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New Embodiments of Ancient Wisdom: How Green Spiritual Practices of Simplicity Can Meaningfully Integrate Faith and Environmental Justice Among Emerging Adults

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NEW EMBODIMENTS OF ANCIENT WISDOM: HOW GREEN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF SIMPLICITY CAN MEANINGFULLY INTEGRATE FAITH AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

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for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This Doctor of Ministry Project explores how green spiritual practices of simplicity provide opportunities for spiritual formation and missional participation, especially for emerging adults. This project synthesizes the biblical and theological foundations for creation care, overviews the sociology of emerging adulthood, offers a framework for Christian simplicity, and investigates how green spiritual practices of simplicity impact the lived experiences of average followers of Jesus. Through interviews with 20 participants between the ages of 18 and 35, this study outlines what green spiritual practices of simplicity are and offers an analysis of themes that demonstrate that green spiritual practices of simplicity are meaningful for individual spiritual formation and communal participation in God's mission.

By integrating biblical and theological reasons for caring for the environment, historical and traditional practices of simplicity, and the unique contextual challenges of emerging adulthood, this project reveals the spiritual depth of practices that are oriented toward caring for God's creation. Not only are green spiritual practices of simplicity an opportunity to worship the Creator, they are also one way to experience wholeness within ourselves, love our neighbor, speak to the pressing concerns of young people, and embody the good news of Jesus to all creation.

For the mvule
and the magnolia
and the mountains of Malibu.

May they usher us
into the presence of God
for many generations to come.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Importance and Rationale of This Study

My heart aches for the open wounds we've inflicted on the earth. Perhaps even more so, my heart aches that God's people are not known for our tender and gentle care for God's creation but instead have allowed misled dualistic beliefs to make us apathetic to the groans of creation all around us. Since the beginning of my emerging adulthood, my environmental journey and my spiritual journey have been intertwined, and I have become increasingly convicted of the calling on each Christian and on the church as a whole to be the world's forerunners in addressing the injustices and suffering perpetrated by human abuse of the earth. Thus, my interest in the climate crisis is rooted in both spiritual formation and missional participation for individuals and communities. Considering how important the climate crisis is to today's college students, to whom I minister, this drew me to thinking about a project that would include creation care in some way.

At the same time, in my own spiritual life and in my work with college students, I have noticed the need for a more robust and well-rounded approach to faith and worship. While enthusiastic and charismatic worship gatherings have immense value, they need to be balanced by opportunities to serve others, to experience contemplative prayer, to appreciate the rich historical traditions and rituals of the Christian community across time and space, and other countless avenues for encountering God. Mindfulness practices have been especially meaningful to many of my students, and while one-off mindfulness practices can have momentary benefits of helping them still their thoughts, lessen anxiety, and feel more present, I have wondered what it would look like for them to

integrate practices of mindfulness into their daily lives. This led me to consider how contemporary ascetic practices—what I have come to refer to as spiritual practices of simplicity—might be made accessible to college students.

As I reflected on my own faith journey, especially during my own emerging adulthood, and as I considered the needs and longings of the college students to whom I minister, and as I tried to be attentive to the nudging of the Holy Spirit, I was led to this phrase: *green spiritual practices of simplicity*. I wanted to create a project that integrated creation care with simplicity in a way that had significant implications for the community and for justice, yet that was simultaneously accessible to the average emerging adult *right now*, no matter their income, their background, their education, their living situation, or their geographical context. The hope is that if these green spiritual practices of simplicity are accessible to college students and other emerging adults (and those who have recently emerged into adulthood), then they will be accessible to any follower of Jesus. More importantly, the hope is that these practices would function as a tangible, meaningful way for disciples of Jesus to integrate their love for God's creation with their daily expression of their faith *and* to allow their faith to lead them to a more holistic expression of their love for God, neighbor, and the world.

Ministry Context

I am the Campus Minister at the University Church of Christ at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. I started this position at the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester. While my primary focus is college undergraduate students (virtually all of whom are traditional students and emerging adults), I work for and serve the entire church community, including families and seniors. As the Campus Minister, my priority

is the spiritual formation of college students, which includes helping them connect with each other and with the multigenerational community of the church. As a church embedded on a college campus, including the offices of the ministry staff and our congregation's worship space, a significant missional goal of the church is to invite students into community, nurture existing commitments to Jesus among students, and encourage all students in the development of their faith.

Because I started my new position when I was already well into my Doctor of Ministry program, my project is not specific to my context at Pepperdine University. However, because my entire ministry career has been on college campuses (before Pepperdine, I worked in the Office of Spiritual Formation in Student Life at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee), my project focuses on the practices and the missional and spiritual formation of emerging adults.

Both Pepperdine and Lipscomb are affiliated with the Churches of Christ, a tradition initially led by Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell that started and thrived in the 1800s, but has been in decline since the Civil War.[1] Like other Restoration Movement traditions, the Churches of Christ was and is committed to reflecting, as much as possible, the beliefs and practices of the early church.[2] While Churches of Christ have historically been identified as a nondenominational sect, it is today widely recognized as a distinct denomination, though its lack of hierarchical governing structure (i.e., each

[1] Richard T. Hughes and R. L. Roberts, *The Churches of Christ* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 3.

[2] Ibid., 4.

church and institution affiliated with the Churches of Christ is completely autonomous) blurs the boundaries of what is and is not "Church of Christ."[3]

Less than 10 percent of Pepperdine's student population identifies as Church of Christ, and only a handful of positions held by employees—the President, the chair of the Board of Regents, the University Chaplain, and tenure-track faculty in the Religion and Philosophy division—are required to be Church of Christ. Still, the Church of Christ tradition has been influential in my own faith formation and in the contexts where I have ministered, where stakeholders' desire to stay connected to the universities' Church of Christ roots remains strong. At the same time, Pepperdine is increasingly evangelical in terms of its student body, leadership, and culture.[4] At times in history, the Churches of Christ have been at odds with evangelical culture, aligning more with mainline beliefs and practices; at other times, the Churches of Christ have participated in White evangelical culture so much as to hardly be distinct. For my purposes in this project, it is enough to recognize that the relationship between the Churches of Christ and White evangelicalism is complicated, even while both play an important role in the faith experiences of the Protestants in my ministry context.

[3] Ibid., 5-7. Because of the lack of formal unity, the universities affiliated with the Churches of Christ have remained, largely, the epicenter of Church of Christ fellowship and self-understanding. See Hughes and Roberts, *The Churches of Christ*, 145.

[4] One of the most prominent contemporary historians of evangelicalism in the United States acknowledges the challenges of defining the term *evangelicalism*. See Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020). While evangelicals define themselves by four specific beliefs—"to uphold the Bible as one's ultimate authority, to confess the centrality of Christ's atonement, to believe in a born-again conversion experience, and to actively work to spread this good news and reform society accordingly" (5)—Du Mez argues that evangelicalism is a cultural and political term that is intertwined with political notions of Whiteness and wrapped up in a complex, widespread consumer culture (6-9).

Ministry Challenges and Opportunities

One reason emerging adults are increasingly disconnected from faith communities is because of a disillusionment with organized religion that is rooted in the perception that American churches care nothing for the most pressing and relevant issues of our day. One of those issues is the global climate crisis, including all the various environmental issues that afflict local communities. The American church—especially, for my context, White evangelicalism—has neglected God's mission toward creation for so long that solutions to the climate crises of the last century have been left entirely in the hands of politicians and companies. Instead of leading the charge to bear good news to creation, the most vocal expressions of American Christianity have resisted scientific consensus regarding climate change and rejected the responsibility of caring for the land and the people who depend on it.

On the other side of the spectrum, for those emerging adults who are entrenched in White American evangelicalism, expressions of faith are so hyper-spiritualized and individualized that it is difficult to imagine how—or why it would be important—to involve creation in our worship experiences. Expressions of worship are often, for these young people, anemic: namely limited to a performative and emotional musical experience in large gatherings. Disciplines of contemplation, asceticism, tradition, and service, for example, are left out of the worship experiences of many young Protestants.

While hostility toward the idea of climate change or human-caused climate crises is a loud portion of the population (and many of them are White evangelicals), it does not represent the majority, and it is especially does not represent the majority of young people. Premier climate scientist and communicator, Katharine Hayhoe, says that 93

percent of the American population are apathetic and open to be influenced; they are are neither fully invested in finding climate solutions nor are they fully dismissive to the idea that it is necessary for us to find climate solutions.[5] However, historically, these 93 percent are often met with messaging based on fear and sometimes even blame, which causes them to shut down rather than motivating them to act.[6] In other words, those 93 percent, whether Christian or not, are not being met with a narrative that inspires change and hope. The Christian story has an opportunity to fill in a major gap.

I explore green spiritual practices of simplicity as a potentially accessible entry point for followers of Jesus to begin including creation in their devotional expressions, and for churches to model to young people the centrality of God's redeeming love for all creation. Often, the climate crisis—even in its localized manifestations—can feel too overwhelming to address, leaving us paralyzed, hopeless, and in some cases, resistant to the very idea that any problem exists at all. However, drawing from the ascetic traditions of Christianity, there are simple, accessible, green practices that anyone can make a discipline in their life. I investigate if these practices help make individuals and communities more conscientious of their habits of consumption and draw their attention to the work of the Spirit in and around them.

Personal Interest

Though I did not have language for it until developing this project, green spiritual practices of simplicity have been immensely formative for me for the past seven years.

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[5] Katharine Hayhoe, *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*, ProQuest eBook (New York: One Signal Publishers, 2021), 18-19.

[6] Ibid., 25-26, 66-72.

During my first semester of graduate school in Fall 2015, I took a Christian Ethics class as part of my MA in Religion from Pepperdine. My professor was one of the scholars referenced multiple times in this project: Chris Doran. While we covered multiple topics in the class, the unit on climate change most impacted me. It was the start of my environmental journey, and (through no fault of Doran's), I was burdened by shame and guilt. I felt the weight of the entire climate crisis in every disposable fork I used. I became oppressively legalistic of myself—not to mention unfairly judgmental of others. I quickly became burnt out by the micro-decisions with which I burdened myself, and eventually resorted to a numb sort of apathy.

By the time my spouse, Nate, took the same class a year later, Doran had reworked the class to be exclusively about the climate crisis and the Christian response to it. It sent Nate on a professional trajectory toward public policy, and his interest not only reinvigorated my spiritual commitment to environmental justice, but it also helped heal my approach to it. I felt convicted again of my participation in the communal sin of earth-abuse. This time, instead of responding in isolation with shame and unhealthy indifference, we responded in partnership with grace and healthy responsibility. Instead of feeling like the burden of solving climate change was on our shoulders alone, we committed to showing our love and respect for God whenever we could, with the small things with which God had entrusted us. Instead of feeling crushed by everything we did not know, we chose to be open-minded to learning and to adjusting our behaviors when possible as our understanding of the world and of our faith changed.

Little by little, we have made small steps to participate less in the faux-conveniences of the contemporary food, fashion, energy, plastic, and travel industries.

We try to be disciplined without being legalistic; we try to embrace discomfort without being prideful. When people ask us about our habits, we talk about environmental justice and our responsibility to care for our resources well, and we also talk about how each of the things we do, big and small, are spiritual practices—a way for us to experience God in the ordinary and the mundane.

The first several ideas I had for my DMin project had nothing to do with creation care or environmental justice. Everything I thought of was either too contextual (when I didn't know what my ministry context would be long-term) or it was too big and unwieldy. Then I read the novel, *Chasing Francis*, for one of my classes.[7] In the book, a megachurch evangelical preacher named Chase goes on a pilgrimage in the footsteps of St. Francis. Near the end of his journey, he visits a soup kitchen and has a conversation with the woman who oversees the kitchen, Angelina. As Chase witnesses Angelina's tender care for the poor, he asks her if we are all called to literally sell all we have and give it to the poor. Her answer is brilliant, not just for how we can practically care for the poor, but for how we care for all creation. She laughs and says, "What if we started by repenting of our materialism and living more simply? I think we'd change the world in a heartbeat."[8] With that one line, I knew I wanted to connect practices of simplicity with creation care, these two great loves that had drawn me so close into the bosom of God. I reflected on St. Francis' simple care for creation—how he experienced God in gentle fellowship with the breeze and the butterflies—and I became drawn to these simple, ordinary acts that help us connect to both God, the earth, and all the people and other

[7] Ian Morgan Cron, *Chasing Francis: A Pilgrim's Tale* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

[8] Ibid., 173.

creatures with whom we share a Creator and our sustenance.[9] I called these green spiritual practices of simplicity.

Ultimately, as my project developed, I decided to focus on Protestant theologies and faith expressions, which drew me away from Francis and his spiritual descendants. However, this project is indebted to him in particular, and to Catholic and Orthodox traditions more broadly. My fellow Protestants and I have much to learn from these much older—and, when it comes to creation, often much wiser—expressions of the Christian faith.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this project is to discover how accessible, green practices of simplicity (1) help followers of Jesus connect more deeply with God and (2) extend a missional hand toward creation and toward those who are alienated from the rich resources of the Christian faith to address environmental injustice.

Research Question and Hypothesis

As I brought together my spiritual interest in simplicity, the pressing global injustices of the climate crisis, and the spiritual needs, desires, and questions of college students, I honed in on accessible practices that are adaptable to ordinary life. I decided to interview individuals who observe green spiritual practices of simplicity to evaluate what outcomes have emerged from their consistent commitment to their practice(s).

[9] Jim Merkel, "Sharing the Earth," in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 209.

The primary research question my project seeks to answer is: How do green spiritual practices of simplicity provide opportunities for spiritual formation and missional participation, especially for emerging adults? I hypothesize that the project study will demonstrate that green spiritual practices of simplicity are accessible but meaningful ways to experience God in daily life while also embodying love for God, ourselves, others, and creation.

Potential Benefits of This Study

I hope this project will have a trifold contribution to: (1) emerging adults, (2) traditional church congregations, and (3) faith-based institutions.

Many emerging adults care deeply about the climate crisis, which is likely to impact their lives and the lives of any children they might have more profoundly than for previous generations.[10] White evangelicalism, which holds prominence in the United States, has largely ignored or actively rejected humanity's God-given vocation to steward the earth.[11] I hope that practices such as the ones to be explored in this project will

[10] For example, one British study of 10,000 people, ages 16-25, in 10 different countries showed that young people are extremely anxious about climate change and how it will affect them, and they believe that governments are not doing enough to combat it. See Sharon Pruitt-Young, "Young People Are Anxious About Climate Change And Say Governments Are Failing Them," *NPR* (September 14, 2021), https://www.npr.org/2021/09/14/1037023551/climate-change-children-young-adults-anxious-worried-study. Furthermore, younger generations, including Gen Z and Millennials, are more likely to express interest in climate change than older generations, and about a third say that they have personally taken action to address climate change, including "donating money, volunteering, contacting an elected official or attending a rally or protest." Two-thirds of Gen Z and almost as many Millennials report that "they've talked with friends or family about the need for action on climate change in the past few weeks." Younger people are also more likely to favor pro-environmental policies, like shifting away from fossil fuels. See Cary Funk, "Key Findings: How Americans' Attitudes About Climate Change Differ by Generation, Party and Other Factors," *Pew Research Center* (May 26, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/26/key-findings-how-americans-attitudes-about-climate-change-differ-by-generation-party-and-other-factors/.

[11] While about three-quarters of American evangelical Protestants affirm that "the Bible contains lessons about the environment," they are also the demographic most likely to reject the existence or serious threat of any climate crises, especially climate change. Barely a quarter of evangelicals recognize global warming trends as a problem, and only 8 percent of regular church attendees say they hear about the environment in

expand the imagination of how we can integrate the injustices, problems, and causes we care most about with our discipleship to Jesus.

Likewise, many congregations who are conscientious of the climate crisis are often uncertain of how to introduce creation care into their ministries. Green spiritual practices of simplicity are an accessible entry point for thinking deeply about our effect on and responsibility to the environment and the communities that depend on its health and flourishing. These practices will also be directly relevant in my ministry context, the University Church of Christ in Malibu. By using university buildings for our offices and worship spaces, our church is refraining from using unnecessary resources. However, without the intentionality that physical, visible spaces can often bring to a church's priorities, our expressions of creation care are limited to the practices of the congregation and the people who call it home. We are on the cusp of substantively integrating creation care with our church's identity and mission, and practices such as these can help make what is often talked about theoretically and statistically into something spiritually and personally tangible.

Faith-based institutions, like Christian universities, can use this project in a way that is similar to that of congregations. I hope this project will offer insight to those who lead emerging adults into what they need to deepen their sense of spirituality and what they expect from faith communities that profess care for others.

