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# FACILITATOR GUIDE

*for Individuals, Small Groups, Advent Programs, and Retreats*

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## Living Well Through Advent 2022

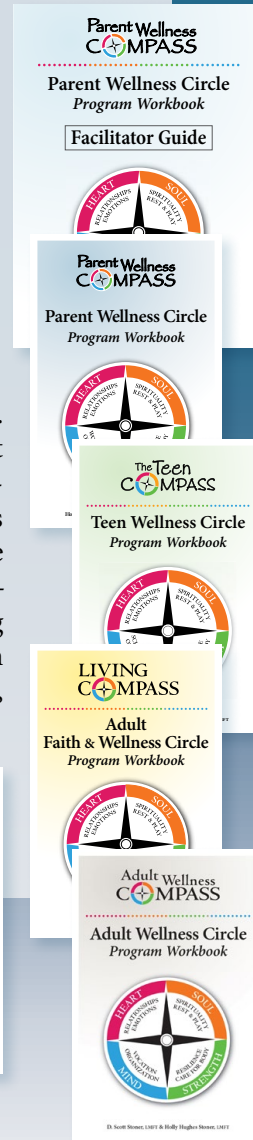
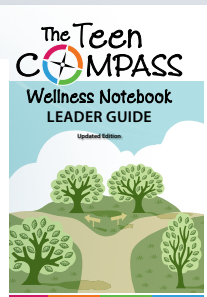
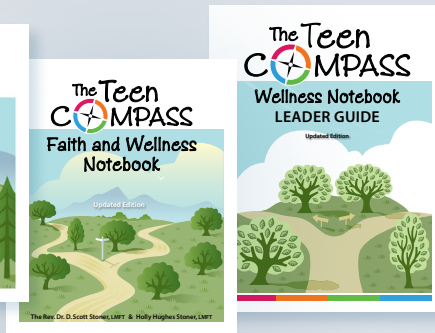
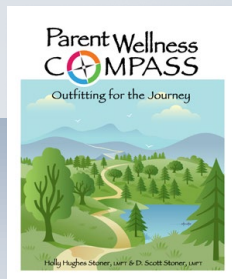


*Practicing Simplicity with All Your  
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

# The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative

In addition to our Advent and Lent devotionals (in English and Spanish), Living Compass offers a number of resources (faith-based and secular) and trainings designed to outfit individuals, families, congregations, and organizations for the journey toward wellness and wholeness. Recognizing that we have a variety of resources that can be used in many creative ways, we offer several ways to learn about, experience, and to become more familiar with them.

We invite you to visit our website: [livingcompass.org](http://livingcompass.org). There you will find more detailed information about our resources, including books, workbooks, facilitator guides for many of our programs, Wellness Circles, Community Wellness Advocate Certificate Trainings, as well as individual training and consultation options. You can also sign up for the Living Compass newsletter, which is the best way to learn about upcoming trainings, highlighted resources, and other opportunities.



To learn more about our resources and our Community Wellness Advocate training, please contact our Program Director Carolyn Karl at [Carolyn@LivingCompass.org](mailto:Carolyn@LivingCompass.org).

# Living Well Through Advent 2022

*Practicing Simplicity with All Your Heart,  
Soul, Strength, and Mind*

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## Facilitator Guide

*for Individuals, Small Groups, Advent Programs, and Retreats*

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*The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative was created with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy Nicholas. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to inspire us and makes this resource possible.*

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*Compiled, written, and edited by Robbin Brent  
Composition by Rick Soldin*

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The Collects, Psalms, and Canticles are from The Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

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# *Introduction and Welcome*

We at Living Compass are delighted to share this *Advent Facilitator Guide* with you. We are especially honored to include the voices and deep reflections of six featured writers. These voices represent diverse backgrounds, yet all come together to reflect upon the theme of this year's devotional: *Practicing Simplicity with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*.

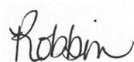
The 2022 Advent devotional and this facilitator guide can be used for individual reflection and study, small groups, a congregational Advent program, and/or a retreat. If you are using the facilitator guide with a group, we suggest you read through it first to familiarize yourself with the contents, concepts, and supplies you may need.

Each Sunday one of our guest writers, frequently using the Sunday Gospel reading, begins the week with an inspiring reflection. Each Monday Scott Stoner invites us to engage more deeply with a theme for the week related to practicing simplicity. The theme for week one is *Simplicity and Balance*; week two is *Simplicity and Letting Go*; week three is *Simplicity and Joy*; and week four of Advent is *Simplicity and Faith*. We have also included a "making it personal" section following each of the daily reflections. This is an opportunity for you to take what you are discovering from the reflections and go deeper with these insights in your own life.

I hope you'll take time to explore the collection of Bible verses, quotes, prayers, and practices related to the theme of simplicity that we have included on pages 38–43. We began including these a few years ago, and many people find that these enhance their daily readings and deepen their connection with the theme. These also have been included in the Advent devotional to augment the daily reflections, opening quotes, and making-it-personal questions that follow each day's reflection. If there is a particular practice that speaks to you and your group, the season of Advent offers a wonderful opportunity to try one with the support of community.

In addition to offering the option to have the reflections from this devotional emailed to you each day during Advent, *we also are hosting new online gathering opportunities for Advent*. While we no longer will be offering the private Advent Facebook Group, we are excited to announce a new way of connecting with others to share our experience of Advent in community. Living Compass staff will be hosting two weekly 75-minute sessions during the four weeks of Advent at two different times via Zoom for reflection and conversation around this year's theme. You may want to offer something like this, or your group might want to gather with others. You and/or your group are welcome to join as many as your schedule allows. To learn more or to register, visit [livingcompass.org/advent](http://livingcompass.org/advent).

However you choose to use these resources, we pray that this season of Advent be a time of spiritual renewal and recommitment to your relationship—with yourself, with each other, and with God. May your faith and your capacity for practicing simplicity be strengthened by your journey through this holy season of Advent.



**Robbin Brent**  
Director of Publications and New Resource Development

*A special thank you to the writers who contributed reflections for the devotional.*

**Robbin Brent**, the director of publications and resource development for Living Compass, a spiritual director, and contemplative retreat leader

**The Rev. Jane Johnson**, an Episcopal priest in Stevens Point, Wisconsin

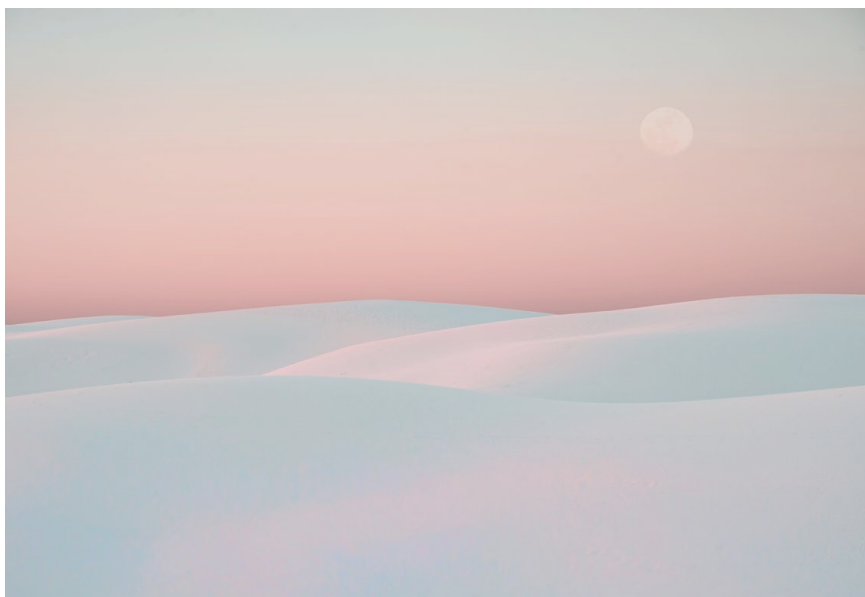
**The Very Rev. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, ThD**, an author, and Dean and President and Professor of New Testament at Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas

**The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski**, an Episcopal priest, wellness coach, and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**The Rev. Gary B. Manning**, an Episcopal priest, and congregational consultant and trainer in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

**The Very Rev. Amy McCreath**, the Dean of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston, Massachusetts

**The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner**, the founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative, author, psychotherapist, and co-creator of *The Wellness Compass*



# Support for the Facilitator

You do not need to be an expert in any way to facilitate a group. Instead, you are much like a midwife who helps guide the process. You will be the one who prepares a space (physically or virtually) where everyone feels welcome, included, and invited to share as desired during each session. You will be supporting each participant by making sure that everyone has needed materials, and understands and agrees to the guidelines established on behalf

of the group (see p. 9 for some suggested guidelines for listening).

