consider planning and hosting a "Simple Christmas Workshop" at your church, inviting the community to come and learn about ways to celebrate the holiday with simple, meaningful traditions.

### **Experiments in Living More with Less:**

*Reflect:* Invite the group to share any experiments related to clothes and bodies or transportation and travel that they did last week. Did they learn anything from those experiences?

*Plan:* Give time for people to prayerfully consider and discuss what experiments in recreation and celebration they might do this coming week.

### **Closing Prayer:**

*O God, we commit to you our week ahead. We hand over to you all that we will do, and ask that you would bless our commitments. Turn our gaze toward you, that we might find renewal and rest. Amen.*

### **Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 200–8 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 19: “Technology and Media” by Isaac Villegas and contributors (pp. 200–8)

### **Note to Leader:**

This session may be full of ideas from people on alternative ways to celebrate holidays. Help group members see the value in sharing ideas with each other about how they celebrate holidays, especially those on the Christian calendar. This is an especially good session in which to have someone take notes on a laptop or pad of paper that can then be copied and shared with the group.

Does your group contain people who live far away from their extended family? Does it contain single people? People who live far from family, or people who are newcomers to this country, may find that holidays give them lots of extra time where they feel particularly alone. How can you or your group extend invitations to include these groups? What does it say about our lifestyles if we are so busy celebrating with our own families that we have no time for the widow, the orphan, or the sojourner?

It may be tempting for some groups to get off-track during discussions so that the session becomes a time and place for people to rant about our culture’s consumption, or the appalling shopping habits of neighbors, or their stingy relatives who *really* need to read this book. Such critical comments aren’t necessarily bad, but they can deflect attention from our *own* habits and need for confession and grace. If you sense your group moving in a judgmental, ranting direction, gently invite people to self-examination rather than critical judgment about others. You may want to invite people to a moment of silence and prayer to refocus the discussion, or say something like, “Many of us have strong feelings about how to live, and it’s easy to turn a

critical eye to others. I'd invite us to redirect our conversation to ways that *we* want to grow in more-with-less directions, since the only people we can change are ourselves."

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## **MORE OF THE SPIRIT**

### **Prayer for Playing**

As children, as young people, and as adults,  
we thank you, God, for time to rest and play!  
Help us to choose activities in our leisure time  
that refresh us and diminish no one.  
Read magazines and books with us.  
Listen to music with us.  
Surf websites with us.  
Play sports with us.  
Party with us.  
Watch movies with us.  
Enjoy our hobbies with us.  
Tune into TV programs with us.  
Be a guest in every chat room we frequent  
and a spectator of every game we play.  
We invoke your presence as Immanuel,  
God-with-us, this week as we play.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.

—Carol Penner

## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

### SESSION 11: TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA

#### Pages Discussed This Week:

- Chapter 19: “Technology and Media” by Isaac Villegas and contributors (pp. 200–8)

#### Opening Prayer:

*God of timelessness and wisdom, we acknowledge to you now that you are all we need. You are everything that we seek. Fill us when we are empty, occupy us when we are preoccupied, and turn our gaze toward you when we are distracted. Give us singleness of purpose and compassion in word and deed. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:1-12

**Session Starter:** Invite participants to stand up and arrange themselves somewhere on a spectrum in the room according to the following:

One end of the room: “I would have no problem living without my cell phone for one week.”

The other end: “I would have a very difficult time living without my cell phone for one week.”

After a bit of discussion, make two more spectrums. Change cell phone to: 2) email; and then 3) television. Encourage people to think about their recreational/social use of the media, apart from uses of them required in their jobs or at school.

If you think your group would be game for this, after the spectrum activity you could invite those who have cell phones or other personal digital devices to bring them to the middle of the room and place them on a table you have set there. (You may want to say something like, “Some among us do not have cell phones. They may not want one or need one, or they may decide it’s not a priority in their budget. Many people do have this technology, so I ask those who do to bring them forward.”) You could then have a moment of silence, during which you invite people to imagine life without personal media devices. End the time with a prayer, offering to God our time and attention and devotion. (Assure people they can collect their devices after the session is over!)

#### Discussion Questions:

1. How large a role do devices like cell phones, computers, gaming systems, etc., play in your life? How much do you rely on them in daily life?