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church monthly. Evangelicals are more likely than other religious groups (who are more likely than nonreligious people) to believe that it is morally acceptable to do nothing to address climate change. For these and other statistics, see Becky A. Alper, "How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment," *Pew Research Center* (November 17, 2022), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/11/17/how-religion-intersects-with-americans-views-on-the-environment/. See also Emily Barone, "Christians Believe in Protecting the Earth, but Aren't Convinced That Humans Cause Climate Change," *Time* (November 18, 2022), https://time.com/6234932/climate-change-religion-survey/.

Definition of Terms

Green spiritual practice of simplicity. This is a term I created that describes practices of simplicity that emerge from and help us grow in our faith and that are oriented toward care for God's creation. In more detail, green spiritual practices of simplicity are daily disciplines, which emerge from a commitment to the ways and teachings of Jesus, that help us focus our thoughts, attentions, and desires on God alone so that we can experience oneness with ourselves, others, and creation holistically. While the term *green* could be criticized for the way it has been abused to greenwash products or corporations, I use the word in this project as a shorthand adjective for practices and programs that explicitly and intentionally mitigate negative effects and/or proactively have a positive impact on the environment. Each facet of this term is broken down in far more detail and with more nuance in Chapters 2 and 3.

Emerging adults. This fluid phrase refers to the elongated process of coming of age as an adult in the 21st-century U.S. Emerging adults are generally thought to include people between 18 and 30 years of age, though people older and younger can identify as an emerging adult depending on factors like marital status and financial independence. This term is explored in more depth in Chapter 3.

Climate crisis. This phrase captures the cumulative impact of climate change, pollution, and resource depletion on plants, animals, ecosystems, and human communities. Its plural form generally refers to the specific crises that affect local communities (e.g., the frequency of wildfires in California, the intensity of hurricanes in

Louisiana, or the duration of cold fronts in Michigan).[12] This project presumes the reality of climate change and a general awareness of how climate change impacts the world, its ecosystems, and its species.[13]

Limitations of This Study

While I believe this project can be helpful to the spiritual formation and missional participation of many of the Jesus-followers who might read it, it is also limited in multiple ways. As a qualitative research study, the sample size is small, and the participants were drawn from my own circles, which means it is not nearly as diverse as I originally intended for it to be, nor is it representative of the demographics of Protestant Christianity, even if that were only limited to Western Protestantism. While I attempted

[12] While there is a distinct partisan divide regarding views about climate change, experiencing extreme weather directly is a major contributor to convincing an individual of the reality of climate change. Eight in 10 of the 71 percent of Americans who have experienced extreme weather in their local region attribute it, at least in part, to climate change, regardless of political affiliation. See Rebecca Leppert, "Most Americans Who Have Faced Extreme Weather See a Link to Climate Change—Republicans Included," *Pew Research Center* (August 12, 2022), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/08/12/most-americans-who-have-faced-extreme-weather-see-a-link-to-climate-change-republicans-included/.

[13] In the U.S., three-quarters of American adults already believe that climate change is caused by human activity, with nearly half of Americans affirming that humans contribute to climate change a great deal. Nearly three-quarters of Americans also believe that the U.S. should work to become carbon neutral, develop alternative energy sources, and collaborate internationally for climate solutions. See Katherine Schaeffer, "For Earth Day, Key Facts about Americans' Views of Climate Change and Renewable Energy," *Pew Research Center* (April 22, 2022), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/04/22/for-earth-day-key-facts-about-americans-views-of-climate-change-and-renewable-energy/. For a succinct and accessible summary of the science behind anthropogenic climate change, the problems facing the world because of environmental degradation, why we should care, and how we should respond—all from an explicitly Christian (that is, Christ-centered) perspective—see Katharine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions* (Nashville: FaithWords, 2009). This book is written as a collaboration by one of the leading climate scientists in the world and a devout follower of Jesus, and a pastor of a church that is generally skeptical against climate science. For more detailed and helpful information on the climate crisis, see Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 138-142; Hayhoe, *Saving Us*, 64; Ann V. Sanson and Susie E. L. Burke, "Climate Change and Children: An Issue of Intergenerational Justice," in *Children and Peace: From Research to Action*, eds. Nikola Balvin and Daniel J. Christie, open access (Cham: Springer Open, 2020), 343; Kenneth Martens Friesen, "A Mennonite Call to Simplicity," *Direction* 49.1 (2020): 46-48; Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002), 249; Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2009), 55.

to recruit a diversity of Protestant Christians to this study, most—though not all—of the participants are like me: White, straight, American, middle-class women. While this is a significant limitation, my hope is that this means that for my specific ministry context at Pepperdine University—where the largest demographic is also White, straight, American, middle-class women—these practices are especially relevant and applicable.

There is room to criticize this project as being White-centric, both in terms of research resources and study participants. This is problematic, since the people who suffer most from the climate crisis are Black and Brown people, especially those in the Southern Hemisphere, though that is also true in North America and Europe.[14] This project also does not take into consideration the rich cultural resources of indigenous peoples. There are many indigenous followers of Jesus who have reflected in depth on environmental justice, and their perspectives are foundational to many of the scholars I reference.[15] Their theologies were outside the scope of my project, and since none of my participants personally identified with indigenous peoples or cultures, I did not include them in the foundational or contextual chapters. Personally, I am influenced by feminist and ecofeminist theologies, which can be alienating to more patriarchal Protestant

[14] Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, "Love Incarnate: Hope and Moral-Spiritual Power for Climate Justice," in *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation*, eds. Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, ProQuest eBook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 68-69.

[15] Robert Melchior Figueroa, "Racism," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 336; Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1976), 6-9.

traditions, as well as the spiritual experiences of some individuals and communities that are Black, indigenous, and/or people of color (BIPOC).[16]

Preview of Remaining Chapters

The rest of this project systematically addresses the research question. Chapter 2 examines the biblical and theological foundations of this project, with a particular focus on ecology. Chapter 3 offers a conceptual framework for the study by defining emerging adulthood, exploring the history of Christian simplicity, and offering a paradigm for thinking about green spiritual practices of simplicity. Chapter 4 clarifies the methodology for the study portion of this project, including more details on the research procedures and participants. Chapter 5 overviews the 23 green spiritual practices of simplicity that emerged from the interviews. Chapter 6 explores the themes that emerged from the participants' reflections on their practices. Chapter 7 concludes the project with an interpretation of the thematic analysis and some suggestions for future research.

[16] For an introduction to feminism and ecofeminism in theology, see Heather Eaton, "Feminist Thought," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 171-173.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I lay the foundation for why green simplicity matters. The primary focus of this chapter are the biblical and theological reasons for followers of Jesus to care about the natural world, the environment, the climate, God's creation—essentially, the core faith-based motivations for implementing *green* spiritual practices of simplicity. I also touch on the biblical and theological foundations of simplicity, especially in the longest section that explores Matthew 6:25-34. However, simplicity will be explored in even more depth and with a more holistic approach in the following chapter. At the end of this chapter, I connect the biblical and theological foundations for caring about creation to a lifestyle of simplicity by exploring the relevance and the formative and missional opportunities of spiritual practices.

Biblical Foundation: Green Simplicity from Genesis to Jesus

The biblical narrative as a whole testifies to God's love for and desire to restore all creation, as well as the reality that God invites humanity to join in that work. For the purposes of this project, I have honed in on three parts of Scripture that lay a foundation for green spiritual practices of simplicity and together provide the overview of the overarching narrative of the relationships between God, humanity, and creation in the Bible. First, the creation narrative in Genesis 1-3 reveals the need for *green* practices based on how God intended for humanity to relate to creation. Then, I will take a brief look at a sampling of biblical poetry, especially in the Psalms, which offers insight into the *spiritual* richness of engaging with creation. Finally, Matthew 5-7, with a special

emphasis on 6:25-34, reveals the need for practices of *simplicity* that Jesus couches in a dynamic and tender view of nature. Our primary focus will be on the last of these sections, with Jesus' succinct coalescence of green simplicity. Together, Genesis 1-3, a small sampling of biblical poetry, and Matthew 5-7 approach green simplicity from different angles, both literarily and theologically, to give us a biblical foundation for the relevance of this project.

Human Interconnectedness with Creation in Genesis 1-3[17]

The opening chapters of the Bible make it clear from the very beginning that humans not only have responsibilities *to* creation, but they are also inextricably connected *with* creation. The themes of Genesis 1-3 can be traced throughout the rest of the biblical story, though I do not explore the breadth of that reality in this project. Instead, I trace the themes of God's love for creation and human partnership in helping all life flourish specifically in the Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount.

Richard Bauckham argues that, because Genesis 1 starts with the repeated refrain that "God saw that it was good," the opening lines of the Bible irrefutably paint a picture of a God who sees all creatures and all creation as "*intrinsically* valuable."[18] Indeed, this refrain of goodness "invites our agreement," for us to affirm, with delight, God's

[17] I will not try to make a case for a poetic, as opposed to a literal, understanding of the creation narrative here. Suffice to say, I do not think scientific literalism is necessary to take the truths of Genesis 1-3 seriously. To honor what the text itself prioritizes is to be far more concerned with exploring the character of a loving God who values order and kindness rather than with delineating the specifics of how the earth literally came into being. For a succinct synthesis of this stance and the complications with biblical literalism more broadly, see Bruce G. Epperly, *Church Ahead: Moving Forward with Congregational Spiritual Practices*, vol. 6, Guides to Practical Ministry, ProQuest eBook (La Vergne: Energion Publications, 2020), 56-57.

[18] Richard Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation: A Biblical Perspective," in *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation*, eds. Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, ProQuest eBook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 32, emphasis added.

assessment of all creation.[19] By the time humans are created in God's image and invited to rule the earth, it is clear that:

> [W]hat God is entrusting to our care is something of priceless value. It is the world that we have begun to delight in as God does. It is the creatures we are learning to love as God their Creator does. Only if we have learned to appreciate the creatures in this way can we begin to be qualified for the vocation of responsible care for them that the text calls dominion. An attentive reading of the whole chapter must rule out the Baconian interpretation of the dominion as a task of exploiting and remaking the creation for the sake of human benefit.[20]

Norman Wirzba's proposed alternative to this Baconian interpretation is a "priestly account of creation," and humanity's role within it.[21] To be created in the image of God means to shape our existence with the same intentions as God, which "seeks and delights in the flourishing of a creation that is fine and very good."[22] To approach creation with this kind of affection and generosity—rather than with the possession and self-gratification that has characterized most of human history—requires us to experience intimacy with God.[23] Only then can we understand God's character, and "attempt to

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[19] Ibid., 33.

[20] Ibid., 33. Elizabeth Johnson draws a similar conclusion. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 204.

[21] Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 128.

[22] Ibid., 128. For a more explicit connection between Genesis 1-3 and Christian spiritual Formation, see Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 31-42. For Chandler, the exploration of the image of God in Genesis 1-3 is the foundation of true human identity (42). God intentionally created Adam and Eve "in the image of God as integrated beings, [which] entails a physical body, spiritual endowment, emotions, relational capacity, intelligence, vocational propensity for work, capability for physical health and wellness, and the ability to be stewards of themselves, God's creation and God-given resources" (31). The image of God in humans was corrupted, or cracked, when humans sinned, but that image is restored through Jesus and empowered by the Spirit in God's people, the church (38). As we become more whole through the restored image of God, and thus more holistically experience God's love, we are better able to carry that love into the world through "caring responsibility over ourselves and the created order" (42).

[23] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 128.

realize God's will and desire for all life."[24] In sum, humans are, according to Wirzba, "set apart from creation not because they are *something other* than creation but because they have a unique role to play *within* creation."[25] Similarly, J. Matthew Sleeth points out that the word often translated as *dominion* does not mean ownership with free reign, but rather, "Implied in our dominion is our dependency on everything under us. Cut the root out from under a plant and the fruit above it will perish,despite its superior position."[26]

Wirzba's writings also offer an exegesis and theological analysis of Genesis 2-3. In Genesis 2, Wirzba notes, it is significant that the first human, the *adam*, is formed out of soil (another word for which is *humus* in English), or *adamah*.[27] God's "life-giving creativity, creativity that takes an intensely intimate form" sustains human life (2:7), plant life (2:9) and animal life (2:19) through a combination of the soil and God's own breath.[28] Fundamentally, Wirzba argues, the shared origins and sustenance of humans alongside the rest of creation emphasizes the creatureliness of humans and their interdependence with their fellow creatures and creation as a whole.[29] One of the most fundamental acts of survival, eating for example, reveals that we are wholly dependent on the sun and the soil, the plants and the pollinators.[30]

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 127, emphasis added.

[26] J. Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2006), 21.

[27] Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, ProQuest eBook (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 74.

[28] Ibid., 75.

[29] Ibid., 74-75.

[30] Ibid., 75.

A fundamental sin of Adam and Eve in eating the fruit from which God had forbidden them was that they went beyond their limit. God set limits for their flourishing: They were created as embodied creatures, dependent on the garden ecosystem, and "must constantly go to the Lord's tree of life and receive life."[31] Instead, however, Adam and Eve idolized the transcendence of their own limits: to know good and evil for themselves, rather than trusting in God's definitions of good and evil.[32] Fundamentally, this "impulse in idolatry" is "the worship of ourselves," and it is a temptation that has plagued humanity ever since:[33] "Serpents abound," Wirzba writes, "not just in gardens, tempting us with the idea that *there are no limits* to what we are permitted to do. The longing to know as God knows, and the hope that we will not suffer or die, are powerful urges that manifest themselves in all sorts of (often unrecognized) ways."[34]

Adam and Eve's sin introduced both a biological and an existential death into the world, because they rebelled against their very nature: their creatureliness before the Creator Lord.[35] According to Wirzba, that rebellion has continued; we continue to rebel against our limits, which "leads to the degradation of the world."[36] Prosperity in the Western world looks much like the prosperity of the cities after Adam and Eve and their family were expelled from the Garden of Eden: Instead of harmonious relationship with other people and creation, it is "predicated on the systematic exhaustion or destruction of

[31] Ibid., 77.

[32] Ibid., 40.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., emphasis added.

[35] Ibid., 79.

[36] Ibid.

life's sources—soil, water, and air—and the communities that inspire, define, and support our being."[37] Since most people were subsistence farmers until the Industrial Revolution, *some* measure of "kinship with the earth could … be taken for granted."[38] However, in industrialized nations, few work directly with the land for survival. As we have detached from the soil from which God made us—and to which we will all return—it is easier for humans to mistreat creation for what we *mistakenly* believe to be for our own selfish gain.[39] This broken relationship between humanity and the earth was one of the primary results of sin that God described after Adam and Eve sinned (3:17b-19).

In response to this false detachment from creation, Wirzba urges us toward *a garden aesthetic*, harkening back to the Garden of Eden and looking hopefully toward new creation:[40]

> If we are to preach ecological concerns we must at the same time promote the sorts of experience and affection that will internally prompt us to act in the ways we should. The recommended transformation of heart and mind will depend on the transformation of experience. As we live now, mostly within urban contexts that shield us from any direct or practical contact with the land, it is very difficult to develop an appreciation or sensitivity for the larger world around us. We do not concretely know the life-forms or the processes that surround and sustain us because we do not have contact with them, and because we do not have the prerequisite contact, we do not feel affection for them either. We value falsely, or do not value at all, because we are largely ignorant of the extrahuman world. So much of our development … amounts not to a "growing up" but a "growing down," since maturation goes hand in hand with the narrowing of focus or

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[37] Norman Wirzba, "The Challenge of Berry's Agrarian Vision," in *The Art of the Commonplace: Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002), vii.

[38] Ibid., ix.

[39] Ibid., ix, xii.

[40] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 111-119. Eschatology can be misused to denigrate creation. For a very brief summary of this eschatological perspective and how it came to pervade Christian thought, and for more biblically holistic alternatives, see Gorman, "Eschatology," 154-155. Willis Jenkins notes that soteriology, a study deeply connected to eschatology, also has been used improperly against creation but actually has rich resources for environmental invigoration. See Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.

> attention. In children there is a ready excitement about engaging a world with all the senses involved. But as we become adults we learn to despise these trivial matters for the more important excitement of careers.[41]

Entering a garden aesthetic means intentionally re-engaging our connection to creation through tangible practices, like gardening, which reinforce our interdependence with nature and teach us to live "responsibly and charitably with the creation."[42] The garden aesthetic also compels us to see the error of living "at the destructive expense of our habitats" and "trying to rise above our naturally and divinely appointed status" established in Genesis 1-3.[43]

Though I have focused here on how Genesis 1-3 lays a biblical and theological foundation for why followers of Jesus should care for and reinvigorate their connection with creation, these chapters of the Bible—according to Richard Foster—also lay a foundation for simplicity. In *Freedom of Simplicity*, Foster argues that in the Old Testament, we learn radical dependence, obedience, and generosity that call us into justice, compassion, and wholeness, and we can put these into practice through simplicity.[44] "The creation story is the starting point for our understanding of simplicity," Foster writes.[45] Genesis 1-3 clarifies that humanity, alongside all creation, is completely dependent on God, which is "certainly the pivotal notion for our

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[41] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 111.