We hope this guide offers the resources and support you need in order to provide a safe space to listen to each other, and to create an environment where authentic learning and conversations can occur about faith and simplicity during the season of Advent. If you have any questions, please ask: [info@livingcompass.org](mailto:info@livingcompass.org).

## Tips for Facilitating

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- Create a safe, supportive, friendly, and confidential environment (what is talked about in the group stays in the group).
- Familiarize yourself with the Guidelines for Listening (“Guidelines” on page 9).
- Remain friendly and open and maintain a sense of humor.
- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions to increase the interaction and meaningful conversation in the group. We provide questions for reflection in the Advent devotional for you to use. And, feel free to come up with additional questions in response to the needs and desires of your group.
- Ask group to commit to attend all meetings if at all possible, and to let the facilitator know when unable to attend.

## Group Dynamics

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All groups take on their own personality and energy. As a facilitator, it is important that you tune into your group and align with its energy, building rapport and trust. You can do this by:

- Warmly greeting each participant when they enter the room, or online space.
- Calling on participants by name.
- Remembering key issues and concerns they discuss and refer back to them throughout the program. This lets them know you are listening deeply.
- Using feedback appropriately. For example, thank a person for sharing, compliment when opportunities arise, or ask a participant to repeat something important that he or she just shared for emphasis.
- Actively listening by focusing completely on what the participant is saying and then repeating back what was heard for clarity.

## Guidelines for Listening

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[On page 9] Print copies for everyone and read them at the beginning of the session.

## Suggestions for handling special situations

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### *The overly chatty person*

- Affirm that you “hear” them and are listening by reflecting back or summarizing what they are saying and then move on.
- Don’t look at this person when asking a question.
- Thank the person for their positive contribution, and then ask for others to share.
- If it continues, talk to the person privately outside of the session.

### *The quiet person*

- Watch for signs that the person wants to participate, and engage them at that time.
- Respect their desire to not share much, but trust they may be benefiting from the session despite their silence.
- Connect with them before or after the meeting.

## Zoom Getting Started Guide for Participants

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- We have included a Zoom getting started guide for participants on p. 8 that you can share with the group ahead of the first session. This way everyone is comfortable using Zoom.
- If meeting via Zoom, make sure that you are comfortable using Zoom. If you aren’t, think about who might be able to assist you with this.

## Tips for Preparing

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- Pray for God to guide and support you as the facilitator. You are not alone. And pray for each person in the group.
- Read the reflections for the week you’ll be focusing on. You may want to read the Sunday reflection and Scripture at least twice before you meet.
- Be familiar with the theme for the week and the “making-it-personal” questions that follow each day’s reflection. Take notes on what stands out for you and refer to them as often as necessary to keep you grounded and focused. This will help you feel confident and relaxed and receptive to the needs and desires of the group.
- In addition to the suggested opening and closing prayers we have included in this guide, take a look at the Scripture, quotes, prayers, and spiritual practices that are included at the back of this guide, as well as in the devotional. These carefully curated resources, which are related to the theme, can offer enrichment and deepen the experience of Advent for your group.
- If meeting in person, prepare the room ahead of time, arranging chairs in a circle, or around a table. If meeting virtually, paying attention to the space you’ll be in during the session really makes a difference in how you feel during the gathering.
- You may want to have a small plant or greenery, and a candle (explain that the candle reminds us that we are in the presence of the Holy). If you are meeting online, you can light the candle at the beginning and place the candle and the greenery where others can enjoy them during your time together.
- Make sure to have any needed supplies on hand.



## *Suggested supplies for each week*

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Whether you are meeting in person or virtually, it can be very helpful to consider the following suggestions. Some are for you (marked “ facilitator”), and some are for you and the participants (marked “all”).

- Bibles or copies of the Scripture for the week (listed at the beginning of each week’s session) [all]
- *A Practicing Simplicity with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind* devotional [all]
- Copies of the prayers (pp. 38–43) and practices (pp. 10–12) Copies of Guidelines for Listening (p. 9) [all; can be sent in an email before the first gathering]
- Music and/or music player [facilitator]
- Pens/Pencils [all]
- Candle/matches [all]
- Bell or soft timer alarm to signal shifts [facilitator]
- A simple contact form to build a list to share among members of the group [facilitator]
- If meeting virtually, email the Zoom Getting-Started Guide for participants to the group a week before the first gathering, along with the Zoom link you’ll be using. We find it very helpful to use the same link for all sessions, and to email it to the group the day before or morning of as a gentle reminder.

# Zoom Getting Started Guide for Participants

You can find directions for joining the Zoom meeting via computer at: <https://bit.ly/3iAaUJf>.

You can also join a test meeting at <https://zoom.us/test> to make sure that everything works. If you haven't used Zoom before or are using it on a new computer, try to visit the test meeting before your first gathering.

If you are using Zoom on a phone or tablet, you can learn how for Apple devices here: (<https://bit.ly/2SyspPl>) or Android devices here: (<https://bit.ly/2SFBAxn>)

## More Zoom Tips

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- If you have never used Zoom before, click on the link a few minutes before you want to enter the meeting. You will be prompted to allow changes to your computer.
- When Zoom prompts you, click on “Save.” This should take 20–30 seconds.
- Once Zoom is downloaded a blue arrow will appear near the top right of your screen (if this does not happen look for the Zoom item in your “downloads” folder).
- Click on the blue arrow and select the Zoom (or from the “downloads” folder).
- A meeting box should pop up and you can then join the meeting.
- Click on “Join with Computer Audio.”
- Click on “Start Video” at the bottom left hand corner of the meeting window if you want people to be able to see you. We encourage the use of video during the sessions, especially during any small-group breakouts.
- If connection is slow or garbled, turn off your video and just use audio, or log off and log back on again.
- If you leave the meeting and want to come back, click on the link again.
- If you are on a computer, when you hover your mouse over the bottom of the Zoom screen, you will find icon controls to start or stop your audio and video, chat, and leave the meeting.
- If you are planning to use a phone for video, you will need to download the Zoom app for your phone.

—Zoom Guide compilation by Ken Haas

# *Guidelines for Listening*

Take a moment to be fully present and to rest in God's presence.

Listen deeply with the ears of your spiritual heart.

Value silence and the pauses between people speaking. This helps us to hear what has been said, as well as what has not been said.

Listen for the movement of Spirit within yourself and others, letting go of any impulse to "fix" or challenge anything.

Speak only for yourself, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, your own experiences. Use "I" rather than "you," "we," or "everyone" statements.

If you have spoken, wait until others in the group have had an opportunity to speak.

Confidentiality is essential. What is shared in the group stays in the group.

# Suggested Practices

Invite the participants to journey through Advent by using one of the following practices or another mindfulness practice that speaks to them (we have additional practices in the back of the devotional and this guide). You can do these together during your session, as well as invite them to engage with these practices between sessions.

