

Circle Session 1: What is Simplicity?

Readings from *Less is More*:

- p.3 (*Less is More*): **Simplicity Defined: Introduction** by Cecile Andrews
- p.18 (*Less is More*): **Voluntary Simplicity: Cool Lifestyle for a Hot Planet** by Duane Elgin
- on-line article from Slate: **Reducing Your Carbon Footprint Still Matters**

For Facilitator:

- **Circle Discussion Ground Rules** (to post)
- **Circle Schedule Table**
- **Action Commitments** form

Materials for Everyone:

- **Tools to Encourage Dialogue and Engagement**
- **Scratch paper & writing utensils for reflection and pairs discussion**
- **A Garden of Simplicity**

First Meeting Ice Breaker

Normally at the beginning of a circle session we will check in on our action commitments. However, as this is the first session, you should take some time learn a little more about each other. Perhaps ask each participant to say a little bit about themselves, and what brings them to the circle.

Initial Business

Information for each circle session is posted on the SFUU web page. Before going on, come to an agreement as to when you will end this session. If you don't finish everything, that is not a problem – you can either opt to skip what you didn't finish or assign it as 'homework' and come back to it during the next session.

Before beginning, you need to schedule the remaining meetings (or if that is too overwhelming, at least schedule the next session). Use the **Circle Schedule Table** to accomplish this:

- **Facilitating:** Hopefully, everyone will feel comfortable facilitating one session (“everybody teaches, everybody learns”), but if not, then work out who might be willing to do it more than once. Reassure facilitators that a full explanation of what to do for each session will be provided.
- **Meeting Place:** Once you have a facilitator, figure out where you will meet for each session. The facilitator may offer to have it at their house, or someone else could host instead, or your group may decide to have it at the same place each time. If it is not possible to schedule all of the meetings, make sure to at least schedule the next one! *Let the circle decide.*
- **Meeting Time:** Schedule the next meeting for sure. If possible, try scheduling the others as well. Some circle members may need advance notice of when the meetings are in order to schedule their other commitments. *Let the circle decide.*
- **Other things:** You have a couple of blank rows on your Circle Schedule table in case you want to add something else for each session. For example, some circles might like to have food and beverages. *Let the circle decide.*

Setting the Ground Rules for Discussion and Tools for Effective Dialogue

You would hope that ground rules would not be necessary, but it is a good idea to get that done first thing just in case. Post the **Ground Rules** and solicit discussion as needed. If you prefer, then you can have your group come up with their own ground rules (this is actually the preferred method, but takes time) – Here is a possible procedure if you want to go this way:

- ask everyone to silently jot down 3 things that they think will help create a respectful atmosphere for the circle.
- have them pair up and share their ideas with their partner
- have each pair share out ideas (one idea per pair at a time until all ideas are out)
 - one effective way to do this is to share an idea that their partner had (rather than their own)
- make a list of the ‘rules’ as discussion goes on, to be posted for each circle session

Hand out and briefly discuss **Tools to Encourage Dialogue and Discussion** – point out that this takes some practice, especially if it is something you don’t naturally do. For example, for some people, pausing comes naturally, but for me it is really hard to pause – but when I do pause, I let someone else’s ideas fill the space and that is usually a good thing. So, you might ask the group to think about what they are not good at, and then ask them to try working on that during this first circle time.

Final Word discussion (for the Cecile Andrews reading - p.3-7 of *Less Is More*)

This dialogue protocol helps groups listen to each other – if done properly, you should hear one conversational voice at a time with no interruptions or cross-talk. This protocol is a good way to allow everyone to talk and be heard; it also helps hone listening skills.

Procedure:

- Split into groups of 3 to 4

Everybody already should have read **Simplicity Defined: Introduction** (p.3-7 of *Less is More*) and underlined or highlighted 2 or 3 sentences that made them think, made an impression on them, or that they wonder about; if not then you may have to allow time for people to do this.

- Person whose birthday (month and day) is closest to today starts
 - Read one of your underlined statements (**say no more**)
- Person to the right
 - Comment on that statement: what did the statement make you think about?
 - Everyone else just listen, no interruptions, no cross-talk
- Next person comment, everyone else listen (no interruptions, no cross-talk)
- Continue around with commenting and listening
- **Person who read the original sentence gets the final word**
 - NOW you get to tell everyone why you chose that statement.
 - If further discussion seems appropriate, now would be the time to do it.
- Continue until everyone reads a statement and gets the final word.

Return to the full circle, offer highlights from the final word discussion to the whole group. If it seems appropriate, close by summarizing key points that came out of the discussion.

Reflection and Pairs Discussion

- Distribute small handout with the **reflection questions**.
- Give them 3-5 minutes to jot down their thoughts about these questions.
- Have them pair up and share their thoughts (10-15 min)
- Bring the group back together – have everyone share the most important change that their partner has already made and their partner's biggest challenge in simplifying their life.

Reflect on these questions

What are you already doing to simplify your life?

What is the most important change that you have made? What impact has it had on your life?

What is the hardest thing (for you) about trying to live more simply?

Circle Discussion of the Other Readings

You read two other essays:

p.18-26 from *Less is More: Voluntary Simplicity: Cool Lifestyle for a Hot Planet*

The *Slate* article: **Reducing Your Carbon Footprint Still Matters**

Which of these articles most resonated with you and why? What take home ideas did you get from these readings? This is an open-ended discussion, let it take your group where it will.

A Garden of Simplicity

The ***Garden of Simplicity*** handout turns Duane Elgin's garden metaphor for Voluntary Simplicity (or Earth-friendly living) into a table for us to explore the many potential aspects of simplicity.

- Pass the ***Garden of Simplicity*** handout to everyone. Remind them that these seven "flowerings of simplicity" came from the essay that they read in *Less is More* by Duane Elgin, and are meant to represent the rich diversity of approaches to simple living.
- Give them about 5 minutes to consider the seven expressions of simple living and to think about
 - (1) how they might already be living a simpler life, and
 - (2) how they might change to live into some of the expressions of simplicity.
- Group discussion: Ask each person to share one thing, if they are comfortable doing so.

Commit to Action

Hopefully the readings and today's session gave you some ideas about how you might want to simplify your life, or maybe you came with ideas already percolating around in your brain. Come up with one step that will simplify your life. It does not have to be something that saves the world here and now. Remember that to find the simple life that suits you, you need to be in touch with who you are and what you value – what really matters to you. So, self-care and reflection can be an important first step toward simplicity along with spending more time with friends and family, taking more time to be out in nature, setting aside time for daily meditation, etc. **This circle is here to support you in whatever way you choose to simplify.**

So, take a moment to consider what you would like to commit to doing before the next circle session. Make sure that it is doable (for example cleaning out the clutter in a drawer or a room rather than the whole garage – especially if your garage looks like mine).

When all are ready, ask each member to say what they would like to commit to doing, and have them record it in one of the circles on the **Session 1 Action Commitments** form. Let everyone know that the one aim of the circles is to provide support and encouragement as we try to simplify, so if you don't get your action done, that is okay – in other words don't skip the next session if you don't get your action done – everyone is welcome and everyone is valued no matter what state of simplicity they find themselves in.