[42] Ibid., 118. See also J. Matthew Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth: Why the Good Book Is a Green Book* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 2-3, 5. Technological advancements, especially those of magnitude, magnify our abilities, and even to some extent, reflect the Creator. And yet, they also delude us into believing we are separate from the Creation of which we are a part. See Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 100-101. See also Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, 11-12.

[43] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 118.

[44] Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), chapter two, 15-32.

[45] Ibid., 16.

understanding of simplicity," because every part of the created order, down to our breath and sense of worth, is wholly dependent on God.[46] "Our value is not tied to wealth, status, accomplishments, or position. It is a gift," which beckons us to have "simple trust" in the Creator and Sustainer.[47]

From here, we also learn about the need for radical obedience.[48] Because the first humans did not listen to or pledge themselves in allegiance to the Lord *alone*, they experienced death instead of life: "Holy obedience," Foster writes, "forms the grid through which the life of simplicity flows."[49] Through Genesis 1-3, we also experience the generosity of God—to create at all, and then to create so beautifully: "Repeatedly in the creation story we have the confession that the earth is good. God lavished abundant provision upon the original pair."[50] As the biblical story continues, it becomes clear that God's promises for provision and restoration are never for an individual, but for a community, and ultimately, for all the world. Thus, "The idea that one could cut off a piece of the consumer pie and go off and enjoy it in isolation was unthinkable."[51] Because we experience the generosity of God, we are empowered to give generously in turn.[52]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 17.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 18.

[51] Ibid., 20.

[52] Ibid.

From this radical dependence, radical obedience, and radical generosity, we practice justice, or in Hebrew, *mishpat*, a repeated cry throughout the Old Testament because of the self-inflicted separation from God that humans created in Genesis 3.[53] *Mishpat* is not retribution; it revolves around equity, and it is "virtually synonymous" with righteousness.[54] Thus, *mishpat* and *hesed*—or compassion, mercy, loving kindness, enduring faithfulness—are also deeply interwoven.[55] Based on God's compassion for humans, even in the midst of their brokenness (Genesis 3), humans are called to compassion for themselves, each other, and creation, even in the midst of their brokenness: "Compassion and justice blended call us to simplicity of life," Foster writes.[56]

Foster connects the idea of *shalom*—wholeness, unity, balance, peace, harmony—which we see epitomized at the beginning of Genesis, to the *shalom* to which God repeatedly calls God's people in the Old Testament, *and* to the *shalom* that the Bible portrays as the *telos* of all creation:[57] "The vision for wholeness and peace, which shines like a beacon of light through the Old Covenant, gives us important insights into Christian simplicity."[58] This *shalom* is not a disembodied or numb absence of conflict, but true "harmonious unity in the natural order," where humans live in peace with the

[53] Ibid., 24.

[54] Ibid., 25.

[55] Ibid., 27.

[56] Ibid., 28.

[57] Ibid., 30-31.

[58] Ibid., 30.

land, plants, and animals, and animals live in peace with each other.[59] Foster summarizes it this way: "We are in harmony with God—faithfulness and loyalty prevail. We are in harmony with our neighbor—justice and mercy abound. We are in harmony with nature—peace and unity reign."[60]

Creation as an Avenue for Holistic Spirituality in Biblical Poetry

The pro-creation overtones of Genesis are prominent in ancient Hebrew poetry. So much of the poetry of the Bible—in the Psalms, prophets, and wisdom literature—speaks, both implicitly and explicitly, to God's deep love for and presence within all creation, from the vastness of the galaxies to the minutiae of the flora and fauna. Many of the psalmists, in particular, believe that when we engage creation with the expectation of meeting God, we will find a surprising breadth and depth of spirituality. Indeed, by rediscovering our own creatureliness within and interconnectedness with creation, we may even find ourselves.[61]

God loves all creation, and all creation loves God back. Psalm 148 and 150 declare that "all creation praises God" and reveal that "the ability to relate to God occurs at every level of life."[62] In Psalm 19, especially vv. 1-6, creation becomes humanity's partner, and perhaps even *leader*, in worship. Psalm 19 opens with: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (v. 1). In light of Genesis 1, Psalm 19 confirms God's approval of creation, God's self-revelation in nature, and the

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[59] Ibid., 31.

[60] Ibid.

[61] J. Matthew Sleeth calls the Psalms the "first environmental music." See Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, 119-136.

[62] Epperly, *Church Ahead*, 52.

active relationship between God and the created order, prompting the "declaration" of the heavens to "all the earth" (v. 4). Wendell Berry, in light of Psalm 19 and other passages about God's love for creation, laments that many people, including Christians, choose to deny dignity to non-human creation, both animate and inanimate:

> The misuse of the Bible … logically accompanies the abuse of nature: if you are going to destroy creatures without respect, you will want to reduce them to "materiality"; you will want to deny that there is spirit or truth in them, just as you will want to believe that the only holy creatures, the only creatures with souls, are humans—or even only Christian humans. By denying spirit and truth to the nonhuman Creation, modern proponents of religion have legitimized a form of blasphemy without which the nature—and culture-destroying machinery of the industrial economy could not have been built—that is, they have legitimized bad work. Good human work honors God's work. Good work uses no thing without respect, both for what it is in itself and for its origin. It uses neither tool nor material that it does not respect and that it does not love. It honors nature as a great mystery and power, as an indispensable teacher, and as the inescapable judge of all work of human hands.[63]

Psalms 24, 50, and 146, for example, affirm that all creation belongs to the Lord in perpetuity; it does not foremost belong to humans, and humans do *not* have the right to do as they please with it. Psalm 24:1 is perhaps the most succinct summary of God's sovereignty over all things: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."[64] Psalm 50:10-11 gets even more specific: "For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine."[65] Elizabeth Johnson makes the following comment about poetry such as this: "Undergirding the tremendous variation among creatures lies the shared identity of belonging to God. All creatures, furthermore, share in the gift of being

[63] Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 312.

[64] Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 200. See also Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 22-23.

[65] Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 220.

passionately cared for by the Creator who acts not with raw power but with a particular ethic."[66] She references Psalm 146, especially vv. 6-7, to demonstrate the connection between God's care for "the oppressed" and "the hungry" to God's faithfulness to the skies, the earth, the oceans, and "all that is in them."[67] Humans devoted to the ways of the Lord are therefore called to the same sort of ethic that wants "the beloved world to flourish" and that joins all species together in "one splendid universal communion."[68]

In other words, to whatever extent humans *are* called to rule over the earth for God (Genesis 1:26), it is in such a way that reflects how God rules creation.[69] Poetry like Psalm 145 reveals that "God rules for the good of all his creatures" with "compassionate and salvific care."[70] As both Berry and Johnson hint, the land reveals whether humans are ruling the earth in the ways of God's justice and generosity. Michael Northcott references Jeremiah and Psalm 72 to connect justice to creation. Jeremiah's poetry, reflecting on the Exodus narrative, reveals that "justice is part of the sacred order that God has set into the character of creation."[71] Psalm 72 reflects the same idea, according to Northcott:

> [T]he king who rules justly rules a land where the rains come in their due season and the peoples enjoy the fruit of their crops. The king is not just because he adopts a human measure of justice, but because the manner of the king's rule is in conformity with the eternal justice of God. And this conformity between human and divine justice is manifest in the conformity between the rightly ruled society, a stable climate and a fertile land. When the king loves justice, the land itself and

[66] Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 200.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2011), 31.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 160.

> all the creatures who dwell in it prosper. When the king and the court neglect justice, the people suffer and the land suffers with them.[72]

Theologians who reflect on creation care reference no biblical poetry more often, perhaps, than Psalm 104, "the great psalm of creation."[73] For Johnson, Psalm 104 epitomizes the biblical authors' posture that humans are "within, not over, the interdependent community of creation, whose center and encompassing horizon is the generous creating God."[74] Psalm 104 has no trace of the "duality" that Western Christian traditions have imposed between humans and nature.[75] Instead, through "cascades of ecologically attuned poetry," Psalm 104 places humans "on a plane of equality" with all of their "fellow-creatures," who serve and praise God together and relate to each other in reciprocal, not hierarchical, community.[76]

For Richard Bauckham, Psalm 104 reveals that humans rejoice in creation *because God rejoices in creation* (vv. 31, 34).[77] Indeed, for the psalmist, "contemplation of the rest of God's plenitude of creatures" draws us closer and deeper into God's presence.[78] Baukham compares Psalm 104 to Job 38-39, because both passages poetically portray God's creation of the world, offer a "panoramic view of the parts and members of creation," and "deny humans a place of supremacy" over the rest of creation (though

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[72] Ibid., 161.

[73] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 30.

[74] Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 205.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 31.

[78] Ibid.

Psalm 104 is far more gentle about it).[79] Bauckham also compares Psalm 104 to Matthew 5-7: He theorizes that Jesus is directly reflecting on and drawing from Psalm 104 as he teaches the Sermon on the Mount, specifically Matthew 6:25-33.[80] Like the psalmist of Psalm 104, Jesus trusts in God's provision for humanity and for all creation, and from this creation theology, Jesus teaches his disciples "the kind of lifestyle that is appropriate to living in such a world, the world of God's generous extravagance, in which God provides abundantly for all his creatures."[81] Thus, it is to the Sermon on the Mount that we turn our attention to now.

Green Simplicity in Matthew 5-7 with an Emphasis on 6:25-34

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he embodies the respect, love, and care for the natural world that is prescribed in Genesis and celebrated in the Psalms. I will focus here on the Sermon on the Mount, a "peak event" in the redemptive work and ministry of Jesus.[82] Through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reinterprets the instructions of the Hebrew Bible and sheds light on the eschatological significance of his own arrival.[83] Amos Oei observes that "the Sermon has been considered the epitome of Jesus' ethical

[79] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 64-65. See also Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 38. Chris Doran similarly compares Psalm 104 and Matthew 6:25-33. See Chris Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change: Creation Care This Side of the Resurrection* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 20-21.

[80] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 72.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 209.

[83] Francois Viljoen, *The Torah in Matthew*, vol. 9, Theology in Africa, ed. Jan Van der Watt (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2018), 349; Antonia Gorman, "Eschatology," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 155.

teaching and therefore, for many, the essence of Christian morality."[84] One of the themes that ties together the entire Sermon on the Mount is *simplicity*: "wholeness," "completeness," "singular devotion."[85] To be a disciple of Jesus is to be totally focused on God alone.[86] Thus, the simplicity of the disciple, emerging from the simplicity of God,[87] ties together all of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. As an expression of righteousness and faithfulness to God,[88] Jesus calls us to practice simplicity in our hearts (5:21-32),[89] simplicity in our words (5:33-37),[90] simplicity in our religious practices—including giving, praying, and fasting (6:1-18)[91]—and simplicity in our material possessions (6:19-24). Even the "beauty and simplicity of the language Jesus uses" draws attention to the overarching theme of simplicity.[92] Combined, the ways Jesus

[84] Amos Winarto Oei, *The Perilous Sayings: Interpreting Christ's Call to Obedience in the Sermon on the Mount* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2017), 1.

[85] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 79. See also Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth and Hellwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Hellwys Publishing Incorporated, 2006), 149.

[86] Margaret Pamment, "Singleness and Matthew's Attitude Toward Torah," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5.17 (January 1983): 74.

[87] Just as God is indivisible, the disciple's mind, heart, soul, body, and attention are also indivisible, wholly aimed at God. See Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, exp. ed. (Greenville: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2002), 417.

[88] Viljoen, *The Torah in Matthew*, 109.

[89] Brian N. Winslade, *The Essence: Unpacking Jesus' Sermon on the Mount* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 41.

[90] Ibid., 64.

[91] Ibid., 106; Oliver O'Donovan, "Prayer and Morality in the Sermon on the Mount," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22.1 (February 1, 2009): 23.

[92] Winslade, *The Essence*, xi.

addresses simplicity in the Sermon on the Mount calls into being a community that is "peculiar," "nonconformist," and "countercultural.[93]

Similar to how Genesis 1-3 encapsulates simplicity in the Old Testament, the Sermon on the Mount likewise captures the characteristics of simplicity in the New Testament. In *Freedom of Simplicity*, Richard Foster notes that simplicity in the New Testament: keeps Christ at the center; identifies with the poor; rejects obscene wealth; self-sacrifices for the good of others; and willingly renounces as a witness to the kingdom.[94] Foster identifies Matthew 6 as "the most radiant passage on Christian simplicity."[95] Rooted in Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of God has drawn near (4:17, just before the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus' Sermon invites us into whole-life simplicity, free from the burdens of seeking the approval of others, of worrying about things we cannot control, of accumulating possessions that ultimately come to own us, and of obsessing over security that is never certain apart from Christ.[96] By letting go of our compulsion to amass possessions, prestige, and power, we can turn our attention to one of the central concerns of Christian simplicity: caring for the poor and the defenseless to the point of identifying with those described in the Beatitudes (5:3-11).[97] Of course, the danger of possessions (and possessions' partners, prestige and power) is a key refrain in the Sermon: "Many of Jesus' statements on riches and caring for the needy" (e.g.,

[93] Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 246.

[94] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, chapter three, 33-51.

[95] Ibid., 34.

[96] Ibid., 34-35.

[97] Ibid., 37.

5:43-48; 6:1-4; 6:19-24; 7:1-6), Foster writes, "come to us in staccato commands that frighten us."[98]

Foster notes that willingly surrendering our own rights and renouncing cultural comforts "is central to everything about simplicity."[99] Not only is self-sacrifice and renunciation an opportunity for us to experience intimacy with Jesus,[100] but it is also one of the greatest Christian witnesses, which becomes obvious when we look at the biblical disciples and the historical saints who followed Jesus into simplicity.[101] Foster summarizes the "scandalous invitation" to simplicity in the Sermon on the Mount and the whole of the New Testament this way:[102]

> Jesus Christ and all the writers of the New Testament call us to break free of mammon lust and live in joyous trust. Their radical criticism of wealth is combined with a spirit of unconditional generosity. They point to us a way of living in which everything we have we receive as a gift, and everything we have is cared for by God, and everything we have is available to others when it is right and good. This reality frames the heart of Christian simplicity. It is the means of liberation and power to do what is right and to overcome the forces of fear and avarice.[103]

No passage alone sums up this posture of simplicity better than Matthew 6:25-34.

Exegetical Analysis of Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus' admonition in Matthew 6:25-34 emerges from his call to holistic simplicity throughout the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Not only does this passage serve as the

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[98] Ibid., 40.

[99] Ibid., 46.

[100] Ibid., 46-47.

[101] Ibid., 55-56.

[102] Ibid., 49.

[103] Ibid.

culmination of what it looks like to live a life of simplicity, but it also frames simplicity in a creation theology that values nature, both inherently and as a teacher to humans. Jesus says this in Matthew 6:25-34 (NRSVUE):

> 25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" 32 For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

This passage can be mistaken as dualistic or even gnostic, but it is important to note that it comes after the Beatitudes (5:3-12), in which Jesus acknowledges, with breadth and depth, the powerful reality of daily troubles: poverty, grief, violence, and injustice.[104] Jesus knows the sorrow of hunger, loss, and forsakenness. Later in his ministry, after delivering the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will face torrential storms, torture, and a humiliating death. At the core of natural disasters, human violence, corrupt systems, and daily concerns is sin and death, and God—through Jesus—offers not just a chance to survive, but the opportunity to thrive.[105] By following and fellowshiping with a suffering Jesus, we are empowered not just with a new attitude *about* our circumstances, but with a

[104] Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 465.

[105] Ibid.

transformed heart that longs for *different circumstances entirely* for ourselves, others, and the world.