**1. Gratitude Practice.** Each day, think about three things for which you are grateful and write them down in a journal. It might be helpful to consider one or more of the eight areas of wellness seen through the lens of *practicing simplicity*. Read them each day during the season of Advent as a powerful reminder of the goodness and grace and hope that surrounds you.

**2. Journal.** Take time each week to further reflect on the readings and *practicing simplicity*. Journaling is a great way to keep track of your thoughts and feelings. Writing down your thoughts, or drawing images, will help you to order and process them. You can use the reflections, making-it-personal questions, or additional resources in the back as prompts.

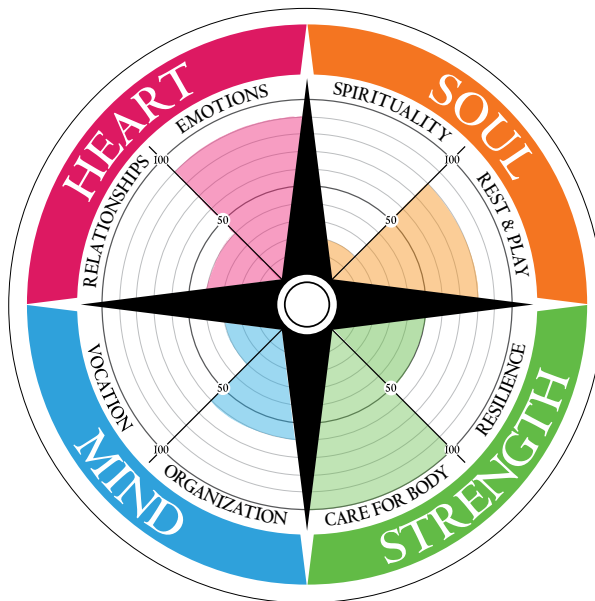
**3. Daily Prayer.** Consider praying each day between now and the next time the group meets. Think about how prayer applies to your journey through Advent, simplicity, and who God is calling you to be. Prayer is one way to ground yourself each day. If you are using this guide as part of a group, you may want to have a prayer partner for whom you commit to pray each day.

**4. Prayer partners.** Offer an opportunity for group members to pray for a prayer partner each day, praying for them by name and asking God to bless their desires. Encourage the group to contact their prayer partner at least once a week. A phone call, meeting (safely) for coffee or a meal, etc., are warmer ways of making contact. If time is an issue, emails work too. The goal is to stay in touch between gatherings. This will build trust and rapport more quickly and help those who may feel shy gain confidence and more ease in a new group setting.

**5. Living Compass Wellness Assessment and FAITH Step.** Using this resource, take some time to reflect on the ways in which practicing simplicity is showing up in the eight areas of wellness. Reflect on how each area of wellness is impacted by the theme for the week.

There is no “right” way to do this. Just allow yourself to see your life as a garden. Identify the areas of wellness you’ve tended and watered, and celebrate them. Then, identify any areas you may have neglected that you may want to focus on. You’ll shade in each area on the Assessment Compass on p. 11 as a value (0–100) based on how you feel you are doing, right here, right now. Then, choose one area to focus on for the week. A FAITH step is a place to write down the one thing you commit to do during the coming week. If you have a prayer partner, you could share that with him/her. If you have any questions, please ask: [info@livingcompass.org](mailto:info@livingcompass.org)

*Note: If there is a lot of interest in this practice, you can invite the group to identify a FAITH step for each week, choosing the same or a different area of wellness to focus on. They should also feel free to continue to focus on the same FAITH step for more than one week.*



Sample completed Wellness Assessment

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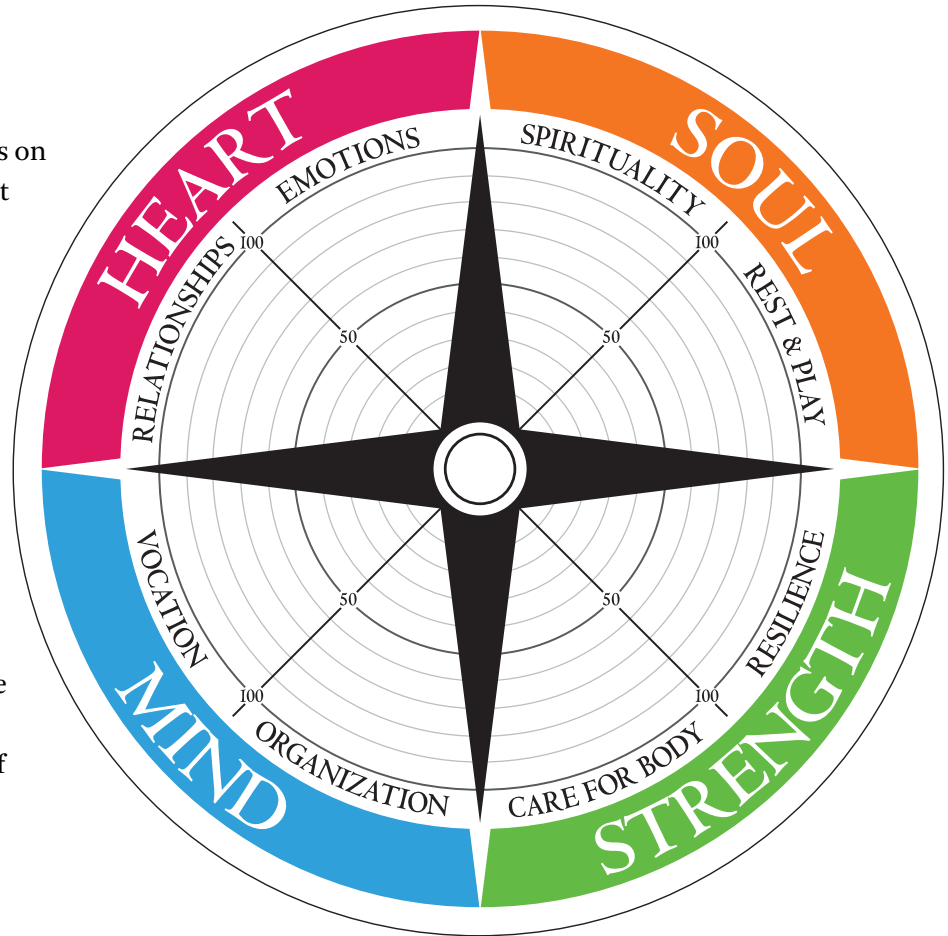
This Advent season, however you use the devotional and this facilitator guide, our hope and prayer is that you feel supported in your desire to more fully practice your faith in a way that is deeply renewing. Thank you for taking on the role of being a facilitator on this Advent journey. We hope this companion guide will help you as you walk with others during this season.

Shade in each of the eight areas on the compass with the value that reflects your current state of wellness and balance.

0 = Uh-Oh!

110 = Awesome!

Using this resource, reflect on how the theme for the week is showing up in one or more of the eight areas of wellness and choose one area to focus on for the week. Notice what happens when you focus on this area through the lens of practicing simplicity.



## FAITH Step

Now that you've put yourself on your own map of wellness, pick one area you feel called to focus on. Remember that whatever we pay attention to is what will grow.

**Area I feel inspired to focus on:**

---

**List one FAITH step you are ready and willing to take in the next 24 hours.**

---

**Is there someone with whom you would like to share this FAITH Step?**

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Support + accountability = much greater chance for success.

F  
A  
I  
T  
H

**Focused.**

Specific and narrow in scope.

**Action-Oriented.**

An action that is observable and measurable.

**Inspired.**

I feel that God wants me to take this step.

**Time-specific.**

I will do at this time, or within a finite time frame.

**Heartfelt and Honest.**

Commit to a step we are ready to take, true to wherever we are in the stages of change.

*Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.* —John C. Maxwell

# Using for an Advent Retreat (in person or virtual)

This program can be used as an Advent Retreat in a variety of ways. Below are two sample schedules. Please feel free to adapt and use however will be helpful for your retreat. It is important to leave space for silence, prayer, reflection, and creative responses, so don't force the entire contents of the Advent devotional into

a single retreat. If you want to offer your own reflections on *Practicing Simplicity* by expanding on any of the material in the devotional, feel free to do so. If you are meeting virtually, we've included a Zoom getting started guide for participants on p. 8.

## Full-day Retreat

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9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day  
9:15 AM Week One Reflection and Theme  
(*Simplicity and Balance*)  
Small-group discussion and reflection time  
10:15 AM Break  
10:30 AM Week Two Reflection and Theme  
(*Simplicity and Letting Go*)  
Small-group discussion and reflection time  
11:45 AM Break  
Noon Lunch  
1:00 PM Week Three Reflection and Theme  
(*Simplicity and Joy*)

Small-group discussion and reflection time  
2:00 PM Break  
2:15 PM Week Four Reflection and Theme  
(*Simplicity and Faith*)  
Small-group discussion and reflection time  
3:15 PM Break  
3:30 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together  
4:30 PM Close with prayer

## Half-day Retreat

---

9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day  
9:15 AM Weeks One and Two (read Sunday's reflection for both)  
Small-group discussion and reflection time (on one of the reflections; group to choose)  
10:30 AM Break  
10:45 AM Weeks Three and Four (read Sunday's reflection for both)  
Small-group discussion and reflection time (on one of the reflections; group to

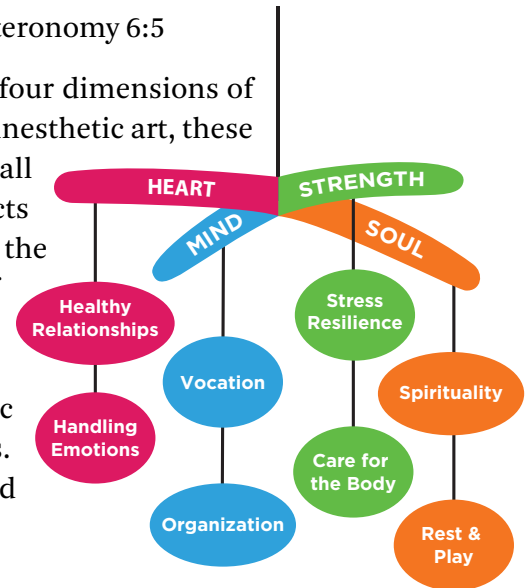
choose; could write down a FAITH step and share with at least one other person)  
Noon Lunch  
1:00 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together  
2:00 PM Close with prayer

# The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

The Living Compass Model for Well-Being offers us guidance in four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Just like a mobile or kinesthetic art, these dimensions are interconnected—movement in one area affects all the others. We are not compartmentalized people. Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact on the other areas. Each of the four quadrants focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness. Our call is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*.



## Areas of Wellness

### Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Handling Emotions.** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

### Soul

- **Spirituality.** The ability to connect with a higher purpose in life and to have a clear set of beliefs, morals, and values that guides our actions.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

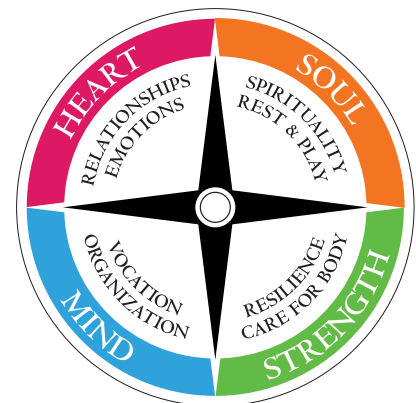
### Strength

- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.

### Mind

- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.
- **Vocation.** The ability to align our life's purpose with the gifts and talents we've been given. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment activities.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of spirituality and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we intentionally choose the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that *health*, *healing*, *wholeness*, and *holy* all come from the same root word *hal* or *haelen*.



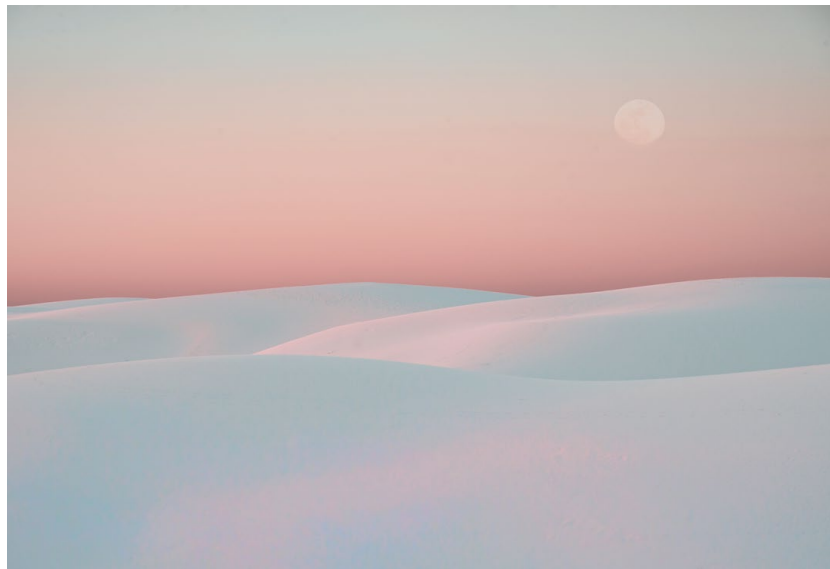


# Practicing Simplicity

## SESSION ONE: THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

*Theme for the Week:*

### Simplicity and Balance



#### Reflections from the Devotional

<b>Sunday</b>	Waking Up to the Gifts of Simplicity.....	11
<b>Monday</b>	Simplicity and Balance .....	13
<b>Tuesday</b>	Being and Doing .....	14
<b>Wednesday</b>	Singleness of Heart .....	15
<b>Thursday</b>	FOMO .....	16
<b>Friday</b>	Simplicity and the Breath .....	17
<b>Saturday</b>	The Gift of Rebalance .....	18



### Readings for the First Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm: Psalm 122

Second Reading: Romans 13:11-14

Gospel: Matthew 24:36-44

### Session One Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- Prayer
- Introduce yourself
- Go around the group with introductions. You can ask them to tell their name, where they are from, and what they hope to get out of this time together.
- Read the *Guidelines for Listening*, (p. 9) out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the first Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the theme for the week: *Simplicity and Balance*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
  - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
  - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
  - Small-group breakout for discussion (3-4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
  - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Organize prayer partners (optional).
- Introduce Practices and invite group to choose one to use during the week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

### Opening Prayer

O God, I am seeking for ways to be less encumbered; ways to simplify my life; ways to build spaces and silences into a life full of busyness and noise.

Teach me to find that quiet center of self that you have hidden within me, a resting in your presence. [Amen.]

—*Jamie L. Watkins*

### Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating any others, either from the resources in the back, or others you think would work well with the theme of *Practicing Simplicity*.



### Opening Invitation

As we embark on this Advent Journey together, I invite you to think about what this season means for you.

Invite participants to share their thoughts and reflections.

### The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent

#### Matthew 24:36-44

##### The Necessity for Watchfulness

‘But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

### Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the Scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

**Different translations.** Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

**Different voices.** If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).



### Read the Living Compass Reflection for the First Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 11–12 in the Advent devotional.

**Then, read Monday’s reflection** out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the theme for the week: *Simplicity and Balance* (found on p. 13 in the Advent devotional).

Invite brief responses.

