

Circle Session 5: Simplicity and Planet Earth

Readings from *Less is More*:

- p.74-78: **Simplicity, Simply Put** by Tom Turnipseed
- p.212-219: **Why Isn't the Empire Sustainable?** by David Wann

Other:

- **The Disarming Case to Act Right Now On Climate Change** by Greta Thunberg (2018 TED talk given in Stockholm): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2QxFM9y0tY>

More:

- **Try a local farmer's market** (see below for information about local farmer's markets in Placer, Sacramento, and El Dorado counties):
 - **Placer Grown** home page: <http://www.placergrown.org/>
 - **Certified Farmer's Markets of Sacramento** home page: <https://marketlocations.com/>
 - **El Dorado Certified Farmer's Markets** home page: <https://eldoradofarmersmarket.com/>

Listed below are some other TED talks that were considered while creating this session (but not ultimately used). If you are interested, here are the links:

Reviews Science, Impacts, & general discussion of energy technology and individual action:

- **Climate Change: Simple, Serious, Solvable** by James Rae TEDx – 2018:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8dHSLiDLKI>

Discusses the Carbon Cycle and green carbon versus fossil carbon:

- **Three Steps to Cut Your Carbon Footprint by 60% Today** by Jackson Carpenter TEDx – 2017:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63hAHbkzJG4>

Suggests divesting from fossil fuels

- **What One Person Can Do About Climate Change** by Ella Lage TEDx – 2016:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRQWXFCaOGs>

Suggests carbon fees:

- **A Simple and Smart Way to Fix Climate Change** by Dan Miller TEDx – 2014:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k2-SzIDGko>

All around discussion of the usual reductions around transportation, eating, and energy

- **What You Can Do About Global Warming** from *Simple Living with Wanda Urbanska*, episode #402 (26 minutes; released August 2008):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XWSRc1LQ1c&list=PL6DCD936145C29443&index=13&t=194s>

Also looked at this trailer for a movie recently shown by 350 Placer (<https://www.350placer.org/>)

- **The Reluctant Radical** trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLwt84rA97I>. Click here for entire movie availability: <https://www.thereluctantradicalmovie.com/>

Materials:

- **Circle Session 4 Action Commitments** (from last session)
- **Reflection** form (small ¼ page with the reflection prompt and room to jot down notes)
- **Pens** to jot down notes for the reflection
- **Large paper** for list-making and a **marker** to make a visible list for everyone
- **Some Action Ideas for the Earth** (¼ page handout)
- **Circle Session 5 Action Commitments** (for this session)

To be completed BEFORE session 5:

Read the essays (two from *Less is More* and one from the web site) and watch the 11-minute TED talk. If you have not been to a farmer's market (and if one is open during this session, then try it (urls provided to help you find one near you)).

Start of Session 5:

Action Commitment Check In

Pull out last session's Action Commitments in case people need to be reminded.

- Were you able to follow through on your action commitments? (no judgments, it is okay if it didn't happen, people can share or not)

Reflection Session Starter

Hand out the ¼ page reflection form to each person. Ask them to take a few minutes to think **individually** about the reflection question by jotting a few notes down – about 3 minutes.

Once everyone finishes jotting a few thoughts down, then pair up to **share one-on-one with another circle member** (if you have an odd number in your group, triads are fine). NOTE: the reasoning behind breaking into pairs is to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak their mind (so that introverts and extroverts are equally engaged).

Reflection

Tom Turpinseed (*Simplicity, Simply Put*) says that we are committing ecocide and David Wann (*Why Isn't This Empire Sustainable*) says that the American way of life is designed for maximum consumption and "tolerable" amounts of environmental destruction.

- Do you think that everyday Americans are aware of these problems? (why or why not)
- Do you think that everyday Americans care about these problems? (why or why not)
- Do you think that everyday Americans are doing anything about these problems? (why or why not)
- What about you? What are you doing about these problems and what more could you do? Make a list to share with the whole group.