Matthew 6:25-34 begins with a "therefore" that is connected most directly to the immediately preceding passage, vv. 19-24:[106] Simplicity in our material belongings, our hearts, and our eyes makes us whole, or else we are split between worshiping God and worshiping mammon.[107] *Disintegration*, or lack of wholeness, emerges from our hearts' desire for too many conflicting things.[108] Our desires control our attention and our actions; Jesus does not claim we need to eliminate all desire, but rather, he claims that focusing our desire wholly on God—not on fame or fortune or even survival—is key to a fulfilling life.[109] Trying to serve two (or more) masters is at the core of un-Christlike complexity. Instead, like Jesus, we are called to seek wholeheartedly God's kingdom (v. 33), trusting that our gracious God will provide the rest.[110] The fundamental imperative of this section of the Sermon on the Mount—"do not worry," repeated in vv. 28, 31, and 34—is a categorical imperative, implying that there are no exceptions to the command.[111] The command, however, can only be obeyed once we have made the choices Jesus has laid out before us in the preceding passage: between corruptible treasures and

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[106] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A, World Biblical Commentary (Colombia: Word Incorporated, 1993), 163; John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 135.

[107] Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 134.

[108] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 80.

[109] Clifford M. Yeary, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018), 64.

[110] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 210; April Yamasaki, *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Personal Renewal*, ProQuest eBook (Scottdale: MennoMedia, 2013), 106, 108.

[111] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 269.

incorruptible treasures, between darkness and light, between mammon and God.[112] If we have rejected the accumulation of possessions, prestige, and power, then there is no need to worry about those things, because the Master we have chosen is compassionate and kind.[113] God longs to provide us with everything we need to survive—and much more.

Through the two core concerns for survival, food and clothing, Jesus distinguishes his disciples from the rest of the world.[114] While everyone else focuses their attention on the *basics* of life, Jesus calls his followers to focus their hearts on eternal life and the greater calling of God's kingdom.[115] Jesus, of course, is not indifferent to our material needs; instead, he argues that our priorities must be in order (v. 33). Jesus' point here is that the *telos* of human existence is not merely survival *nor* greedy accumulation; it is the holistic flourishing of individuals, communities, and creation.[116]

The first of the three arguments (vv. 25c-30) compares humans to animals, represented by the birds, and then to plants, represented by the lilies. Jesus would have known that there are, in fact, animals that store up food, and that most animals work quite hard for their food, whether by hunting or foraging. Jesus is using rhetorical devices to illustrate why the birds and lilies do not worry: They rely on the abundance of nature, their innate sense of survival, and their lack of presumption that they even could control

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[112] Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 135-136; Arren Bennet Lawrence, *Comparative Characterization in the Sermon on the Mount: Characterization of the Ideal Disciple* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 218.

[113] Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 136.

[114] Lawrence, *Comparative Characterization in the Sermon on the Mount*, 220.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 132; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 210; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 472.

the future if they wanted to, let alone any attempts to actually do so.[117] Similarly, Jesus knows that the flowers are not "clothed" in the same way humans need to be clothed with items external to our created body. Unlike the "clothing" of petals on flowers, humans are created naked, and our clothing is not part of our bodies, but entirely separate and dependent on external resources.[118] Though necessary, clothing has no effect on our value as human beings or on our character; it is foolhardy and misguided to give too much attention to things like clothes that have no eternal significance.[119] For humans, these comparisons do not give us permission to be idle, but they redirect the focus of our work not toward the accumulation of possessions that help us feel a (false) sense of security and control, but rather toward seeking God's kingdom and righteousness, trusting that God will provide everything else in its turn.[120] In this work, humans are called to mimic nature; nature is our teacher and mentor in simplicity.

The question in v. 27 forms the bridge between these two analogies of birds to food and lilies to clothing: "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" Interestingly, the word Jesus uses here is best translated not as *hour*, but as *cubit*, which is a unit of measurement for length, rather than time.[121] It is possible that this

[117] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 473-475. Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba call Jesus' statement about the lilies "to be a kind of agrarian directive": "Look at the created order God has established. You will never do better than this. So trust in this order and imitate it. Neither Solomon in all his glory—nor, we might add, Monsanto or Archer Daniels Midland or Cargill and their fertilizers or pesticides or genetically modified seeds—can out-create what God has created." See Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation*, Kindle ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), loc. 997-1004.

[118] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 479.

[119] Ibid., 472.

[120] Ibid., 473-475.

[121] Lawrence, *Comparative Characterization in the Sermon on the Mount*, 222.

choice of vocabulary reminds us that anxiety neither increases the length of our life nor our physical or metaphorical stature in this life.[122] This first argument concludes with v. 30, in which Jesus calls the disciples people "of little faith"—a phrase he also uses in 8:26, 14:31, and 16:8—to highlight that our singular focus on God prompts us to trust in God's providence, because we can see the evidence wherever we look, even in the smallest of sparrows and the most fleeting of flowers.[123] If choosing simplicity means choosing to devote our lives to God's values and God's kingdom, then certainly, choosing simplicity means also choosing to care about the seemingly unimportant details of God's ecosystems.[124]

Jesus' second argument (vv. 31-33) compares the disciples not to animals and plants but to other people, specifically the Gentiles, who have no knowledge of God. However, instead of using it as an ethnic category, Jesus uses the word to refer to those who go about life anxious, because their attention, their commitments, their focus, and their hearts are complicated and confused by their desire for possessions, prestige, and power, rather than for God alone.[125] On the flip side, the people of God are those who follow in the footsteps of Christ's simplicity, devoting every facet of their lives to actively seeking the kingdom of God.[126] This is what sets the disciple of Jesus apart from the birds and the lilies: Humans do not just experience the absence of worry, but also the

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[122] Ibid..

[123] W. F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew*, vol. 26, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 82.

[124] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 73; Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, loc. 970-989.

[125] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 208.

[126] Ibid., 209.

blessing of hope for God's coming redemption of all things, of which we receive a foretaste in this life.[127] Thus, eternal life is not the only reward: As promised by the latter half of v. 33, the earnest seeker finds not only eternal life, but also all the necessities of this life, too.[128]

The final argument of Matthew 6:25-34 is found in v. 34. Since v. 33 seems to be the climax of the passage—the culmination of Jesus' entire argument—v. 34, at first glance, seems like an odd, anticlimactic addendum to the rest of the passage.[129] However, this final verse and its "memorable aphorism" serves as a conclusion not just for the subunit of vv. 25-34, but for the entire pericope starting in v. 19.[130] To live in anxiety is to live in the future, which we can neither control, nor rush, nor foresee. For the disciple seeking God's kingdom, the best and only thing we can do is simply seek God's kingdom in our present moment and situation.[131] If we are overwhelmed with worry for the imagined problems of tomorrow, we will inevitably neglect the real, concrete, urgent matters that require our attention today.[132] On the whole, Matthew 6:25-34 makes a coherent argument for the absolute necessity of orienting ourselves wholly toward God. For both Jesus' ancient and contemporary disciples, this singularity of focus calls for not only a change in our mindset, but a change in our practices as well.

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[127] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 482; Witherington, *Matthew*, 154.

[128] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 483.

[129] Ibid., 481; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 165; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 209.

[130] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 209.

[131] Ibid., 209-210.

[132] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 486; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 166.

A Brief Note on Matthew's Parallel: Luke 12:22-32

Catherine Wright reflects on the Lukan passage, Luke 12:22-32, which parallels Matthew 6:25-34 quite closely.[133] Like Matthew, Luke highlights that Jesus' primary concern is for his disciples to orient their lives not around money and possessions, but around the kingdom of God; not around greed and anxiety, but around generosity and trust.[134] People in the ancient world, as today, have always been tempted to orient their lives around money; however, "Such a mentality chokes the beauty from life and reduces relationships to business transactions. Jesus would have more than that for us."[135] Indeed, of all the gospel writers, Luke is arguably the most careful to demonstrate that Jesus' lifestyle was "fully consistent with Jesus' teachings about simplicity," especially his comments in the Sermon on the Mount (or, in Luke's case, the parallel Sermon on the Plain in 6:20-49).[136] "Luke depicts simplicity, a lifestyle characterized by complete dependence on God, willingness to share possessions, and habits of almsgiving and generosity, as an indicator of one's participation in the kingdom of God."[137]

Wright then asks the pressing question: To be serious about our faith and discipleship to Jesus, do we *really* need to sell *all* our possessions (Luke 18:22; Matthew 19:21)?[138] Though there are good reasons to see this as a hyperbolic statement, Wright

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[133] Catherine J. Wright, *Spiritual Practices of Jesus: Learning Simplicity, Humility, and Prayer with Luke's Earliest Readers* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 3-21.

[134] Ibid., 3, 5, 9.

[135] Ibid., 7.

[136] Ibid., 19, 21.

[137] Ibid., 20.

[138] Ibid., 10.

challenges us not to brush it off with a spiritual or reductionist explanation: "[I]f we consistently interpret Luke's teachings on wealth in this way, we will mute the transformative shock value of the text. Jesus' teachings probably made his first audience uncomfortable, and if we are reading Luke [and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew] the way we should be, it will do the same for us."[139]

Theology and Mission in the Sermon on the Mount, Especially Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 6:25-34 offers both practical advice to the average lives of disciples *and* an eschatological vision of God's promises breaking into the life of the discipleship community. In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the words Jesus speaks in 6:25-34 flips Maslow's hierarchy of needs on its head: Jesus argues that seeking God's kingdom—meaning to *see* it, *testify* to it, and *reflect* it—is foundational not just to our survival but to our ultimate fulfillment,[140] a message that should be particularly alarming in a culture that valorizes workaholism and idolizes the amassing of the same treasures that Jesus calls us to renunciate.[141]

On the whole, the Sermon on the Mount casts a vision for a simplicity of devotion (*teleios*) to the kingdom that leads to holistic flourishing (*makarios*) for both humans *and* creation.[142] While *teleios* is often translated as *perfect* (5:48; 19:21), a better translation would be *whole* or *complete*.[143] In the Bible, *teleios* is characterized by wholehearted

[139] Ibid., 10.

[140] Yeary, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 68.

[141] Winslade, *The Essence*, 140.

[142] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 72.

[143] Ibid.

self-sacrifice for, obedience to, and companionship with God.[144] While *teleios* is not specifically used in 6:25-34, the argument in these verses emerges from Matthew 5 and the first half of Matthew 6, which hinge on the command to "Be *teleios* as your heavenly Father is *teleios*" (5:48).[145] Thus, *teleios* is a foundational theological concept to the admonition not to be anxious. However, rather than making us more anxious because we are not being *perfect*, we can receive *teleios* as an invitation into a *simplicity* of mind, heart, body, and soul that makes us *whole* by empowering us: (1) to reflect, in all facets of life, the image of God in which we are created, and (2) to fulfill, in our relationship with each other and the created order, our potential to embody the character and values of God.[146] In short, Matthew 6:25-34 admonishes us to receive God's mission *to us*: a mission to restore our bodies into eternal life, our hearts into singular devotion, and our minds into peaceful attentiveness. In turn, we become missional to other people and to all creation.

Paul—probably drawing from traditional stories about Jesus, as he sat in prison anticipating the end of his own life—offers his Gentile congregants in Philippi the same advice that Jesus presents on the mountain: "Do not worry" (Phil. 4:6).[147] As the community of Jesus-followers grew and matured, it became apparent that to not worry about possessions, power, and prestige made them quite generous, compassionate, and loving. Trusting in God's provision for each individual, the community of God's people,

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[144] Ibid., 76.

[145] Ibid., 79.

[146] Winslade, *The Essence*, 85.

[147] Amy-Jill Levine, *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven*, ProQuest eBook (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 15w.

and all God's creatures, the disciples rejected the hierarchical power struggles of the Roman Empire; instead, they broke bread together, forgave each other, and showed hospitality to outsiders.[148] Thus, we see in the lives of Jesus and his earliest disciples how freedom from anxiety emerges from trusting in God's mission of provision, sustenance, and generosity to us.[149] We know this is true, because we witness daily God's mission to the least significant of the birds and the flowers.

Based on God's mission to creation, Matthew 6:25-34 also offers insight into *humanity's* mission to creation. In the larger pericope of 6:19-34, Jesus' comparison between God and mammon takes on new meaning in a post-industrialized world.[150] In enslavement to mammon, humans have devastated the earth, further impoverished the world's most vulnerable people, caused mass extinctions, committed genocides, and obliterated the beauty of God's creation across the globe.[151] The chaos that ensues when we fail to focus our devotion on God alone is more apparent now than ever, and it has created increasing interest in lifestyles of simplicity that allow us to separate ourselves from the overconsumption, overproduction, and overstimulation that characterize those who do not fully trust in the Lord.[152]

To "look at the birds of the air" (v. 26) and "consider the lilies of the field" (v. 28) requires us to be attentive to nature and to God's Spirit within nature.[153] Indeed, it means

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[148] Ibid., 15x.

[149] Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 231, 239.

[150] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 74.

[151] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, loc. 997-1004.

[152] Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 131.

[153] Levine, *Sermon on the Mount*, 15w.

that striving for God's kingdom is not only for our own peace of mind, or even for the flourishing of humanity; it is also so that our *peaceful*, *non-anxious* presence as the Body of Christ may be *truly good news* to the land, the plants, and the animals, too.[154] In practical terms in the twenty-first century, this means rejecting the over-extraction of resources in fear that there will not be enough for *me* and instead trusting that the sustaining fertility and sustainable abundance with which God created the earth will provide enough for us all.[155] Thus, rather than being a random example, the birds and the lilies are "essential" to Jesus' message:[156]

> We cannot appreciate Jesus' message in this passage unless we place ourselves as creatures within God's creation, along with our fellow-creatures the birds and the wild flowers. We cannot appreciate Jesus' message unless we see ourselves not as masters of creation entitled to exploit its resources to our heart's desire, but as participants in the community of God's creatures. No doubt we are *eminent* participants. Jesus does say we are of more value than the birds, though he says this not in order to disparage the birds, who do have value of their own, but to reassure the anxious. No doubt we are eminent participants in the community of creation, but *participants* nonetheless. Considering these other creatures, we see a natural world of abundance and beauty that exists by the Creator's gift, independent of all our efforts to create our own world of plenty and beauty for ourselves. If we can recover our own real relationship to that world of God's creatures, then we can begin to seek God's Kingdom and further his purposes for his creation.[157]

Later in *The Bible and Ecology*, Bauckham adds:

> What we have in common with the lilies of the field is not just that we are creatures of God, but that we are fellow-members of the community of God's creation, sharing the same Earth, affected by the processes of the Earth, affecting the processes that affect each other, with common interests at least in life and

[154] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, loc. 970-989.

[155] Ibid., loc. 1194-1206.

[156] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 75.

[157] Ibid., 75-76, emphasis original.

> flourishing, with the common end of glorifying the Creator and interdependent in the ways we do exactly that.[158]

Of course, just because the birds rely on God for their sustenance and are not anxious about where their next meal will come from does not mean that their sustenance is always provided. Even more commonly in the post-industrial world that is tortured by pollution and climate change, animals die of starvation, and plants do not germinate or get pollinated. Ecosystems are changing, and the environment is paying the price for anthropogenic climate change. Both on the literal and metaphorical level, we are called to be the missional people who meet those needs, too, as followers of Jesus and as the Body of Christ. As image-bearers and co-creators, we tend to the earth to ensure that nature sustains life as God intended it, and that human needs are met as God wills it. To pursue God's kingdom and righteousness is to be so aware of God's love and grace in our lives and in creation that it overflows into love for others and for the earth itself.[159]

Thus, in this short passage, Jesus invites us to simplify our attention, expectations, and desires (6:25-30), so that we are wholly focused on God.[160] Indeed, when we give up our own anxiety about whether our plates are full enough, we missionally turn a compassionate eye toward those whose plates have nothing on them.[161] Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba put it this way:

> God knows that we need to eat. Our task is not to worry but to trust that God will provide. Although we should certainly care about the fact that well over a billion people still do not have enough to eat, it is tempting to assume that this distinctly Christian concern about eating ends when food has been adequately distributed

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[158] Ibid., 88.

[159] Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 165.

[160] Yeary, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 67.

[161] Witherington, *Matthew*, 151.

> and shared. This is a serious mistake. Jesus' admonition is directed to the ways in which worry dominates and distorts our relationships with the world and each other. Clearly life is more than food. We can, if we are not careful, turn eating into an idolatrous affair by making food our obsessive focus. But there is no life without food. God created a world in which every creature lives by eating. God daily sustains creatures by providing them with gifts of decomposition, photosynthesis and digestion, which are essential for the eating we enjoy. On the first Sabbath sunrise, God looked out on the world and pronounced it good. Seeing the creatures eat, he also made it delectable. That Jesus ate with sinners is both a practical and a profound action because it shows us how God relates to us, how we are to relate to each other and how we need to relate to the food itself. When our relationships in these three areas are properly configured, creation is nurtured and reconciled, God is glorified and heaven is tasted.[162]

When we look to nature not as a resource to extract but as a mentor to guide us, we do not worry about if there is enough, but rather, we inhabit abundance so that there is always enough to go around, not just among humans, but for the delicate and biodiverse environment that God created. This is what Jesus means when he invites us to seek, to keep our eyes, to move ourselves constantly toward the kingdom of God. The word translated as *seek* or *strive for* (v. 33) is in the continual present tense to emphasize that this is not something we can achieve in its totality, but rather, it is "the vocation of our lives."[163] Green spiritual practices of simplicity reorient us and our priorities: They not only keep us focused on our true needs and the will of God, but they also contribute to a world in which there is enough to go around for the flourishing of all people and all creation.