2. Do you think the new communication technologies have improved or deepened your relationship with people? How is face-to-face interaction being affected by the growth of communication technologies? What does this mean for Christians as we try to build community and congregational relationships?
3. What limits do you and/or your household place on things like the Internet, cell phones, video games, television, etc.? Do those limits seem to be working? What ways would you like to adjust them?
4. Talk about the point that Isaac Villegas makes on p. 201—that we want to use technological devices but not have any relationship with the people who produced them. He quotes Frederic Jameson: “You don’t want to think about Third World women every time you pull yourself up to the word processor, or all the other lower-class people with their lower-class lives when you decide to use or consume your other luxury products: it would be like having voices in your head.” How do you respond to this idea—that is, how connected are we to the people who have manufactured our computers and other devices?

#### **Activity Options:**

1. *Media Fast*: Talk about the idea of a Facebook fast (p. 206) or other media fast and whether that’s something the group or part of the group would want to do.
2. *Media Usage Log*: Keep track of all your media usage for one day’s time. Try to keep track of all the minutes you spend engaged with media, without at this point trying to reduce that time. (You could use a spreadsheet for this, or talk to your group about other ways to keep track.)
3. *Redeeming the Internet*: Talk about the positive ways that you and others have used the Internet and other media technologies. What are ways that you and your group can put the Internet to work for furthering the reign of God?
4. *Congregational New Media Audit*: Talk about how your congregation or individuals within it are using new media technologies. How often are people connecting in your congregation using new media? Are people supporting one another, sharing prayer requests via email/Facebook/twitter/blogs? How comfortable are you with these new directions?

#### **Experiments in Living More with Less:**

*Reflect*: Share any experiments in living more with less in terms of recreation/schedules and celebrations/life passages that people did last week.

*Plan*: What experiments would your group like to do this coming week, related to technology and media? One idea would be for the group to do a communal social media fast for the week, in which group members agree to not use Facebook, Twitter, or other social media sites. Other possibilities would include keeping one day as a Sabbath from emailing, texting, TV-watching,

and Web-browsing (or try to delete one of these from your life). Encourage people to set a goal for what they'd like to spend time doing *instead* of those things throughout the day or the week.

**Closing Prayer:**

*O God, focus our attention on you now and throughout this week. Teach us constancy and focus, and lead us into habits of holiness and prayer even as we are overloaded with information. We commit our time and our talents, our loneliness and our relationships, our work and our free time to you. Amen.*

**Pages in *Living More with Less* to Read for Next Week:**

Group members can read pp. 209–36 for next week. It includes:

- Chapter 20: “Meetinghouses and Churches” by Darren Kropf and contributors (pp. 209–19)
- Chapter 21: “Strengthening Each Other and Organizing Communities” by Sheri Hostetler and contributors (pp. 220–31)
- Afterword: “A Generous Orthopraxy” by Brian McLaren (pp. 233–36)

**Note to Leader:**

Members of your group will most likely have divergent responses to the suggestion of limiting media technology usage. Make sure that, as you talk about figuring out healthy interactions and balance when it comes to digital devices and online communication, members of your group have a chance to raise questions and concerns.

Next week is the last week of the study. If you haven't done so already, today would be a good day to talk with your group about whether they're interested in extending the study of and action around these issues after next week. Talk and pray together about how you might feel God calling you to continue to read and discuss and act on more-with-less living.

Resources to consider if you want to extend this study further:

[Creation Care: Keepers of the Earth](http://www.everence.com/?utm_source=mma-online.org&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=rebrand): A twelve-week curriculum on environmental sustainability and faith by Luke Gascho. [http://www.everence.com/?utm\\_source=mma-online.org&utm\\_medium=web&utm\\_campaign=rebrand](http://www.everence.com/?utm_source=mma-online.org&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=rebrand)

[Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5,000 Pounds](http://www.amazon.com/Low-Carbon-Diet-Pounds-Be-Solution/dp/0963032720/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1286546187&sr=8-1): This resource is not faith-based but offers a well-outlined plan for reducing one's carbon emissions. [http://www.amazon.com/Low-Carbon-Diet-Pounds-Be-Solution/dp/0963032720/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1286546187&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Low-Carbon-Diet-Pounds-Be-Solution/dp/0963032720/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1286546187&sr=8-1) A [book](http://www.amazon.com/Journey-Planet-Adventure-Create-Earth-friendly/dp/0964437309/ref=pd_sim_b_2) for kids is also available. [http://www.amazon.com/Journey-Planet-Adventure-Create-Earth-friendly/dp/0964437309/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_2](http://www.amazon.com/Journey-Planet-Adventure-Create-Earth-friendly/dp/0964437309/ref=pd_sim_b_2)

*Trek: Venture into a World of Enough:* This four-week guide from Mennonite Central Committee invites readers to consider the question (and actions around the question), “What is enough?” It includes daily reflections, discussion questions, and suggested activities. *Parent Trek*, a twelve-session resource, is also available.