### Reflection and Journal Time

#### Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the devotional (pp. 13–18) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

#### “Making it Personal” Questions for Week One

##### Monday: *Simplicity and Balance*

What connection do you see between simplicity and balance? As you begin your journey through Advent, are you aware of any choices that you want to make as you prepare for the coming of Christmas, choices that may be different from ones you have made in years past? Do you want to include simplicity and balance in what you are considering? How might today’s quote from Thomas Merton inspire you?

##### Tuesday: *Being and Doing*

Do you struggle with finding a balance between being and doing? What practices or choices might help you find a balance between being and doing during this season of Advent? Did you try the way of praying I described using “Be still and know that I am God”? If yes, what was that like for you?

##### Wednesday: *Singleness of Heart*

In what ways do you think intentionally cultivating a practice of gratitude could help you to live with more gladness: in heart, soul, strength, and mind? Does Brené Brown’s definition help you to identify those things in life for which you are grateful?



### **Thursday: FOMO**

Do you struggle with feelings of FOMO? Are you experiencing these feelings right now around the holidays? How might focusing on prayer and gratitude give you more of the “peace which surpasses all understanding”?

### **Friday: Simplicity and the Breath**

Did this breath prayer practice help you to be present and open to God? If you felt any resistance or found yourself distracted, were you able to return to your breath, the silence, and your center? If not, simply notice this without judgment, instead offering kindness, acceptance, and love to yourself.

### **Saturday: The Gift of Rebalance**

What were your first thoughts about today’s quote? Is there a particular area of well-being you feel is too wobbly right now? If yes, what is one simple practice you might use to recenter yourself throughout the day?

### **Group Discussion**

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

**Briefly review Suggested Practices** on pp. 10–12, 41–43, and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

### **Closing Prayer**

Holy One,  
help me to be grateful for what  
I have,  
to remember that I don’t need  
most  
of what I want,  
and that joy is found in  
simplicity  
and generosity.  
Amen.

—*Belief.net*

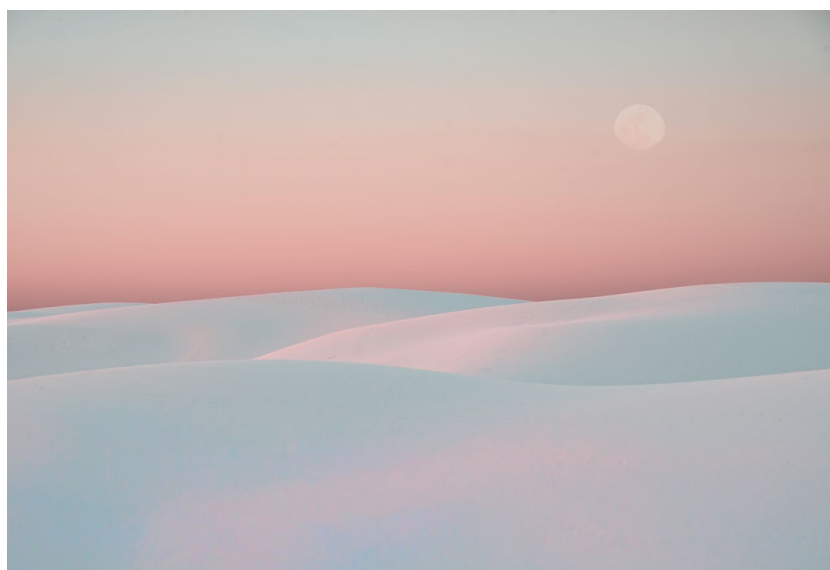


# Practicing Simplicity

## SESSION TWO: THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

*Theme for the Week:*

### Simplicity and Letting Go



#### Reflections from the Devotional

<b>Sunday</b>	Santiago and Simplicity . . . . .	19
<b>Monday</b>	Simplicity and Letting Go . . . . .	21
<b>Tuesday</b>	Letting Go of Worry . . . . .	22
<b>Wednesday</b>	Freedom in Letting Go . . . . .	23
<b>Thursday</b>	Grief and Simplicity . . . . .	24
<b>Friday</b>	A Spoon and a Prayer . . . . .	25
<b>Saturday</b>	The Stable's Invitation . . . . .	26



### Readings for the Second Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalm: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Second Reading: Romans 15:4-13

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

### Session Two Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- Prayer
- Read Guidelines for Listening to encourage active and respectful listening (p. 9)
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the second Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the second Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the theme for the week: *Simplicity and Letting Go*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
  - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
  - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
  - Small-group breakout for discussion (3-4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
  - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Explore how the theme for the week shows up in the areas of wellness from one of the four Living Compass quadrants that are introduced on p. 13.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

### Opening Prayer

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

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.

Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Serenity Prayer*

### Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating any others, either from the resources in the back, or others you think would work well with the theme of *Practicing Simplicity*.





## Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme showed up during the past week.

## The Gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent

### Matthew 3:1-12

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.””

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

## Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the Scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

### Different translations.

Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

**Different voices.** If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).



### Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 19–20 in the Advent devotional.

**Then, read Monday’s reflection** out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the theme for the week: *Simplicity and Letting Go* (found on p. 21 in the Advent devotional).

Invite brief responses.

### Reflection and Journal Time

#### Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the devotional (pp. 21–26) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

#### “Making it Personal” Questions for Week Two

##### **Monday:** *Simplicity and Letting Go*

As we begin this week’s focus on simplicity and letting go, what does this theme bring to mind for you? Do you see a spiritual connection between simplicity and letting go? In the list of emotions Gary mentioned that can weigh us down, is there one specific thing you would like to let go of this Advent?

##### **Tuesday:** *Letting Go of Worry*

Were you able to name a specific worry that you want to release? Did speaking, visualizing, and/or writing about letting go of this worry ease its burden? Do you see a connection between simplicity and letting go of this worry?

##### **Wednesday:** *Freedom in Letting Go*

What is your response to the connection Gary made when he wrote that John the Baptist’s minimalism was an act of faith? Do you have a desire to lighten your load and free yourself from past choices that no longer serve your life? If yes, is there one thing you are ready to let go of this Advent?

##### **Thursday:** *Grief and Simplicity*

Are you experiencing grief or loss this holiday season? How can you both honor your grief and be open to new possibilities that might be present for you this year? In honoring that grief, is there any way you wish to simplify how you celebrate Advent and Christmas?



### **Friday: *A Spoon and a Prayer***

Can you relate to the struggle with a need to be perfect? This can be especially true this time of year. Can you think of one simple practice or prayer you could incorporate into your day that would help you to be more accepting, patient, and kind, toward yourself, and toward others?

### **Saturday: *The Stable's Invitation***

Are you facing a situation or circumstance beyond your control right now? What helps you to let go of an outcome and instead trust in God's loving presence? How might you experience God's love being birthed anew in you?

### **Group Discussion**

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

**Briefly review Suggested Practices** on pp. 10–12, 41–43, and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

### **Closing Prayer**

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

Living one day at a time;  
enjoying one moment at a  
time; accepting hardships as  
the pathway to peace; taking,  
as He did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have  
it; trusting that He will make  
all things right if I surrender  
to His Will; that I may be  
reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with  
Him forever in the next.

Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr, *The  
Serenity Prayer*

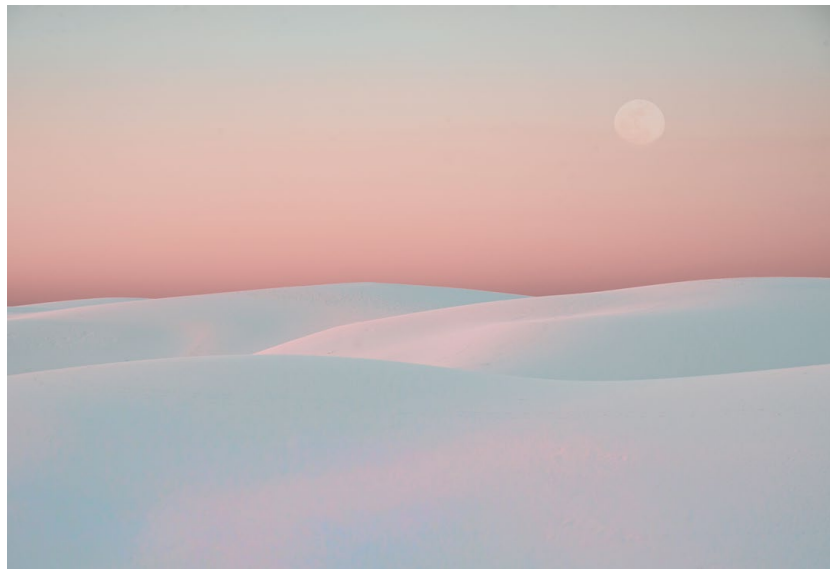


# Practicing Simplicity

## SESSION THREE: THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

*Theme for the Week:*

### Simplicity and Joy



#### Reflections from the Devotional

<b>Sunday</b>	Being Present to Joy .....	27
<b>Monday</b>	Simplicity and Joy .....	29
<b>Tuesday</b>	Saying Yes! .....	30
<b>Wednesday</b>	Making a Joyful Noise .....	31
<b>Thursday</b>	True Simplicity and Joy .....	32
<b>Friday</b>	Simple Joy .....	33
<b>Saturday</b>	Birthday Joy .....	34



### Readings for the Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm: Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:46b-55

Second Reading: James 5:7-10

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

### Session Three Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- Prayer
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the third Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the third Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the theme for the week: *Simplicity and Joy*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
  - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion.
  - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
  - Small-group breakout for discussion (3-4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
  - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Explore how the theme for the week shows up in the areas of wellness from one of the four Living Compass quadrants: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Encourage participants to choose an area to focus on during the coming week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

### Opening Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand,

To be loved, as to love. [Amen.]

—*St. Francis of Assisi*

### Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating any others, either from the resources in the back, or others you think would work well with the theme of *Practicing Simplicity*.



### Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme showed up during the past week.

### The Gospel for the Third Sunday of Advent

#### Matthew 11:2-11

##### The Necessity for Watchfulness

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

##### Jesus Praises John the Baptist

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

“ See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.”

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

### Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the Scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

**Different translations.** Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

**Different voices.** If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.)



### Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Third Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 27–28 in the Advent devotional.

**Then, read Monday’s reflection** out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the theme for the week: *Simplicity and Joy* (found on p. 29 in the Advent devotional).

Invite brief responses.

### Reflection and Journal Time

#### Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the devotional (pp. 29–34) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

#### “Making it Personal” Questions for Week Three

##### **Monday:** *Simplicity and Joy*

Do you think of happiness and joy as being different? If so how, or why not? What initial thoughts do you have about the connection between simplicity and joy? Do you see a connection between these two in your life right now?

##### **Tuesday:** *Saying Yes!*

What might God be inviting you to spontaneously say “Yes” to right now? Are you aware of times when you are seemingly saying “Yes” to God, but often making it a “Yes, but ...”? Are the holidays this year offering you a chance to say “Yes” to a different plan than perhaps you originally had in mind?

##### **Wednesday:** *Making a Joyful Noise*

What is your response to the idea that all areas of whole-person well-being are interconnected? Is there an activity or hobby you’ve wanted to try but for some reason haven’t yet? Something that makes you happy just to think about? If yes, what is one step you could take today that would move you closer to your desire?

##### **Thursday:** *True Simplicity and Joy*

What do you think of the idea that comparison can be a thief of both joy and simplicity? Are you caught up in any kind of comparing your life to others during this holiday season? If so, what choices can you make to reclaim a greater sense of true simplicity and joy?





### **Friday: Simple Joy**

What helps you to identify and celebrate the simple joys in your life? Perhaps you might pause right now and name something small that has brought you joy recently. What might help you to continue to notice the small things that bring you joy for the remainder of Advent?

### **Saturday: Birthday Joy**

Recall a time a child taught you a lesson about joy. How might you apply that lesson to your life today? Notice what you pay attention to and how it affects the quality of your day.

### **Group Discussion**

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

**Briefly review Suggested Practices** on pp. 10–12, 41–43, and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, make me an instrument of  
thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me  
sow love,  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much  
seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to  
understand,  
To be loved, as to love. [Amen.]

—*St. Francis of Assisi*

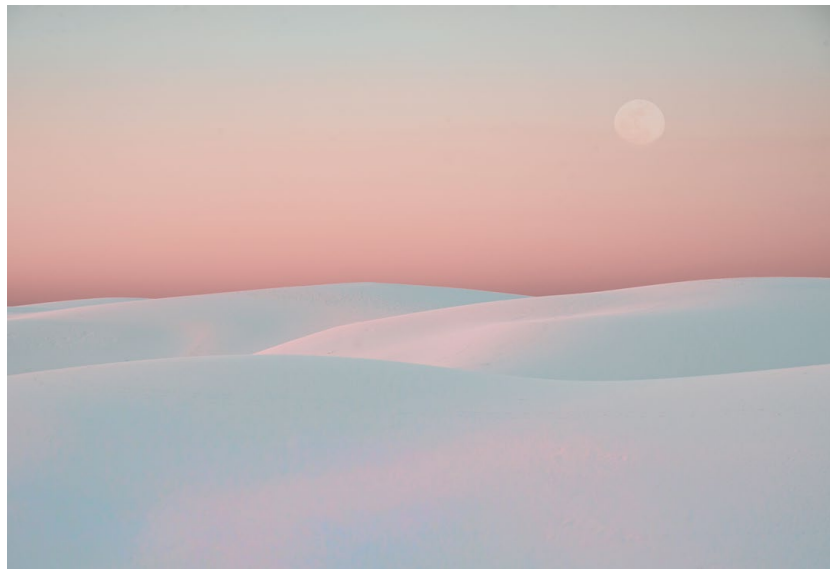


# Practicing Simplicity

## SESSION FOUR: THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

*Theme for the Week:*

### Simplicity and Faith



#### Reflections from the Devotional

<b>Sunday</b>	Love Is Waiting to Be Born . . . . .	35
<b>Monday</b>	Simplicity and Faith . . . . .	37
<b>Tuesday</b>	The Gift of Simplicity . . . . .	38
<b>Wednesday</b>	Faith as Our Compass . . . . .	39
<b>Thursday</b>	Bowing and Bending . . . . .	40
<b>Friday</b>	Sacred Dance of Faith . . . . .	41
<b>Christmas Eve</b>	Holy Simplicity . . . . .	42
<b>Christmas Day</b>	Receiving the Gift. . . . .	43



### Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Second Reading: Romans 1:1-7

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

### Session Four Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- Prayer
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of how the theme showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the fourth Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the fourth Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the theme for the week: *Simplicity and Faith*. Also read the reflections for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day as a way of more deeply engaging as a group. Invite brief responses. Note: you may want to invite your group to consider practicing this theme throughout the twelve days of Christmas.
- Reflect and Learn
  - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
  - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
  - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
  - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group members indicate a desire to stay connected.
- Close with prayer.

### Opening Prayer

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
 And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
 When true simplicity is gained,  
 To bow and to bend, we will not be ashamed,  
 To turn, turn will be our delight,  
 Till by turning, turning we come 'round right [Amen.]

—Joseph Brackett, *Simple Gifts*

### Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating any others, either from the resources in the back, or others you think would work well with the theme of *Practicing Simplicity*.



### Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme showed up during the past week.

### The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

**Matthew 1:18-25**

#### The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

### Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the Scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

**Different translations.** Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

**Different voices.** If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.)



### Read the Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 35–36 in the Advent devotional.

**Also, read the reflections for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day** out loud (found on pp. 42–43 in the Advent devotional).