Theological Foundation: Biblical Themes and Doctrinal Beliefs for Green Simplicity

There are many more biblical passages we can explore beyond Genesis, the Psalms, and the Gospels that give us insight into green simplicity, but these sections of

[162] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, loc. 1194-1206.

[163] Witherington, *Matthew*, 153.

Scripture give us a general sense of the Bible's overarching narrative about the natural world and a simple lifestyle. In addition to specific texts that can be cited by chapter and verse, there are also overarching biblical themes and orthodox Christian doctrines that provide valuable insight into green simplicity. Three themes in particular emerged unexpectedly from my research, and they are a helpful contribution to the theological foundation for ecotheology, which in turn, helps us better understand how to put our beliefs into practice. I have categorized these theological themes into three groups and offer a brief, introductory summary of each: (1) the Trinity, *kenosis*, and divine immanence; (2) the incarnation, crucifixion, and embodied resurrection; and (3) the kingdom, Sabbath, and new creation. I conclude this section with a brief overview of how the American church has responded to the climate crisis, in general, in order to contrast our actions with the explicit calling we receive from God through the Bible and theological tradition.

The Trinity, *Kenosis*, and Divine Immanence

Sallie McFague draws heavily on trinitarian theology in her extensive explorations of creation. "Intrinsic relationality" defines the Trinity, the flourishing of humans, and the ecosystems of the natural world.[164] Absolutely nothing, not even the three divine persons of the Trinity, exists apart from interdependent love.[165] Thus, everything that emerges from a "radically relational" God must likewise be radically

[164] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Christology: Kenosis, Climate Change, and Befriending Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), xi.

[165] Ibid.

relational.[166] *Kenosis*, or kenotic theology, is the inherently self-sacrificial—or self-emptying—love of God.[167] Each person of the Trinity empties into and makes room for the other persons of the Trinity, which is most clearly epitomized by Jesus' willingness to incarnate into a fully human form, sacrifice himself through a violent and humiliating execution, and be the first-born of the new creation.[168]

Reflecting on the meaning of a kenotic trinitarian doctrine for us, McFague wonders:

> What if we choose this as our model? How should we conceive of the transcendence / immanence of God and God's relation to the world if we take the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as our model in a time of climate change? … What if some of the novel insights into this basic "worldview"—that is, the assumed, underlying assumptions about the human place in the world on issues of power, exceptionalism, responsibility, body, materialism, dependence, and so on—give us a very different picture than the traditional Protestant picture of two superbeings, God and man, struggling for dominance? What if we might learn something about how to live a kenotic life from the very different picture of our place on our planet, from an anthropology challenging us to face up to our radical dependence, fragility, and even weakness? The seeming absurdity of living a life of sacrificial love for others that is at the heart of most religions, and certainly of Christianity, may find a partner in insights from postmodern science and philosophy in terms of its insistence that primarily and centrally, we are animals, bodies dependent on other bodies, incarnational beings at the mercy of the many sources of power in our planet—among them, climate change.[169]

In *Blessed Are the Consumers*, as McFague observes the deterioration of the planet at the hands of humans, she likewise centers her attention on the idea of "*kenosis*, self-restraint, giving space to others, pulling back, saying 'enough,' recognizing the interdependence of all life-forms: these are a few of the words that attempt to describe the special—and

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[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid., 3.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid., 4. See also Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 144-145.

challenging—religious contribution to the economic and ecological crises of our time."[170] McFague sees the natural world as mimicking Jesus: Creation empties itself so that life can go on in a constant process of death and rebirth, since all creatures, including humans, are completely indebted to other creatures for survival and flourishing.[171] Justice requires that people, in turn, self-empty, too, "of sharing when they have too much, of sacrificing for others, of limiting their wants so the needs of others can be met."[172] McFague calls this the practice of "restraint"—as opposed to the more culturally common practice of "individualism"—that is more concerned with "the carrying capacity of any ecological system" than with "our own individual desires."[173]

By choosing to participate in the self-emptying love of the Trinity, we love and honor God: "[W]e are not called to love God or the world. Rather, we are called to love God in the world. We love God by loving the world. We love God through and with the world. But this turns out to be a kenotic, a sacrificial love."[174] She suggests "the wild space of voluntary poverty"[175] as a way to reject both the false dualism between private

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[170] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 17-18.

[171] Ibid., 21. Ted Grimsrud observes these natural realities as holy redemption enacted, transforming "brokenness to wholeness" and healing rather than punishing. See Ted Grimsrud, *Instead of Atonement: The Bible's Salvation Story and Our Hope for Wholeness*, ProQuest eBook (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 147.

[172] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 21.

[173] Ibid., 30-31. See also McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 141-142. Norman Wirzba refers to individualism, in partnership with "consumer capitalism," as "practical atheism." See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 15-17.

[174] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 22, emphasis added. For a similar idea, see Joel James Shuman, "Introduction: Placing God in the Work of Wendell Berry," in *Wendell Berry and Religion: Heaven's Earthly Life*, eds. Joel James Shuman and L. Roger Owens (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 3.

[175] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 81.

and public life and the compartmentalization of religion apart from politics.[176] In sum, McFague says, voluntary poverty helps us put *kenosis* into practice,[177] to experience "genuine humanity," not through personal fulfillment or individual emotional ecstasy, but through "participation in the astonishing self-giving of God's own self."[178]

In *Life Abundant*, McFague clarifies that participating in the kenotic reality of the Trinity is contingent on the reality that:

> God is closer to us (to every iota of creation) than we are to ourselves. God is the breath of our breath, the love with which we love, the power that sustains our work. When we become aware of God, who is the Alpha and Omega, as the source and goal of everything and of all life, love, and power, then we become channels for these realities, both in our own lives and for others. We become available to be "saved" (restored to health and happiness) and to help "save" others. Salvation means living in God's presence, in imitation of divine love for the world. Each of us can love only a tiny fragment of the earth, but that is our task.[179]

The persons of the Trinity self-empty into each other, but they also self-empty into creation. Divine immanence is necessary for *kenosis*.[180] As alluded to at the beginning of this section, we know this to be true through the incarnation. As McFague puts it, "kenotic theology is necessarily a body theology," an "incarnational theology."[181] Thus,

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[176] Ibid., 129.

[177] Ibid., 81.

[178] Ibid., 154.

[179] Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 12. As Norman Wirzba puts it, "To know *how to live* presupposes that we know *who we are* and *where we are*." See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 17, emphasis original.

[180] Bruce Epperly describes divine immanence in the language of the Celtic traditions, which talk about "thin places," especially in nature and in relationships, that are a window into divinity. See Epperly, *Church Ahead*, 43.

[181] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 171.

we next turn our attention to the relevance of the doctrines of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to this study.

The Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Embodied Resurrection

The *kenosis* of the Trinity is most clear in the incarnation, crucifixion, and embodied resurrection of Jesus. Sallie McFague also lays important groundwork for the significance of the incarnation. For her, "incarnationalism" fundamentally describes "God present here and now."[182]

> The incarnation reveals God as always with us and our being *defined* as within God. The incarnation is the solution to the "two worlds problem": the problem of how to love God and the world. There is only one world, a world that God loves. Since God loves it, we not only *can* but *should*. In fact, loving the world (not God alone), or rather, loving God *through* loving the world, is the Christian way.[183]

McFague believes that Christianity is unique for its emphasis on the goodness of the body, what she calls "its profound materialism."[184] We cannot be faithful disciples to Jesus, the paradigm of humanity, while ignoring the *embodied* heart of the faith.[185] However, this doesn't only include Jesus' embodied *birth*; the crucifixion—Jesus' embodied *suffering*—is also central to incarnationalism:[186]

> [T]he story of the Jesus of the cross, who as the face (incarnation) of God identified so thoroughly with all creation that his life led to death on the cross (self-emptying love). Here we have a picture of the God-world relationship that is neither one of absorption of creation into God nor a distant ignoring of creation as

[182] McFague, *A New Climate for Christology*, x.

[183] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 13, emphasis original. See also McFague, *Life Abundant*, 20-21. For more on the intimacy of the incarnation, see Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 16-17.

[184] McFague, *A New Climate for Christology*, 4.

[185] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 17-20.

[186] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 196. For a superb, thorough, and accessible theology of the crucifixion and its relevance for us today, see Henri Nouwen, *Following Jesus: Finding Our Way Home in an Age of Anxiety* (London: SPCK, 2019), 75-81, 102-104, 115.

> utterly separate from God. Rather, as we have seen in our discussion of the Trinity, God's relation to creation is one of both radical intimacy and total respect for the otherness of the other. Trinitarian love is not based on the erotic paradigm (of one-to-one), but rather on a communal-covenantal pattern (of empathetic identification with the well-being of the other). … [I]t makes the claim that true love (God's love), the only love that is real, is one in which each and every partner participates in the dance of give-and-take, sharing and reciprocation, sacrifice and letting be, death and rebirth.[187]

Thus, for followers of Jesus, a "cruciform lifestyle" is defined by loving God so intensely that we empathize with and love creation as God does, helping all life to flourish.[188]

In the chapter titled, "Love Incarnate: Hope and Moral-Spiritual Power for Climate Justice," Cynthia Moe-Lobeda also explores the relevance of God's love revealed in the incarnation and resurrection to the realities of environmental degradation. Out of God's "infinite love," she says, which is both "intimately personal" and "envelop[s] creation as a whole," Jesus incarnates into creation.[189] The incarnation reveals that: "[E]ach person personally, humankind as a whole, and the entirety of creation are beloved with a love that cannot be escaped, a love that will not cease or lessen regardless of whatever we do or fail to do. … This God is at play in the world,

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[187] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 196. See Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 82-86 for more on this topic. She notes that while environmental ethicist Holmes Rolston III uses the term *cruciform* to connect the suffering of Christ with the suffering of the natural world, she prefers the term theo-drama, because it "looks beyond the event of the cross to the resurrection. … The way that I am interpreting the cross implies not so much the necessity of suffering, but its inevitability" (85).

[188] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 24. Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw elaborate on the paradox of death and life in the crucifixion. They note that *to be detached from the suffering* of creation is the real threat to life and flourishing, however paradoxical that may sound. See Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 277, 292.

[189] Moe-Lobeda, "Love Incarnate," 64. As Elizabeth Johnson points out, the Word did not become *human being*, but *flesh* (John 1:14). For more on Jesus' identification with all material creation, not just human beings, through the incarnation, see Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 183-186.

breathing life into it, saving it."[190] She emphasizes that incarnation is not a heady theological doctrine, but rather, it shapes our lives daily:

> Incarnate love is the breathtaking centerpiece of Christian faith. … It is luring creation toward the reign of God, a world in which justice, compassion, and joy are lived in their fullness by all and in which creation flourishes in the light of God. We human creatures are created and called to recognize this gracious and indomitable love—to receive it, relish it, revel in it, and trust it. But that is not all. After receiving and trusting God's love, we are to embody it in the world. We are beckoned to be the body of God's justice-making, Earth-relishing Love working through us, in us, and among us to bring healing from all forms of sin that would thwart God's gift of abundant life for all. According to widespread understanding of the Christian story, this is the human vocation, our life's work.[191]

Of course, we don't always embody the reality of the incarnation well. Climate change, Moe-Lobeda argues, is a prime example. Even decent people who want to practice justice make choices that might be beneficial for them, and maybe even for the people around them, but that are devastating to so many others.[192] However, this is where we place our trust in God's love demonstrated in the resurrection, through which God affirmed love and life over destruction and death.[193] "So," she encourages us, "speak the resurrection. If [the resurrection] is true, then by the power of God's love at play in life on Earth, life can triumph over the death and destruction that we now engender in climate change and economic exploitation."[194]

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[190] Moe-Lobeda, "Love Incarnate," 73.

[191] Ibid., 64. See also, Moe-Lobeda, "Love Incarnate," 73-74.

[192] Ibid., 66.

[193] Ibid., 69. Michael Northcott writes, "Acting rightly with respect to the earth is a source of hope, for those who so act give expression to the Christian belief that it is God's intention to redeem the earth, and her oppressed creatures, from sinful subjection to the oppressive domination of prideful wealth and imperial power." See Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 285.

[194] Moe-Lobeda, "Love Incarnate," 70. As John Haught puts it, "Christian faith in the resurrected Christ extends to the fulfillment of the whole of creation. … A genuinely eschatological faith encourages openness to the divine promise of a fulfillment yet to come, but our theologies of nature have failed to take into full account the fact that the universe may still have a future of new creation and 'fuller-being' up ahead." See John F. Haught, "The Unfinished Sacrament of Creation: Christian Faith and the Promise of

Elizabeth Johnson also connects the crucifixion and the resurrection to creation care. To identify with the suffering of creation, and then to be vindicated by defeating death in a resurrected *body*, God, in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, affirms the entire community of creatures into which God has breathed life:[195] "Through the double solidarity of Jesus with those who suffer and of God with the crucified Jesus, a blessed future opens in hope for the rest of the world. In the tangle of our lives, graced fragments of personal, social, and ecological flourishing give foretastes of this blessed life, the fullness of which is still to come."[196] Chris Doran, in *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, notes that ignoring the relevance of Jesus' resurrection to our present lives and to the present creation is like witnessing to a message of despair.[197] To proclaim Jesus' kingdom is to live in the hope that the resurrection matters, not just for our future bodies, but for the present creation, and the "pain, violence, and even death" that it—and we alongside it—experience.[198]

The Kingdom, Sabbath, and New Creation

Christopher Fung, in his article, "Sabbath: A Biblical Understanding of Creation Care," succinctly connects the kingdom of God, Sabbath, and new creation. Similar to how God rests in the creation narrative (Genesis 2:2-3), Sabbath for humans is an

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Nature," in *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation*, eds. Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, ProQuest eBook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 138.

[195] Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 193.

[196] Ibid., 111.

[197] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 63-64.

[198] Ibid., 66.

opportunity to appreciate and delight in the goodness of all creation.[199] Thus, in the Old Testament, God's commands about Sabbath are not only for humans, but for the benefit of all creation; this is especially true in the institution of Jubilee, during which the land is allowed to rest from agricultural practices.[200] Fung argues that Jesus' death and resurrection fulfill the mutuality, harmony, respect, and love in the relationship between humanity and nature that God built into the Sabbath observance of ancient Israel.[201] Indeed, Fung points out that Jesus inaugurates his ministry by proclaiming Jubilee (Luke 4:18-19), and his proclamation and embodiment of the kingdom throughout his ministry is the Jubilee come to fruition for people and nature.[202] The Sabbath Jubilee is fulfilled in God's kingdom among Jesus' disciples, and it is consummated in the new creation, especially represented by communion:[203]

> At the centre of this expectant community—the church—is the Lord's Table through which the church, the body of Christ, looks forward to the consummation of creation through a redemptive process. Nature is an indispensable part of this

[199] Christopher Fung, "Sabbath: A Biblical Understanding of Creation Care," *ERT* 36.4 (2012): 317-318. Norman Wirzba claims that the core intent of Sabbath is to "model for the whole creation a life that brings glory to God," particularly by ceasing "self-gain and self-glorification." See Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 38. For a more in depth analysis of the Sabbath's relevance to creation, see A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018), part three, 121-157.

[200] Scholars believe it is unlikely that Israel ever actually practiced Jubilee, but God's *intention* for Jubilee, especially for the most vulnerable people and creatures, is what is central in Jesus' ministry. See Fung, "Sabbath," 319. The prophet Jeremiah seems to claim that Israel's punishment via exile was primarily a result of Israel's neglect of the full scope of Jubilee. See Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 161.

[201] Fung, "Sabbath," 316, 318, 321.

[202] Ibid., 321. See also Cherice Bock, "Watershed Discipleship: Communicating Climate Change Within a Christian Framework: A Case Study Analysis," in *Handbook of Climate Change Communication: Case Studies in Climate Change Communication*, vol. 3, Climate Change Management, eds. Walter Leal Filho, Evangelos Manolas, Anabela Marisa Azul, Ulisses M. Azeiteiro, and Henry McGhie (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 16. Ted Grimsrud offers a brief but thorough account of Jesus' proclamation and embodiment of the kingdom, with a special emphasis on Mark, in Grimsrud, *Instead of Atonement*, 7, 65-66. He also connects the kingdom to the wholeness and healing of new creation, described in Revelation. See Grimsrud, *Instead of Atonement*, 174-176, 182.