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## MORE OF THE SPIRIT

### Prayer of Connection

God, you know that in our remote-control world,  
advertisements compete to control body, mind, and thoughts.  
Pop-ups tell us how to look, walk, eat, buy,  
Tell us who to be, what to see, who to fear, what to wear,  
how to think, where to shop.

God, you know when we log on, when we are offline and online.  
You know our usernames, our passwords,  
our physical and virtual memories.  
You can hack through every firewall we build.

God, give us your Spirit, create us in your image.  
Remind us of our true identity: your children.  
Remind us of our true calling: a gentle yoke.  
Remind us of our true connection to each other and to You.  
This is our prayer, in a fragmented world.  
This is our prayer, slipping through space.

—Carol Penner





## LIVING MORE WITH LESS: 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# SESSION 12: MEETINGHOUSES AND CHURCHES, STRENGTHENING EACH OTHER AND ORGANIZING COMMUNITIES

**Pages Discussed This Week:** [insert icon of book cover]

- Chapter 20: “Meetinghouses and Churches” by Darren Kropf and contributors (pp. 209–19)
- Chapter 21: “Strengthening Each Other and Organizing Communities” by Sheri Hostetler and contributors (pp. 220–31)
- Afterword: “A Generous Orthopraxy” by Brian McLaren (pp. 233–36)

### Opening Prayer:

*God, we know that you are here as we gather in your name. Make us mindful of the ways that you dwell with your people, within our bodies and our communities. Make us honest, humble, and unafraid to examine ourselves and our priorities. Give us courage as we strengthen each other and work in our communities for the care of the poor and the earth. Amen.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:20

### Session Starter:

Open this last session of your study of *Living More with Less* with a meditative, Quaker-style session starter. Invite people to silently read Brian McLaren’s afterword, “A Generous Orthopraxy.” Tell people that after they are done reading it, they can spend a few moments in silence and prayer. After you think everyone has had a chance to read the chapter, invite people to close their eyes or sit in a way in which they can focus. Invite people to continue sitting in silence while anyone who wants to offers short sentences of reflection. These reflections could include short descriptions of how McLaren’s words affected them, or even the oral reading of a sentence or two from the Afterword. Before you begin, encourage people to leave some silence after a previous speaker’s comments before they begin to talk—and if the group simply sits in silence after everyone is done reading, that’s fine too.

### Discussion Questions (about chapter 20, “Meetinghouses and Churches”):

1. Darren Kropf quotes Winston Churchill: “We shape our buildings, and then our buildings shape us.” In what ways do church buildings shape the congregations that meet in them? More specifically, how has your church building (or lack thereof) shaped your

congregation? (You may want to allow people to write some notes about this first, before conversation begins.)

2. Talk about the list on p. 216, “How Can Our Congregation Care for Creation?” What items on that list has your congregation already done? Are there items on the list that your group would like to try out?
3. Darren Kropf suggests that we should think *behavior* first, then *technology*. How might your congregation change its behaviors with regard to energy efficiency?
4. Talk about how your group might help to nurture creation care in your congregation, beyond the issue of the building itself. Are there ways that your group might actively help people in your congregation understand and act upon environmental issues?

**Discussion Questions (about chapter 21, “Strengthening Each Other and Organizing Communities”):**

1. Sheri Hostetler makes the point that we live in a fundamentally different world than the one in which *Living More with Less* was first published in 1980. In what ways do you think global warming should change or intensify the church’s commitment to more-with-less ideas?
2. What are ways that you can extend personal- and household-level changes so that they have more impact? Are there ways to connect any simple and sustainable actions you try to do at home with what needs to happen in your congregation, community, or world?
3. What do you think “relocalization” looks like in your community? Are there relocalizing initiatives taking place in your area? Are there connections between those initiatives and faith communities like yours?
4. Talk about the ideas that Sheri Hostetler proposes on pp. 223–24. Which do you think are most important to address? Which do you feel are most personally compelling?