Invite brief responses.

### Reflection and Journal Time

#### Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on any questions the group or you select from any of the weekday reflections in the devotional as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

#### “Making it Personal” Questions for Week Four

##### **Monday:** *Simplicity and Faith*

What initial thoughts do you have about the connection between simplicity and faith? Can you think of a phrase or a portion of Scripture that could serve as a “focus item” for you this week as you think about a Christian approach to simplicity?

##### **Tuesday:** *The Gift of Simplicity*

What words or phrases speak to you in the first two lines of *Simple Gifts*? What do you think of the idea that simplicity is a gift we are given and that our role is to be “stewards of simplicity”?

##### **Wednesday:** *Faith as Our Compass*

Reflect on your own relationship with faith. What if anything has shifted for you recently? Have you noticed any distractions or resistance getting in the way of receiving these gifts? In what ways has the focus this Advent supported you in experiencing the gifts of simplicity?

##### **Thursday:** *Bowing and Bending*

Plans don’t often go as expected during the holidays, so how might you have the opportunity to bend and be flexible right now? What difference do you see in offering the gift of bowing and bending because you choose to, rather than from a place of feeling like you have to?



### **Friday: Sacred Dance of Faith**

How do you know you are “coming ’round right”? How might you intentionally call on your faith and the wisdom of your body to help guide your next steps?

### **Christmas Eve: Holy Simplicity**

Which lyrics of *Silent Night* speak to you at this moment? How has your understanding of simplicity evolved since the first Sunday of Advent? If things don’t go as planned for you today or tomorrow, how might you remain open to the unexpected ways in which God can still show up?

### **Group Discussion**

- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group indicates a desire to stay connected.

### **Closing Prayer**

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the  
gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where  
we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in  
the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and  
delight.  
When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend, we will not  
be ashamed,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come  
'round right [Amen.]

—Joseph Brackett, *Simple Gifts*

# Scripture, Quotes, Prayers & Practices for Advent

## Scripture\*

*I know my God that thou lovest simplicity, wherefore I also in the simplicity of my heart, have joyfully offered all these things.*

—1 Chronicles 29:17 (Douay–Rheims Bible)

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*Be still and know that I am God.*

—Psalm 46:10

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*O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

—Psalm 95:1

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*Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

—Psalm 95:2

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*This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

—Psalm 118:24

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*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ... a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.*

—Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! ... I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

—Isaiah 43:18-19

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*Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ... if God so clothes the grass of the field ... will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?*

—Matthew 6:27-30

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*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.*

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

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*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him. ...*

—Romans 15:13

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*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

—Philippians 4:6

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\*These Scripture are in addition to the ones used in the daily reflections in the devotional.





## Quotes\*

*When we get the size of our expectations right, we do simple things well.*

—Donna Schaper, *Living Well While Doing Good*

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*Simplicity is not about deprivation. Simplicity is about a greater appreciation for things that really matter.*

—Anonymous

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*Less really is more. Only those who have nothing to prove and nothing to protect, those who have in them a broad space big enough to embrace every part of their part of their own soul, can receive the Christ. And Christ himself will lead us on this path.*

—Richard Rohr, *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go*

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*Being content with less, creates space in the heart for more love.*

—Margo Vader, *Take A Little Soul Time*

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*Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.*

—Thích Nhất Hạnh

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*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend, we will not be ashamed,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.*

—Joseph Brackett, *Simple Gifts*

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*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.*

*We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.*

*We should like to skip the intermediate stages.*

*We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.*

*And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—*

*and that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you;*

*your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste.*

*Don't try to force them on,*

*as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)*

*will make of you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.*

*Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you,*

*and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.*

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Patient Trust*, from *Hearts on Fire*

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*Spiritual joy arises from purity of the heart and perseverance in prayer.*

—Francis of Assisi

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*When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.*

—Rumi

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*In everything, love simplicity.*

—Saint Francis de Sales

\*These quotes are in addition to the ones used in the daily reflections in the devotional.



*Life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time. ... We need not get frantic. God is at the helm. And when our little day is done we lie down quietly in peace, for all is well.*

—Thomas R. Kelly

*Joy is not just about being happy. Joy is a rigorous spiritual practice of saying yes to life on life's terms.*

—Mark Matousek

*The simple life does not begin outside. ... It begins inside with the quality of the soul. It is first and foremost the quality of sincerity, which is the opposite of duplicity or sham. Emerson's famous line, "your life talks so loudly that I cannot hear the words you say," makes the idea pretty clear.*

—Rufus M. Jones

*Pure prayer begins at the threshold of silence. It says nothing, asks for nothing. It is a kind of listening. The deeper the listening, the less we listen for, until silence itself becomes the voice of God.*

—Stephen Mitchell, *A Book of Psalms*

## Prayers\*

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

*Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.*

—Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Serenity Prayer*

*Lord, help me to live this day, quietly, easily. To lean upon Thy great strength, trustfully, restfully. To wait for the unfolding of Thy will, patiently, serenely. To meet others, peacefully, joyously. To face tomorrow, confidently, courageously. [Amen.]*

—Francis of Assisi

*O God, I am seeking for ways to be less encumbered; ways to simplify my life; ways to build spaces and silences into a life full of busyness and noise.*

*Teach me to find that quiet center of self that you have hidden within me, a resting in your presence. [Amen.]*

—Jamie L. Watkins

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

*O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek To be consoled as to console, To be understood as to understand, To be loved, as to love. [Amen.]*

—Francis of Assisi

\* These prayers are in addition to the ones used in the daily reflections in the devotional.



*Father, to You I raise my whole being,  
—a vessel emptied of self. Accept, Lord,  
this my emptiness, and so fill me with  
Yourself—Your Light, Your Love, Your Life—  
That these precious Gifts  
may radiate through me and  
overflow from the chalice of my heart  
unto the hearts of all with whom  
I come in contact this day  
revealing unto them  
the beauty of  
Your Joy  
and  
Wholeness  
the  
Serenity  
of Your Peace  
which nothing can destroy.  
Amen.*

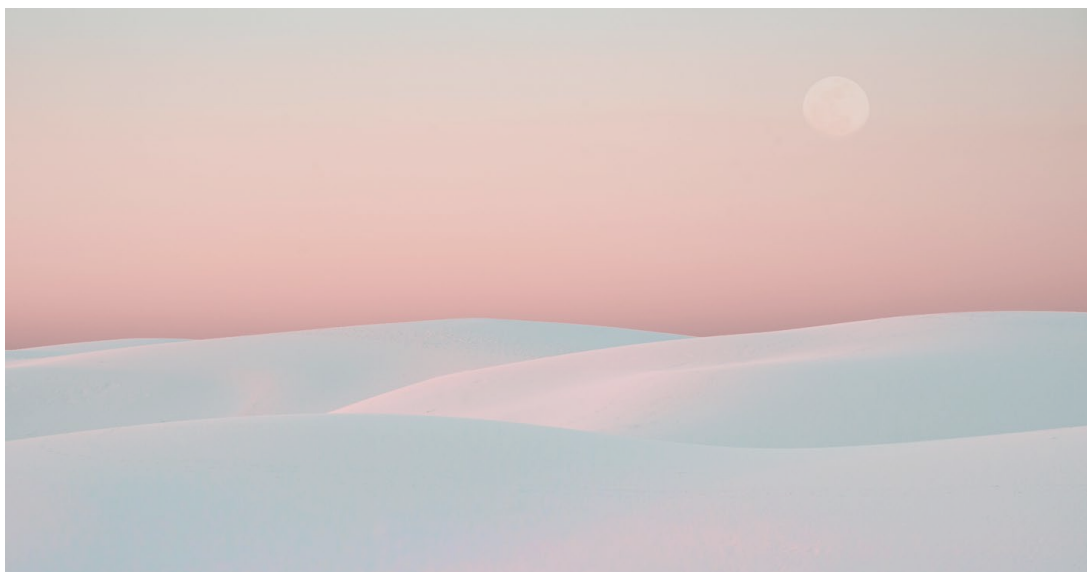
—Frances Nuttall, *Prayer of the Chalice*