[203] Fung, "Sabbath," 320-321.

> consummation. The time orientation in the Sabbatical-year-transformed church is now irrevocably locked into a hope, the hope of creation's fullness.[204]

The work of the church, Fung poses, is not in the salvation of souls *from* earth but in the "redemption of nature."[205] He identifies this new-creation reality as the "Sabbath-Kingdom," in which the heavenly and mundane, the eternal and temporal, the spiritual and material collide.[206] He then concludes by claiming that the Sabbath-Kingdom is how humans "can truly actualise [themselves] through [their] work in God's creation,"[207] because creation care, in short, is the holistic manifestation of faith, hope, and love,[208] and of God's redemptive justice enacted in the world.[209]

Richard Bauckham notes that the entire story of the Bible is the story of the triangular, not vertical, relationship between God, humans, and the rest of creation.[210] While the God-human relationship may be the focus, the God-creation and human-creation relationships "are operative throughout the story,"[211] and it is clear that God's

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[204] Ibid., 321.

[205] Ibid., 322.

[206] Ibid., 324.

[207] Ibid., 328. Celia Deane-Drummond notes the following about the purpose of Sabbath: "The Sabbath points to the ultimate purpose that God intends for all creation, namely to give glory to God by being what God has intended it to be through God's wisdom. Perhaps the greatest challenge in the development of eco-practice is setting aside a particular time for just being with the natural world and with God, in active rest understood as appreciation. Creation is not just 'good,' it is also declared holy. It is in such contexts that we can, perhaps, begin to hear the silent 'voice' of creation and its demands." See Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 30.

[208] Fung, "Sabbath," 329.

[209] Ibid., 330.

[210] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 46; Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 145-146.

[211] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 46.

intention is to redeem all creation, with humanity as part of that creation.[212] Bauckham characterizes the plan of new creation as one of "cosmic inclusivity" (Col. 1:15-20).[213] Likewise, John Haught notes that, while eschatology has often been used and received as more "ecologically menacing rather than salutary,"[214] he believes the eschatological notion of new creation is a sacrament of hope that is:

> confluent with a fresh concern for the future of the whole universe. … The theme of promise may now become the maternal womb of an ecological theology completely attuned to contemporary cosmology. Jesus's proclamation of the coming reign of God and the promises that accompany it now extend to encompass the horizon of a cosmic future previously unnoticed. Our longing for the coming of God need no longer be separated from hope for the ultimate fulfillment of an unfinished universe.[215]

Drawing on Haught,[216] Chris Doran also affirms the universe as "sacramental"—much like communion and baptism—because of their shared revelatory nature.[217] In observing the sacraments, a "religious consciousness is awakened to the presence of sacred mystery," or in the theology of Augustine, "a sacrament is a visible form of invisible grace."[218] In engaging creation as a sacrament, we are not only motivated to protect it,[219]

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[212] Ibid., 47.

[213] Ibid. For more on the Colossians hymn, see Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 152-160. Elizabeth Johnson refers to this concept as "cosmic redemption," for which the natural world groans alongside humans. See Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, xi-xii. Chris Doran likewise refers to the Colossians 1 passage as indicative of the "cosmic significance" of Christ. See Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 28. See also Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 22-23.

[214] Haught, "The Unfinished Sacrament of Creation," 137.

[215] Ibid., 148.

[216] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 33.

[217] Ibid., 29.

[218] Ibid., 30.

[219] Ibid., 32.

we also have a clearer vision of "God's work of redemption," not as a distant and ethereal heaven, but as a present and future reality that is for all creatures.[220]

The Church's Response(s) to the Climate Crisis

Given the rich biblical and theological reasons to care about God's creation (which the preceding synthesis far from exhausts), it is a "catastrophic discrepancy" that the predominant—perhaps, even, the most "respectable"—response to solutions for environmental injustices among American Protestants is one of apathy, skepticism, outright hostility, or, at worst, open complicity in the "military-industrial conspiracy to murder Creation."[221] How the American culture wars politicized environmentalism as a "liberal agenda" and somehow anti-Christian is extremely complex and beyond the scope of this project. However, it would be helpful to note some of the most common reasons for climate change denial or indifference among people of faith, as well as the consequences of these reactions, as we consider the role of green spiritual practices of simplicity among Christian communities.

Science denial is a significant problem among fundamentalists in the United States, and covert fundamentalism is increasingly common in mainstream evangelical churches.[222] Science skepticism and denial take root in fundamentalist communities

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[220] Ibid., 46.

[221] Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 306. See also Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 319; Shuman, "Introduction," 5; Jerry Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," *Sewanee Theological Review* 58.1 (2014): 139-140. John Haught notes, "Christian theologians are partly to blame for this indifference," because the natural world has mostly been ignored until very recently. "By and large, however, even these efforts have yet to meet with much success in reshaping ecologically the spirituality of Christians in the world today." See Haught, "The Unfinished Sacrament of Creation," 136.

[222] Evangelical is a notoriously difficult term to define. Take, for example, this observation rooted in the haziness of evangelical identity: "As a transdenominational movement, evangelicalism lacks the theological foundation, organizational structures, and leadership to develop a shared theological understanding of culture, power, social responsibility, politics, and government. In my perspective, the

because they tend to focus on literalist interpretations of the Bible; the creation narrative in Genesis 1-3 as a literal description of young-earth creationism is an especially pertinent example.[223] Other religious fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals may accept that there is a climate crisis to some degree, but oppose environmentalism out of fear of heading too close to Earth-worship[224] or under the pretense of respecting God's sovereignty: Since only God is sovereign over the earth, then, they believe, either humans cannot change the climate or they should not try to do anything to prevent climate disasters—or both.[225] Inevitably, perhaps even very soon—some Christians believe—God will whisk the true believers away from this earth, destroy it all, and start from scratch, so they interpret environmentalism as a *lack* of faith.[226] These same Christians often have dangerously gnostic beliefs, a dualistic heresy that perceives the material world as evil and believes that the only thing of importance is the soul that will live forever in an immaterial and intangible heaven apart from this earth and apart from our bodies (resurrected or otherwise).[227]

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crisis in evangelical identity isn't driven by substantive changes in the core beliefs (think Bebbington's Quadrilateral) that have defined the movement for generations. It is grounded in an inadequate understanding of how those core beliefs ought to shape one's sense of national identity, religious identity, and social responsibility, areas that are directly related to ecclesiology and mission." See Mark Young, "Recapturing Evangelical Identity and Mission," in *Still Evangelical? Insiders Reconsider Political, Social, and Theological Meaning*, ed. Mark Labberton (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 61.

[223] Laurel D. Kearns, "Fundamentalism," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 178.

[224] See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 40-46.

[225] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 11; Hayhoe, *Saving Us*, 31.

[226] Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 291; Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 96.

[227] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 48; Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 23-25; Shuman, "Introduction," 2-3; Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 10-11.

Other scholars are far less optimistic that the primary motivations for climate denial and indifference are theological. Instead, they point more strongly to the Christian nationalism, partisan loyalties, and ideological self-righteousness that plague the culture wars.[228] Katharine Hayhoe is one of the lead scholars to document how politicized issues get wrapped up into people's "sense of identity" to the point that climate solutions, even those that might benefit a person, can still feel like "a personal attack on their identity," which actually entrenches people more firmly in their beliefs, regardless of scientific facts, biblical evidence, or practical ramifications.[229] Some church leaders have given up on pushing politically controversial political issues like the climate crisis, sometimes out of fear of losing members or their jobs, and other times, because they cannot imagine what a local congregation could do about it.[230]

Wendell Berry calls the neglect and murder of creation "the most horrid blasphemy. It is flinging God's gifts into His face, as if they were of no worth beyond that assigned to them by our destruction of them."[231] Drawing on Berry, Jerry Cappel echoes this belief, saying:

> Calling it blasphemy points to a sacred dimension of wrongness. Blasphemy points beyond material and economic assessments toward spiritual ones. Blasphemy names more fundamental spiritual disconnects between our souls and God's coming reign. And the business of souls and God's coming reign is church business indeed. Naming this destruction as a blasphemy extends to the church an invitation to a broader repentance and a pathway for restoring a relevant form of

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[228] Mark Labberton, "Introduction: Still Evangelical?" In *Still Evangelical? Insiders Reconsider Political, Social, and Theological Meaning*, ed. Mark Labberton (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 8.

[229] Hayhoe, *Saving Us*, 58-59. See also Annick de Witt, "Global Warming Calls for an Inner Climate Change: The Transformative Power of Worldview Reflection for Sustainability," *Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches*, eds. Joan Marques and Satinder Dhiman (New York City: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 203.

[230] Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," 140.

[231] Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 308.

> Christian holiness and discipleship that connects these very large and present issues to a whole hearted participation in God's unfolding work of reconciling all things to himself (Romans 8:19-23).[232]

There are many followers of Jesus across the theological spectrums—evangelicals and mainlines, conservatives and progressives, traditionalists and mystics—who are aware of and passionate about the calling on Jesus' disciples to act for God's creation.[233] According to a 2012 study, churches that are likely to engage in environmentalism are scientifically literate; are aware of social, ecological, and environmental interconnectivity; are committed to justice; and have an "expanding view of God and the moral universe that is able to include other species and the entirety of creation in its understanding of the Christian narrative."[234] However, the overwhelming—and certainly the most visible—response of the American church to neglect creation is an *ecclesiological crisis*: The church has lost sight of a key element of its identity as the representative of God's character to *all* creation, as well as a non-negotiable part of its mission to bring the good news "to the ends of the earth" (Matthew 28:20).[235] The blasphemy of neglecting our identity and calling is not only harmful in terms of the church's spiritual formation; it is also damaging to the missional witness of the church as worshippers of God, followers of Jesus, and embodiments of the kingdom.[236]

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[232] Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," 144.

[233] Epperly, *Church Ahead*, 14, 42.

[234] Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 163.

[235] Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," 141-143.

[236] Labberton, "Introduction," 16-17; Young, "Recapturing Evangelical Identity and Mission," 52; Epperly, *Church Ahead*, 15, 37; Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 68.

Yet, it is not only Jesus-followers who are missing out in a significant way by ignoring creation as part of God's redemption narrative and by neglecting a legitimate opportunity to testify to the character of Jesus. The Christian faith, as we have already begun to explore in this study, has rich and unique resources to contribute to the movement for environmental justice. Climate scientists, advocates, and activists are missing out on the opportunities of integrating spirituality, faith, and religion into climate restoration. At its core, many scholars argue, the climate crisis is not primarily a logistical problem that can be resolved "solely by technological measures."[237] Instead, the climate crisis requires "more humanness, fairness, and awareness."[238] It is "fundamentally a moral issue."[239] This places climate solutions beyond the realm of science (though science is certainly a vital advisor and partner) and into the realm of religion.

Thankfully, religion, and specifically the Christian faith, have much to offer. Followers of Jesus who identify as pro-life should readily be able to see their values in the climate crisis, since it most strongly impacts the lives of children and impoverished people.[240] The church has an organic infrastructure for the interplay between public and private life, both of which we need for the implementation of solutions to the climate crisis.[241] Historically, churches value the "proper stewardship of earthly material within

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[237] de Witt, "Global Warming Calls for an Inner Climate Change," 202.

[238] Ibid.

[239] Louise Gorenflo, "The Moral Response to the Climate Challenge," *Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light* (April 4, 2014), https://www.tennipl.org/the-moral-response-to-the-climate-challenge/. Similarly, see also Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 7-8; John E. Carroll, "The Environment Is a Moral and Spiritual Issue," *Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches*, eds. Joan Marques and Satinder Dhiman (New York City: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 50.

[240] Claiborne and Campolo, *Red-Letter Revolution*, 96-97.

[241] Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 81-82.

their doors" and have systems in place to "improve their stewardship, repent of consumerism, and align their lifestyles."[242] Traditionally, followers of Jesus are community-oriented; they are rooted in, discern within, submit to, and covenant with the community.[243] Church life revolves around shared experiences among the gathered people, including worship, liturgy, music, teaching, sacraments; commitment to service activities; and storytelling as a way to clarify identity and purpose, all of which are opportunities for engraining a love for creation.[244]

Perhaps most importantly, the story of the church, in light of the story of God, is one of hope, healing, and love; there is no room for shame, fear, or despair.[245] Simplicity, contentment, and gratitude are core to the Jesus movement, and they are a powerful counternarrative to the idolatry of wealth, consumption, and accumulation.[246] Followers of Jesus are equipped to see God everywhere, giving a "sacramental nature" to our

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[242] Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," 145. Besides money, churches have many material goods to steward well, including buildings. See Nashville TIPL Chapter, "Greening Houses of Worship," *Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light* (December 2016), https://www.tennipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Greening-Houses-of-Worship.pdf. Churches can: use energy-saving lightbulbs, motion detector lights, and programmable thermostats (1-2); be mindful of water usage by buying low-flow toilets, eliminating single-use water bottles, and doing regular water maintenance to avoid leakage and waste (7-8); practice responsible landscaping by composting, using Earth-friendly weed control, having a community garden, and planting native vegetation (3-4); be mindful that purchases reflect the value of creation and people when buying paper, lightbulbs, cleaning supplies, coffee, kitchenware, and eating utensils (5-6); and include environmental education in a religious school attached to the congregation, or in any adult education as a part of religious services (2-3). A more radical suggestion (or opportunity) for church stewardship is implementing a "carbon tithe" (modeled on the carbon tax) in wealthier churches that are made up of members who have contributed higher carbon emissions. "Morality of Using Revenue from a Carbon Tax or Tithe: A Spiritual Response to Climate Change," *Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light* (March 2018), https://www.tennipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Revenue-Policies.pdf, 3-5, 26.

[243] Joanne Moyer, "'Let Earth Rest': A Consumption Sabbath Tent Revival Meeting to Inspire Simplicity and Environmental Action," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 33.2 (2015): 270-271.

[244] Ibid., 281; Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," 145-148, 152; Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 165-167, 173; Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 226; Kyle David Bennett, *Practices of Love: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life of the World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017), 171.

[245] Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," 149; Moyer, "Let Earth Rest," 277.

[246] Cappel, "Deeper Green Churches," 155-156, 161.

choices and surroundings that likewise counteract selfishness and greed.[247] Additionally, we are well-versed in prayer and spiritual practices, both personal and communal, that help us integrate reflection and action, hope and transformation, passion and response.[248]

The Union of Theology and Ecology

From the biblical narrative, which values creation and calls humans to fulfill our responsibilities to creation, and from theological doctrines, which inform humanity's relationship with nature based on God's relationship with nature, a vivid *ecotheology* emerges. Celia Deane-Drummond, in her *Primer in Ecotheology*, says that ecotheology uses interdisciplinary scholarship, the Bible, and diverse resources across the theological spectrum to facilitate spiritual transformation in humans and missionally include the natural world into the good news of God's story with humanity and the world.[249] Thriving in the dialogue between the local and the global,[250] ecotheology, like other liberative theologies,[251] is "first and foremost concerned with guiding and stimulating

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[247] Ibid., 156-158.

[248] Epperly, *Church Ahead*, 17.

[249] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 2, 17, 22, 91, 114. Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy argue that *imagination* is another core facet of ecotheology. See Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy, "Introduction: Loanwords to Live With," in *An Ecotopian Lexicon*, eds. Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 4-5.

[250] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 2, 125.

[251] "Liberation theology was birthed in the experience of those who witnessed the suffering of those oppressed by various totalitarian regimes and other unjust political structures in the poorest nations of the world, particularly Latin America. The question then becomes: how can that poverty be addressed? A strong criticism of the 'development' rhetoric of the Western world is that it amounts to importing particular cultural values. Initially liberation theology focused more specifically on human survival and flourishing in the particular contexts of oppressive regimes, but the association of the devastation of land with poverty meant that the cry of the poor also joined with a cry of the earth." See Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 37. Some of the richest resources for liberation theology and ecotheology are indigenous. See Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 42. I did not lean primarily on indigenous theologies in this research, because I wanted to use theological perspectives that would come as close to those of my primary ministry context as possible, which is primarily White Protestant, and mostly White

right action."[252] However, it is different than environmental ethics, a twentieth-century philosophical approach to humans' responsibilities to the nonhuman world,[253] in that ecotheology's primary focus and goal is *the relevance of Jesus to all things*.[254] Ecotheologians testify to the meaning of God's creation of us and the world, trust in the presence and activity of the Spirit, and witness to the reality of and hope in Christ who redeems sinful humanity and restores a broken cosmos.[255] Thus, humans practice "deep incarnation" in creation based on the "deep incarnation" of Jesus in creation, which means that the actions that emerge from ecotheology are distinctly rooted in the justice of God, *not only* self-preservation or even human-preservation (though these, too, are wrapped up in environmental concerns).[256]

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evangelical. See the works of Randy Woodley for a Christian indigenous ecotheology, especially Randy Woodley, *Becoming Rooted: One Hundred Days of Reconnecting with Sacred Earth* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2022), 34-51; Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*, ProQuest eBook (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 15-44, 82-128; Randy Woodley and Bo. C. Sanders, *Decolonizing Evangelicalism: An 11:59 p.m. Conversation* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020), 19-39, 98-107.