You do not have to answer every question! Jot some notes down; be prepared to share as you feel comfortable.

Bring everyone back together; ask each pair that is willing, to share at least one idea that came up during their pairs discussion. Make sure that by the end you have drawn out the kinds of things that they are doing individually to address 'ecocide' and make a list on the large paper so that everyone can see it.

Before dealing with the list, review Duane Elgin's definitions of cosmetic simplicity vs sophisticated simplicity from session 1 (p.22; there is one paragraph about each on p.22). You can do a group reading of those paragraphs, going around the circle with each person reading one sentence out-loud to the group until both paragraphs are read. These paragraphs are reproduced below for you:

Cosmetic/Superficial Simplicity

In recent years, a different view of Simplicity has begun to appear – a cosmetic Simplicity that attempts to cover over deep defects in our modern ways of living by giving the appearance of meaningful change. Shallow Simplicity assumes that green technologies – such as fuel-efficient cars, fluorescent light bulbs and recycling – will fix our problems, give us breathing room and allow us to continue pretty much as we have in the past without requiring that we make fundamental changes in how we live and work. Cosmetic Simplicity puts green lipstick on our unsustainable lives to give them the outward appearance of health and happiness. A superficial Simplicity gives a false sense of security by implying that small measures will solve great challenges. A cosmetic Simplicity perpetuates the status quo by assuming that, with the use of green technologies, we can

moderate our impact and continue along our current path of growth for another half century or more.

Sophisticated/Conscious Simplicity

Seldom presented in the mass media and poorly understood is an elegant Simplicity that represents a deep, graceful and sophisticated transformation in our ways of living – the work we do, the transportation that we use, the homes and neighborhoods in which we live, the food that we eat, the cloths that we wear and much more. A sophisticated and graceful Simplicity seeks to heal our relationship with the Earth, with one another and with the sacred universe. Conscious Simplicity is not simple. This is a life-way that is growing and flowering with a garden of expressions. Sophisticated Simplicity fits aesthetically and sustainably into the real world of the 21st century.

The David Wann essay suggests that to make our “empire” sustainable, we need to change the patterns of our lives, NOT just the pieces (see p.212, introductory paragraph). Have the group look at the combined list of actions that you made – which actions are piecemeal solutions (cosmetic simplicity), and which represent lifestyle shifts (sophisticated simplicity)?

Further Discussion of Essays / Ted Talk

Split the group in to pairs again, ask people to pair up with different people this time and 5 to 10 minutes to talk about the single question given below. How much time you give them to talk depends on how much time you have left – so set a limit and then give a warning. You also may want to warn them that they will be asked to share their partner’s thoughts (rather than their own) when the circle reassembles. Here is the question for pairs discussion:

Which of the readings (including the TED talk) most resonated with you and why?

Bring the circle back together. Ask each person (if they are willing) to share one thing that their PARTNER talked about with the group (NOTE: the reasoning behind sharing someone else’s thought rather than your own is to show that you actively listened and also valued what your partner said). There is sure to be plenty of discussion, but if not, here are some guiding questions related to the essays/video that you could use if wanted:

- NATURE / EARTH
 - What can we do to have more time for nature?
 - What can we do to rethink our relationship to the Earth?
- EATING
 - Are there ways that we can eat more responsibly?
- SUCCESS / WEALTH
 - What are some ways that Americans define success/wealth?
 - What are some other ways that success/wealth can be defined?
- POLICIES
 - What did you think of Wann’s list of policies that reward sustainability (p.219)?
 - Are they plausible – what can we do to make them happen?

Commit to Action

What step toward simplicity will you commit to today? Take a moment to consider actions that you can take to improve your relationship with the Earth and environment.

What you would like to commit to doing before the next circle session? **This circle is here to support you in whatever way you choose to simplify.**

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 5 Action Commitments** form. Remind everyone that 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.