**Activity Options:**

1. *Make a List:* If your group is part of a congregation that rents or owns a building, talk together about how often and in what ways your church building is used. Make a list of the groups that use your building and approximately how often. If there are trustees in your group, invite them to share what they have noticed about the use of the building or stewardship of energy resources by your congregation. If your group meets in a building other than a church, talk together about what freedom and constraints your arrangement offers.
2. *Walk Through Your Building:* If you meet in a church building, walk prayerfully and silently through the building as a group. As you walk, consider the spaces as you walk through them. How are the spaces used now? How could they be used better or use energy more efficiently?
3. *One Hundred Shades of Green:* Bring materials from the Mennonite Creation Care Network’s program, “One Hundred Shades of Green.” MCCN is hoping to have one

hundred congregations commit to actively care for creation and to name a liaison. Find more information [here](#).

4. *Sustainability Circles*: Does your group desire to move this study beyond the quarter by forming groups to work on any of the issues you've discussed? Talk about forming "sustainability groups" that would meet to support each other and share ideas for more-with-less living.
5. *Reviewing the Experiments*: Invite people to reflect on the experiments in more-with-less living that they tried during this quarter. Which ones have now become habits? Which ones were experiments for only a period of time and then got dropped? Are there more experiments members of your group would like to try? You may also want to talk about how to move experiments toward becoming practices.

### **Experiments in Living More with Less:**

*Reflect*: Invite reports from participants on any media fasts or other experiments in living more with less from the past week.

*Plan*: Although this is the last session, people can still discuss what experiments they'd like to do during the coming week. Or, if your group is interested in a larger-level experiment that extends what you've done during this quarter or that has a community- or congregation-level element, you could discuss those plans now.

### **Closing Prayer:**

*God, you are calling us toward yourself. Broaden our understanding of sacred spaces, of stewardship, and of worship. Strengthen us as we strengthen each other and support each other in our attempts to live more with less. Give us humility, humor, and humor as we work to steward your gifts and your creation. As we work, give us grace for ourselves and others. As we share, remind us what we have received from you. As we act, remind us also to rest in you. As we leave this place, help us to live out our commitments. Amen.*

### **Note to Leader:**

You may want to touch base with individuals who were in the group to debrief from the experience of studying *Living More with Less*. Do they have any feedback that would be helpful to you as you reflect on the experience of leading the group?

You may also want to mention to the group that they can access online resources to related topics at [www.mpn.net/livingmorewithless](http://www.mpn.net/livingmorewithless). They can also join the "Living More with Less" Facebook group for online discussions of topics surrounding the book. Encourage the group to pray about ways to extend the energy and momentum from your time together into their own lives and into the life of your congregation. How could your group's study be a gift to the larger church?

Thank you for the time and energy you've put into helping your group study *Living More with Less*. Blessings as you and your group members continue to seek ways to live out grace-filled, God-infused, more-with-less lives.

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## MORE OF THE SPIRIT

### Our Place at the Table

The effort to achieve goodness  
stretches the most ambitious soul.  
But faced with global warming,  
the oil crisis, and rampant materialism,  
we can and do rise to the occasion.  
We count miles and kilometers,  
we pinch pennies,  
we evaluate and re-evaluate  
our time-saving, time-treasuring,  
simple-life strategies.

Having scrambled our way up this hill of beans  
we know a thing or two,  
and occasionally we point out the failings  
of the less enlightened ones.  
We criticize, constructively,  
all who may not be as high  
on the more-with-less ladder.

These prodigal sons and daughters,  
with their wasteful ways,  
surely don't deserve the love and affection  
we have earned.

News of the feast hits us like a wall . . .  
extravagance, lavishness, over-the-top hospitality.  
"That fatted calf could have been sold  
and the money given to the poor!  
Don't get me started on the gold rings!"

As the unsimple are welcomed into the kingdom,  
our father turns to us with joyful smiles.  
"Yes," he says, "another good day of work.  
Will you come and join the celebration?"  
The wheels turn slowly, painfully,  
as we realize that the day's labor has brought joy.  
In the end it's a simple decision.  
We take our place at the table,  
ready for grace.

—*Carol Penner*