[252] Alan G. Padgett and Kiara A. Jorgenson, "Introduction: For the Love of the World: A Dialogue on Ecotheology," in *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation*, eds. Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, ProQuest eBook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 16. See also Padgett and Jorgenson, "Introduction," 17-18.

[253] Willis Jenkins, "Ethics, Environmental," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 159. For more on "secular" approaches to environmentalism, see Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 11-16.

[254] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 74, 77. See also Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, and A. J. Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Praxis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 15.

[255] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 74-75, 112, 128-129; Padgett and Jorgenson, "Introduction," 21; Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 9.

[256] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 87. See also Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 102. Though Norman Wirzba does not specifically use the term *deep incarnation*, he reflects a similar need to recover "a sense for the human identification with the wider universe. We need a more honest estimation of ourselves as embodied and embedded beings. What is necessary is that we learn to reconnect with the ecological and social contexts that sustain us, for it is in this reconnection that the range of our sympathies and care will increase." See Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 7.

Ecojustice, or environmental justice,[257] then, is core to ecotheology. Environmental *in*justice is "the disproportionate impact of environmental harms on vulnerable populations," human and nonhuman alike.[258] Environmental justice, on the other hand, considers:

> not just the plight of those most vulnerable to environmental harms, but also wider ethical issues of ecological degradation, loss of biodiversity, ethics of food production, and so forth. Justice issues have always been a concern for moral theologians. Widening that brief so that the recipients of justice-making are inclusive of creatures and the land beyond the human community is part of the agenda of ecological ethics.[259]

Deane-Drummond synthesizes some principles for ecojustice: We are called to see the "intrinsic worth" of all creatures; recognize the interconnectedness and kinship of humans and ecosystems; realize that every component of the "dynamic cosmic design" has a "God-given purpose; think of ourselves as guests and custodians of the planet; and appreciate that "the earth and its components actively resist injustices imposed by humans."[260] However, it is important not to succumb to the temptation to relegate ecojustice to the realm of theory; ecojustice is, most importantly, "practical wisdom."[261] Practicing ecojustice is a way to recognize "the right to live and flourish enjoyed by all

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[257] Another term that appears in the scholarship is social ecology: "Social ecology is an approach that emphasizes the close linkage of environmental and social problems. A principal cause of both types of problems is political, social, and economic domination. The ideal is libertarian, egalitarian, and decentralized communities that work in harmony with the natural world. In such a view, sustainability must be comprehensive, including social justice and economic security for all." See David Landis Barnhill, "Ecology, Social," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 138.

[258] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 106, 108.

[259] Ibid., 106.

[260] Ibid., 31.

[261] Padgett and Jorgenson, "Introduction," 20.

living things."[262] For humans, that means that we need to stop damaging the earth and "heal and care for those places we are so actively destroying as a species. What is beyond dispute is the greater insight that the intersection of ecological destruction with human systems of oppression—racism, poverty, sexism, and the like—opens up a new emphasis on justice that has significantly changed our understanding of and quest for full liberation."[263] For Christians specifically, it means that we need to allow the sacredness of ecotheology and ecojustice to influence our values *and* behaviors, so that we are no longer "better known as climate deniers than as environmentalists."[264]

Deane-Drummond suggests that liturgical transformation, the ecclesial responsibilities of global and local church communities, practical steps in individual responsibility, and building a collective conscience for our responsibility to creation are all ways for us to embody ecotheology and ecojustice.[265] Ecotheologians use various terms and phrases—stewardship, creation care, the community of creation, and watershed discipleship, to name a few—to encapsulate these responsibilities. Since green spiritual practices of simplicity emerge from these responsibilities, I have included a brief overview of some of the merits and limitations of each of these phrases as they appear in the scholarship. Ultimately, like Chris Doran:

> I am skeptical of a single symbol like steward, priest, partner, or servant representing the human relationship with, to, or in the rest of creation. Our theological and social imaginaries become too restrictive by dogmatic adherence to one such symbol. Instead, we need to listen to the broad theological imaginary

[262] Ibid.

[263] Ibid.

[264] Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 161.

[265] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 120-121.

of Scripture and describe what attributes are associated with being properly human, especially in a time of ecological crisis.

Therefore, I believe all of the terms together—in light of the biblical and theological foundations outlined above—give us the fullest picture of the intersection between God, humans, and nature, so I (and the participants in the study) use all of these terms and phrases, relatively interchangeably.

Stewardship

Stewardship is, by far, the most common and recognizable term to describe the practice of ecojustice. The ideals of stewardship "are accepted and discussed by religious congregations, ecologists, environmental organizations, politicians, and corporations alike. Stewardship incorporates sustainable utilization of natural resources, thoughtful care for the environment, and appropriately sharing the Earth as [a] household, with other humans and other species."[266] Compared to notions of *dominion* that entail humans' hierarchical *conquering* of nature and justify the exploitation of nature for the imagined benefit of humans, notions of *stewardship* that view humans more as caretakers, developers, trustees, gardeners, or even babysitters are at least a step in a more positive direction.[267]

[266] Susan Power Bratton, "Stewardship," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 372. However, just because it's the most common term does not mean it is popular or comfortable for congregations or other communities, especially when it refers to creation. See Al Tizon, "Preaching for Whole Life Stewardship," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 19.1 (2016): 3.

[267] Holmes Rolston III, "Dominion," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 110.

In its best and clearest forms, *stewardship* is a "loving and grateful response to God"[268] in imitation of Jesus.[269] Broadly, stewardship "refers to the careful oversight of what has been entrusted to one person or entity by another,"[270] including "the earth, finances, material possessions, and time in order to bring maximum glory to God."[271] Ecotheologically, stewardship "refers to caring responsibility for God's creation."[272] As Diane Chandler puts it, "An individual and corporate Christian response to the care of creation moves from *awareness* to *appreciation* to *stewardship*."[273] Reflecting on creation as a sacrament, John Haught points out that stewardship goes beyond preservation to preparation rooted in hope, "because, for all we know, the cosmos is pregnant with incalculable future outcomes that lie far beyond the range of what we can presently predict or plan for."[274]

Al Tizon connects "whole life stewardship" to simplicity.[275] For him, biblical stewardship is not merely management but "kingdom generosity"[276] that requires "a simple lifestyle" that "puts us in position to actually address human need by way of

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[268] Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 222.

[269] Ibid., 225.

[270] Ibid., 222.

[271] Ibid., 21.

[272] Ibid., 221. While the term *stewardship* most prominently comes from Genesis 1-2, there are other biblical references to ecological and other types of stewardship, including Joseph's interactions with Pharaoh. See Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, 57-70.

[273] Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 228-229, emphasis added.

[274] Haught, "The Unfinished Sacrament of Creation," 152.

[275] Tizon, "Preaching for Whole Life Stewardship," 5.

[276] Ibid., 7.

freed-up resources and freed-up time."[277] When he refers to *human need*, he assumes an "interdependence between the earth and people," which means biblical stewards must understand that their mission to participate in God's healing and reconciliation "must include the care of creation."[278]

However, stewardship also has significant limitations, and many ecotheologians have dropped it from their vocabulary entirely.[279] The first limitation is in the most direct definition of stewardship: to "take care of property belonging to someone else."[280] This implies that humans are not part of the earth, that they are detached from creation. Furthermore, *stewardship* "does not have within itself a very clear understanding or program for what our management or dominion ought to look like."[281] Nor does it answer "*why* we should care for creation, other than that humanity is commanded to do so by God."[282] There is more fundamental work to be done to appreciate the significance of creation that stewardship does not address.[283] Chris Doran puts it most directly:

> The standard historical notion of human beings as God's stewards of creation is tougher than ever to maintain. Contemporary scholarship has helped to show just how troublesome this notion is and how it is rather new in the history of ideas even though many believe it goes back to the earliest days of Scripture. Moreover, while so many American Protestant Christians believe they are being God's good stewards, too many do not exhibit any substantial behavior on a daily basis that

[277] Ibid., 9.

[278] Ibid., 11.

[279] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 25.

[280] Padgett and Jorgenson, "Introduction," 19.

[281] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 132.

[282] Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 25, emphasis added.

[283] Ibid.; Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 132.

> would convince anyone inside or outside of the Christian tradition that we are worthy of the title.[284]

The only alternative to *stewardship* that Doran finds compelling is the virtue of *humility*, which he perceives to be "paramount if we are to act responsibly in the age of climate change."[285]

> Steven Bouma-Prediger also highly values humility, which he defines as:
>
> > the disposition to properly estimate one's abilities or capacities. It is the fitting acknowledgment that we humans are earth creatures. The virtue of humility thus implies self-knowledge and knowing the limits of one's knowledge. Aware of their ignorance, humble folk do not pretend to know more than they really know. Aware of their brokenness, humble people do not pretend to be perfect. The vice of deficiency is hubris—exaggerated self-confidence or overweening pride. Hubris is the failure to acknowledge one's own limits, often resulting in tragic consequences for all concerned, as famously evident in the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare. Overestimating their abilities, prideful people are vain and boastful. Thinking themselves in control, they make foolish decisions that wreak havoc for themselves and for others.[286]

Ultimately, Bouma-Prediger prefers the term *earthkeeping* over *stewardship* because it connotes a more embodied, interconnected, specific, and mutual relationship with nature — and it encapsulates humility.[287] He describes *earthkeeping* as a virtue, similar to humility, that shapes our character and that informs and is formed by our practices.[288]

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[284] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 90.

[285] Ibid., 91.

[286] Steven Bouma-Prediger, "The Character of Earthkeeping: A Christian Ecological Virtue Ethic," in *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation*, eds. Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, ProQuest eBook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 117. See also Bouma-Prediger, "The Character of Earthkeeping," 119-120.

[287] Ibid., 103, 106. Richard Bauckham prefers the term *responsible care* over terms like *stewardship*, *earthkeeping*, or *guardianship*. See Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 29.

[288] Bouma-Prediger, "The Character of Earthkeeping," 109. "Bouma-Prediger's conviction is that certain character traits are essential for Earthcare. To that end he forwards seven pairs of ecological virtues: respect and receptivity, self-restraint and frugality, humility and honesty, wisdom and hope, patience and serenity, benevolence and love, and justice and courage. To build an ecological character requires two things. First, we need stories or narratives with which we can identify. Our culture offers us numerous framing stories, including consumerism, materialism, and prosperity. As Christ-followers, our dominant narrative must be

The fundamental question that earthkeeping asks is, "What kind of person should I be?"[289] He also prefers the term *earthkeeping* over *creation care*, since "earth" is more specific to our home planet, as opposed to the cosmos.[290] However, second, perhaps, to stewardship, *creation care* is one of the most common terms used in ecotheology, so we turn our attention there now.

Creation Care

Creation care is Chris Doran's preferred term in his book, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, for both practical and theological reasons:[291] Practically, he writes, the term *creation care* "is used so frequently in scholarly and popular Christian literature to describe something that should be seen as the virtuous practice of our faith" that other terms could be confusing.[292]

Theologically, he considers it an asset that *creation* has a broader connotation than *earth* or *nature*.[293] Whereas *nature*, or *the environment*, can be studied and controlled, the only plausible understanding of *creation* is as a holy gift from God.[294]

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that of Jesus and his vision of the kingdom of God. Secondly, ecological character is developed chiefly in community. Our social and ecosystemic communities play central roles in forming our character. What we do to care for God's Creation must be rooted in who we are in solidarity with God's Creation." See Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecology*, 25.

[289] Bouma-Prediger, "The Character of Earthkeeping," 107.

[290] Ibid., 106.

[291] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 16.

[292] Ibid.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid. For more on this contrast, see Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 31. Another way of thinking about this gift is as a sacrament that reveals "the immanence of the Creator" and "the presence of divinity in the natural world." See John Hart, "Sacrament," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 343. Another phrase used to describe this reality is "creation spirituality," which focuses on "the goodness of creation and God's immanence in it" to urge humans "to affirm our

Creation is also an opportunity to experience and encounter God through the revelation and awakening of the natural world and everything in it, including humans.[295] *Creation* includes nature for nature's sake, but it also links the health of ecosystems to the health of humans *and* human social structures, which, in their brokenness, produce environmental injustice, racial injustice, and socioeconomic injustice.[296] To care for creation is to care for all of these injustices; it is to care for "the least of these."[297]

In addition, *care* has an active and hopeful connotation: Because God cares for creation, we, too, should care for all creation in tangible ways, particularly through "our daily consumptive habits."[298] On this topic, Daniel Brunner, Jennifer Butler, and A. J. Swoboda in *Introducing Evangelical Ecology* note that *care* matters, because:

> Regular ecological practices (like drying laundry on a line, gardening, composting, living in community, commuting by bicycle, etc.) are capable of transforming our theology and ethic as we do them. Our actions not only give evidence of a caring relationship with the planet but also shape our loves, affections, and desires. Doing ecotheology may be the truest way to a conversion of both mind and lifestyle. Orthodoxy can lead to orthopraxy, but orthopraxy can also lead to orthodoxy.[299]

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cosmological origins," "engage in sacred activism on behalf of the nonhuman world," "lament human activity that destroys nonhuman nature," and "promote feelings of connection with the natural world." See Laura M. Hartman, "Creation Spirituality," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 91.

[295] Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecology*, 19-20. *Creation care*, as an act of caring for nature and humans in their interconnected relationship, reinforces the creatureliness of humans. See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 28-29, 72-73.

[296] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 41-44.

[297] Ibid., 38. See also Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 39-41.

[298] Ibid., 15.

[299] Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecology*, 8.

Through care for creation, we practice *mutuality*, seeing the world from a "subject-subject" perspective" and recognizing that "the well-being of humankind is dependent on the well-being of the planet. And vice versa."[300] Norman Wirzba connects this mutuality to asceticism, which, when properly characterized, "is ultimately about … the correction of the chaotic desire and moral disorder within us so that we can perceive and welcome the world as God does. Asceticism is the discipline and art that, at its best, enables us to contemplate the beauty that radiates throughout creation."[301] He adds that to see this beauty in all things is to experience resurrection in the present:

> Asceticism is the discipline that polishes the glass on our doors of perception so we can see the world as the manifestation of God's love, and then also go through the door to meet the world in acts of kindness, compassion, and hospitality. The action of loving, inspired as it is by the ministries of Christ, equips us to see the beauty of God at work in the world.[302]

Indeed, *care*, more than other active words like *stewardship*, implies an "ethic of love," founded on God's promises of hope for the future, and is a "long-term logic and orientation to the Other" that "disrupt[s] a society built on short-term, egocentric fulfillment."[303]

Thus, *creation care* affirms that God cares about the myriad of creatures and ecosystems and implies that humans have a choice to actively participate in God's "cosmic redemptive plan" for all creation.[304] Its versatility and positive connotations

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[300] Ibid., 22. For more on the subject-subject model, in contrast with the subject-object model of interacting with creation, see Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecology*, 33.

[301] Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 63.

[302] Ibid., 64.

[303] Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecology*, 28. See also Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecology*, 37.

[304] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 20.

explain its common use in the literature, especially resources designed for popular or lay consumption. Because of its commonality, there is the risk that it can come across as cliche or greenwashed. Still, I have found it to be the most resonant phrase in my ministry, especially with emerging adults, so it is the term I use most frequently in this study.

The Community of Creation

For Richard Bauckham, the preferred phrase for describing human interactions with the natural world is the *community of creation*. Placing humanity in the midst of this community helps correct the misleading hierarchical connotations of a phrase like *stewardship* or even *creation care*.[305] The *community of creation* clarifies that humans are:

> related horizontally to other creatures; we, like they, are creatures of God. To lift us out of creation and so out of our God-given embeddedness in creation has been the great ecological error of modernity. We urgently need to recover a biblical view of our solidarity with the rest of God's creatures on this planet, which is our common home. We need to locate ourselves once again where we belong—within creation.[306]

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[305] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 29; Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 2, 5-6, 8-11.