*Grant us strength and courage to love and serve you  
with gladness and singleness of heart. [Amen.]*

—Book of Common Prayer, p. 365

*Lord,  
it is night.  
The night is for stillness.  
Let us be still in the presence of God.  
It is night after a long day.  
What has been done has been done;  
what has not been done has not been done;  
let it be.  
The night is dark.  
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of  
our own lives  
rest in you.  
The night is quiet.  
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,  
all dear to us,  
and all who have no peace.  
The night heralds the dawn.  
Let us look expectantly to a new day,  
new joys,  
new possibilities.  
In your name we pray.  
Amen.*

—New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 184





## Spiritual Prayer Practices\*

### Receive & Release Prayer Practice

This prayer practice focuses on two words: *receive* and *release*. Here are some simple instructions for getting started.

- First, find a comfortable sitting position and begin to take deep, slow breaths.
- After you have relaxed and settled into the gentle rhythm of your breathing, begin to say the word *receive* silently in your mind each time you inhale, and the word *release* as you exhale. So, it's *receive* as you inhale, and *release* as you exhale. These two words will also help to focus your mind whenever it begins to wander.
- As you repeat the word *receive*, imagine yourself receiving what God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now.
- As you repeat the word *release*, imagine yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time.
- Start by doing this practice for three to five minutes (it can be helpful to set a quiet timer at the beginning).
- If you have a particular prayer concern, you can use this practice to assist you in finding peace and guidance regarding your concern. Bring the concern to mind as you begin the "Receive, Release" practice. You may even find that you are given a different word or phrase that comes to mind to use in place of *receive* or *release*. You might, for example, find yourself mindfully repeating "simplicity," "kindness," or "forgiveness" on your in-breath and perhaps something like "control," "anger," or "judgment" on the out-breath.

### Loving-Kindness Prayer Practice

*May you be happy.*

*May you be healthy.*

*May you be safe.*

*May you live with ease.*

Each time you say this prayer, first think of those you love. Then, as you repeat the prayer, you may want to bring in those you find challenging to love right now, and those you have never met.

### Centering Prayer Practice

A way to sit with God without using language. It is to consent to the Divine Presence within. Dwelling in God who dwells in us. The present moment is where we meet God and where we have an opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love.

#### The Four Guidelines

(from Thomas Keating, *Contemplative Outreach*)

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (You can pray for God to give you an image/word that is just what you need at this time.)
2. Sit comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and then silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,\* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

\* thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

\* These practices are in addition to the ones mentioned on pp. 10–12 in this guide..



### Examen Prayer Practice

A way of paying attention as we listen for God. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God's presence. Then:

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God's purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God's purpose for your life, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God's plan and purpose for you tomorrow, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

—For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality's website: [bit.ly/38De8gc](http://bit.ly/38De8gc)

### Additional Practices in the Devotional

Please see the following pages in the devotional for other practices:

- p. 14: Prayer Practice using *Be Still and Know That I Am God*
- p. 15: Gratitude Practice
- p. 17: Breath Prayer Practice

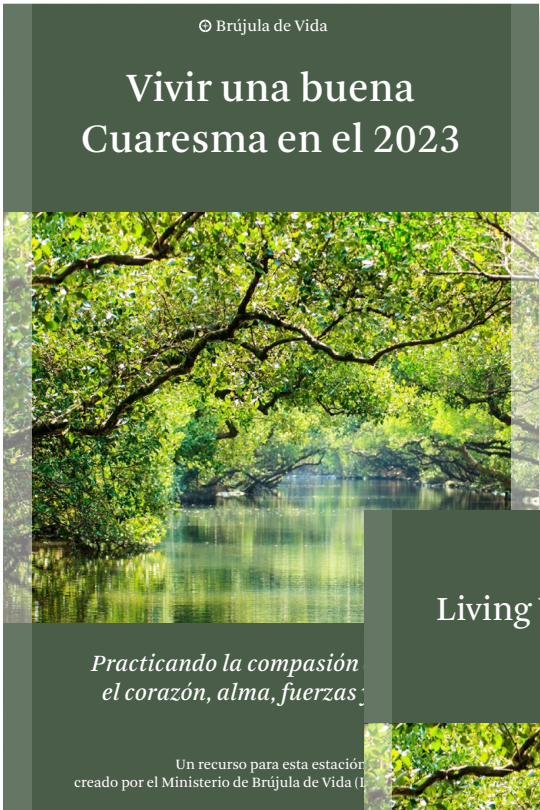
### Welcoming Prayer Practice

When used consistently, this prayer practice has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional patterns, and limiting comfort zones. Using it can help move us through challenging or painful experiences, times of disturbed emotion or anguish, and even moments where unhelpful control tendencies and self-inflation takes us over.

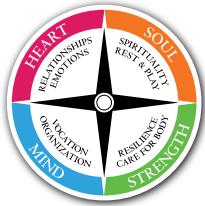
#### Three steps for the Welcoming Prayer Practice:

1. **Focus or “sink in”** to become aware and physically present to the particular experience or upset without analyzing or judging yourself or the situation. Don't try to change anything at this stage—just stay present.
2. **Welcome and lightly name** the response that is being triggered by the difficult situation, such as “fear” or “anger” or “pain.” Acknowledge the response as sensation, and recognize that in this moment, if the experience is not being rejected or repressed, it can be endured. Ever so gently, begin to say “welcome,” such as “welcome fear,” “welcome resentment,” etc. Though this step is counter-intuitive and the impulse is most likely to try to push away the unpleasant emotion, Cynthia Bourgeault explains: “By welcoming it instead, you create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. By embracing the thing you once defended yourself against or ran from, you are actually disarming it, removing its power to hurt you or chase you back into your smaller self.”
3. **Transition to a “letting go,”** whereby the intensity of the situation can recede. This enables the natural fluidity of sensation to come and then go.

—For more on the Welcome Prayer/Practice, go to: <https://bit.ly/2Sqtj0R>

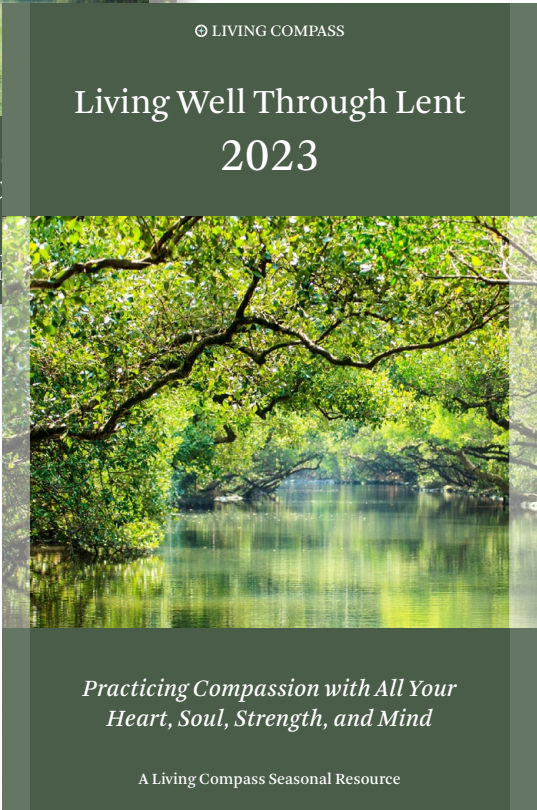


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