[306] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 29. See also Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, Preface. For those who think it may be odd to identify humans as being *in community* with the natural world, note what Sallie McFague says about philosophical views of nature: "Attitudes toward nature do change and have changed. There is no such thing as a natural view of nature: nature, in this sense, is not natural. The ways we think about nature are constructed; there are hundreds of different ways to perceive and conceive nature. … [A] change in sensibility occurs through changing metaphors. We think in terms of major metaphors and models that implicitly structure our most basic understandings of self, world, and God. The basic model in the West for understanding self, world, and God has been 'subject' versus 'object.' Whatever we know, we know by means of this model: I am the subject knowing the world (nature), other people, and God as objects. It is such a deep structure in all our thinking and doing that we are not usually aware that it is a model. It simply seems to be the way things are. But it is a model and not an innocent one, for it is implicitly dualistic, hierarchical, individualistic, and utilitarian. It is a model that has been especially destructive to nature." See Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 7. Norman Wirzba puts it this way: "We need to appreciate that how the world is named and narrated—whether as creation or as a corpse—is of the greatest theoretical and practical importance because the way we name and narrate the world determines how we are going to live within it. In other words, how we characterize what things 'are,' what philosophers call the

Bauckham likes the idea of extending the word *community* beyond humans "to refer to the whole global ecosphere," which entails "the diverse living inhabitants of a particular ecosystem, together with the inanimate components of their environment," all in relationship with God.[307] To include humans in the community of creation is to assert "our own creaturehood," affirm "the interconnectedness of life and the many components of inanimate nature," and intentionally live "in conscious mutuality with other creatures."[308] Indeed, *God's* continued involvement in creation means that *God, too*, is the foundation of and an integral participant in the community.[309]

In his construction of the *community of creation*, Bauckham especially relies on the Bible's suspicion of hierarchical relationships and human kingship. The ideal human king in the Bible is a "brother" who is "forbidden any of the ways in which rulers exalt themselves and entrench their power over their subjects."[310] He also looks at what it means for humans to be made "in the image and likeness of God."[311] He believes that the *imago Dei* neither privileges humans with a specific ruling office, nor even authorizes humans as God's representatives, but rather, that the *imago Dei*:

> simply means that humans, in some important but unspecified ways, resemble God. … Resemblance to God does not remove humans from the created world or rank them with God rather than with other creatures. It is qualified by the absolute

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'being' or ontology of things, also determines what we are going to do with them." See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 22.

[307] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 30.

[308] Ibid. See also Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 16; Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 97-98.

[309] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 7.

[310] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 35. See also Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 32-33. In contrast to human models of domineering rule, see Jesus' ministry as described, for example, in Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 98-99.

[311] Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation," 41.

> distinction between the transcendent God and creation. Moreover, it does not rule out any resemblance to God in other creatures, who surely reflect their Creator in a vast variety of different ways. … The point is not to minimize human uniqueness but to situate it properly in relation to our fundamental kinship with other creatures.[312]

When "dominion" (Genesis 1:26, 28) is contextualized within the *imago Dei* and the rest of the Bible,[313] we find an "ecological" view of humanity within creation that does *not* demote creation as merely a tool "for the sake of humans," but instead "stresses the profusion and diversity of living things, and it portrays the creation, animate and inanimate, as an interdependent whole."[314] That is not to say that humans are not entitled to use the resources God provides through creation; all creatures, after all, are wholly dependent on "other creatures, animate or inanimate, in order to live and to flourish."[315] The *community of creation* does, however, mean that we are called to use those resources with a sense of hospitality and compassion.[316] Norman Wirzba calls this approach to the natural world "a citizenship ethic," which acknowledges our "need to till and keep the garden," our "common origin in the dust of the ground," and our "common lot with other creatures," even though humans, too often, "are not content with their lot."[317]

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[312] Ibid., 41-42. See also Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 20-21.

[313] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 11-12, 37. Norman Wirzba similarly explores the *imago Dei*. See Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 135-136.

[314] Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 15.

[315] Ibid., 28.

[316] Jim Merkel, "Building the Case for Global Living," in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 140.

[317] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 133. See also Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 134-135. For more on the sin of human discontent, see Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 98.

Sarah Thompson describes a concept similar to the *community of creation*, but she calls it "the ecological Beloved Community,"[318] which includes, "not just the people, but all those natural resources that sustain us as well. Because for low-income communities of color, social justice, public health, environmental justice, and energy equity intersect."[319] Using Martin Luther King, Jr.'s language and vision, Thompson's *ecological Beloved Community* draws special attention to the connection between environmental justice and the "[m]arginalized people who bear the brunt of injustice."[320] This term also takes into consideration "*both* the *natural* and the *built* worlds."[321] More than broadly inviting people of faith to care for "creation" as a whole, however, Thompson is more interested in local, grassroots advocacy—"going door to door, town hall meetings, phone trees, some social media"—all of which require an understanding of and an investment in "the watershed."[322] This phrase is gaining more traction in faith-based environmentalism, and it is the last phrase we will explore in this portion of the study.

Watershed Discipleship

Cherice Bock uses the phrase *watershed discipleship* in order to emphasize the moral and religious dimensions of the climate crisis and to highlight our hyper-localized

[318] Sarah Thompson, "An Ecological Beloved Community: An Interview with Na'Taki Osborne Jelks of the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance," in *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*, ed. Ched Myers (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 102.

[319] Ibid., 118.

[320] Ibid., 105.

[321] Ibid., 112, emphasis added.

[322] Ibid., 109. See alsoThompson, "An Ecological Beloved Community," 117.

responsibilities to care for creation.[323] It emphasizes the "bioregional locus of an incarnational following of Jesus."[324] The word *watershed* has the double meaning of highlighting the climate crisis as a "watershed moment" in human history, and pointing to the water resources that flow in a specific area, connecting many parts of a region and sustaining life throughout a local ecosystem:[325]

> The three main tenets of watershed discipleship are: 1. We are in a watershed moment of ecological crisis, which demands that environmental and social justice and sustainability be integral to everything we do; 2. Following the incarnational Jesus as embodied disciples in our watersheds; 3. Being disciples of our watersheds, learning from the creatures and non-human entities in our regions.[326]

Incarnated disciples of Jesus are called "to care for their home places, and in so doing, to care for those downstream."[327] This, according to Bock, is especially pertinent to the faithful witness and discipleship of White people:

> Watershed discipleship invites Christians to a way of following Jesus that, if enacted fully, requires [those] of European descent to move through repentance toward reconciliation, taking our place within the community of creation. As a reversal of watershed conquest, which authorized domination of entire watersheds "claimed" by European explorers when they first made landfall at the mouth of a river, watershed discipleship deconstructs the basis of the Doctrine of Discovery and engages in restorative justice with God, people, and creation.[328]

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[323] Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 164.

[324] Ibid., 165. For more on bioregionalism, see Ched Myers, "Introduction: A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach to Ecological Theology and Practice," in *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*, ed. Ched Myers (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 10-11.

[325] Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 165. See also Myers, "Introduction," 11.

[326] Cherice Bock, "Friends and Watershed Discipleship: Reconciling with People and the Land in Light of the Doctrine of Discovery," *Quaker Religious Thought* 134.5 (March 2020): 40.

[327] Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 176. See also Bock, "Friends and Watershed Discipleship," 42.

[328] Bock, "Friends and Watershed Discipleship," 39-40. See also Bock, "Friends and Watershed Discipleship," 41, 43.

More broadly, the word *discipleship* is significant, because it connotes an active way of "caring for creation in the social and economic spheres of our collective life, while also grounding us in a robust and meaningful faith basis for these actions" by reminding us that our actions are a way to follow and imitate Jesus. Bock adds:

> By living as disciples, we move from the role of fixer, to the posture of learner and co-laborer, teachable participants in a shalomic community. Being disciples in and of our watersheds requires us to build relationships with people who are seeing and addressing similar problems, and form partnerships toward innovative and creative solutions. These relationships draw us into more complete and experiential knowledge of injustice, convicting us regarding further actions we can partake in to reconcile God, people, and creation.[329]

Often, climate change feels too big and overwhelming to many people, so a more effective way to communicate about the climate crisis and promote pro-environmental behaviors is to intentionally engage faith within the local neighborhood.[330] In Bock's view, climate activists need to "utilize [churches' and other faith communities'] built-in networks and constituencies and engage them in projects with positive environmental impacts."[331] Intentionally engaging our local watersheds in community requires an emphasis on "social justice, being a disciple of Jesus, and living in a covenant relationship with the rest of creation based on faith in God."[332] Using the stories and resources of their local communities, personal experience and memory, social and environmental history, Christian tradition and Scripture, liturgies and rituals, watershed disciples develop a "place-based theology leading to watershed care, with a clear

[329] Bock, "Friends and Watershed Discipleship," 43. See also Myers, "Introduction," 33.

[330] Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 164, 176, 179.

[331] Ibid., 162.

[332] Ibid., 165.

understanding that water flows across and through each watershed, connecting one to all."[333]

The main limitations on *watershed discipleship* are practical: It requires an understanding of ecological interpretations of the Bible, the social-ecological history of a local place, environmental justices and injustices, and local ecosystems and social-ecological systems.[334] Of course, these same disadvantages are also advantages, because it entails asking people to learn more about a place that they already love and in which they already have investment: "A feedback loop develops as watershed discipleship practitioners learn about their area's history, become involved in restoration and adaptation projects, learn about the people and places around them, and reclaim and recreate places and communities. … They often become environmental justice activists, citing social and environmental justice themes in the Bible."[335] *Watershed discipleship* is most familiar in the U.S. and Canada among congregations and denominations that are already inclined toward justice.[336] This is especially true among the Quakers (the Religious Society of Friends).[337] However, because of the lack of familiarity to most people and congregations, at least in my context, *watershed discipleship* is the term I use least frequently in this study, though its emphasis on locality and tangible neighborliness is highly relevant to green spiritual practices of simplicity.

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[333] Ibid., 167. See also Bock, "Watershed Discipleship," 173-175.

[334] Ibid., 167.

[335] Ibid., 169.

[336] Ibid., 178.

[337] Bock, "Friends and Watershed Discipleship," 35.

Spiritual Practices as a Way to Embody Green Simplicity

Willpower alone cannot transform us toward the God-oriented, other-oriented, and creation-oriented simplicity for which God created us (Genesis 1-2) and into which Jesus invites us (Matthew 5-6). Nor can willpower alone empower us to embody an ecotheology that cares for the entire community of creation as a reflection of Jesus in the world. Spiritual practices, or spiritual disciplines, are a way for us to bring simplicity and ecotheology into our daily lives and expressions of faith.[338]

Practices of *simplicity*, intentionally integrated into our daily lives, make space for the Spirit to transform our hearts so that we become increasingly committed to God and God's in-breaking kingdom alone. *Green* practices help us put into action the care for the Earth that God models for us and in which God invites us to participate. Together, *green spiritual practices of simplicity* help us see and eliminate the things that steal our attention away from the redemptive work of Jesus in ourselves, in others, and in all creation. Before clarifying the parameters of simplicity more explicitly at the end of the next chapter, we will take a look at the role spiritual practices play in spiritual formation and missional participation. Though nothing in the research I reviewed specifically combined *green spiritual practices of simplicity* like the participants did in this project's study, the following authors' understanding of spiritual practices generally, and their suggestions for practices of simplicity and creation care specifically, are a necessary component of our theological foundation.

[338] Another way to put this is that spiritual disciplines are a tangible manifestation of our beliefs or a practical way of embodying our theology. See Epperly, *Church Ahead*, 52-53; McFague, *Life Abundant*, 25.

Diane Chandler describes spiritual practices as necessary for Christian spiritual formation: "Formation of the spirit relates to our faith journey as the grace-based, interactive process of nurture and growth of the human spirit as it is conformed to the image of Jesus and overseen by the Father through the indwelling Holy Spirit in the context of the believing community."[339] Spiritual practices are an opportunity to *practice* bearing the *imago Dei* and following in the footsteps of Jesus.[340] Drawing on other authors, Chandler suggests that practices of simplicity draw our attention to creation care and stewardship,[341] and can help us "assess values and actions regarding possessions,"[342] like documenting how we spend our money to make sure we're prioritizing God's kingdom, making specific plans to use our possessions to glorify God, document our acts of generosity, cutting out unnecessary luxuries, distinguishing between wants and needs, resisting new tech and fast fashion, eating a plant-based diet, fasting from specific purchases, praying before purchases,[343] and simply noticing "the movement of the Spirit in the small and mundane as well as the big and supernatural" moments of our lives.[344]

> In his book, *Practices of Love*, Kyle David Bennett notes that spiritual disciplines:
>
> > are unique, alternative ways of doing basic, daily activities that Christians have deliberately practiced in order to change their lives. Now this is an important insight: these are not practices that we do in addition to our daily activities. Rather, they are alternative ways of doing things we already do. In fact, it would be best to see them as renewed ways of doing these things.[345]

[339] Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 20.

[340] Ibid., 29.

[341] Ibid., 242.

[342] Ibid., 241.

[343] Ibid., 241-242.

[344] Ibid., 245.

[345] Bennett, *Practices of Love*, 22.

To explain this further, Bennett refers to the fourth-century monk, John Cassian, who believed there were eight principal vices from which humans suffer: "gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory, and pride."[346] Cassian saw these vices interplay in the lives of the monks, and he believed that to truly uproot them, the monks had to "live differently, not just do a couple of things differently."[347] To encourage this new way of life, Cassian suggested certain "institutes" and "remedies"—in other words, "rules and practices"—that the monks would observe as a community:[348]

> The remedies that the monks practice to rid themselves of these vices are what we nowadays call spiritual disciplines. They practice silence, solitude, fasting and feasting, Sabbath keeping, meditation, and simplicity. They change the way that they dress, own, think, eat, interact, talk, work, and rest. Spiritual disciplines will fix their habits and practices and get them living the way that they should in community or in shared spaces together.[349]

Since Cassian was primarily thinking about the life of monks, he assumed that the only way to sustain these practices was in community. Bennett thinks this point is still relevant to American Protestant Christians today as we strive to live in community in our churches, in our neighborhoods, and in creation: "It's pretty simple," Bennett writes, "in order to live in community and even to stay alive in community, we have to alter our lifestyle. We can't just do whatever we want to do. We can't just live selfishly. We have to be disciplined to some degree. We have to discipline our lives at least a little bit."[350]

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[346] Ibid., 17.

[347] Ibid., 18.

[348] Ibid.

[349] Ibid

[350] Ibid., 19.

American Protestants today "often cringe at the word discipline," but there is a reason that the word discipline "shares a root with the word disciple": "to be a disciple is to discipline our lives to follow, reflect, and embody Jesus."[351] This is especially important to remember when we are struggling to implement spiritual practices in our lives, because it is notoriously difficult. Bennett explains why:

> For some of us, spiritual disciplines are very difficult. We're inconvenienced by them or we find ourselves in extreme discomfort in doing them. But this is not because we're doing something we've never done before but because we're doing *differently* what *we've always done*. We have been eating, thinking, sharing, giving, owning, resting, and working the same way for years. We've grown accustomed to doing things in this way. Change doesn't happen overnight. And there's an added layer of resistance because these disciplines are changing our selfish tendencies, which, if we're honest with ourselves, we don't really want to give up. The institutions of society and cultural practices have informed the ways that we eat, think, share, give, own, rest, and work. We have assumed that these ways of doing things are right and normal (i.e., the norm that we should follow), and we have just done them by rote. But that's the problem: *they aren't right*. And in God's kingdom, selfishness and harm to one's neighbor is *never normal*. This is precisely why *all* of us need to practice spiritual disciplines.[352]

In sum, spiritual disciplines are an opportunity for us to refuse to exalt ourselves through our daily activities, and to instead love our neighbor.[353]

Bennett specifically points to simplicity as an integral part of the life-change that spiritual disciplines require and facilitate. "The one who lives simply," Bennett writes, "is oriented in his acquiring, possessing, and consuming by what he needs to survive, and maybe just enough to live a tad bit comfortably. … He lives within his means, and that's all. He owns just what he needs for his own unique circumstances and conditions. …

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[351] Ibid., 20.

[352] Ibid., 22, emphasis added. See also Bennett, *Practices of Love*, 171.

[353] Ibid., 25, 27, 48.

Simplicity is simplicity for him. But no matter what, there is no excess for him."[354] Bennett does not disparage *owning* itself, since owning is necessary for survival; even comfort is not a sin.[355] However, we are called *to discipline how we own*, because "we are part of one household: God's creation. … God calls, commands, commissions, and convicts us to give to others what he has given to us. … He makes it possible for us to own so that we can bring life and love to others."[356]

Richard Foster also focuses on simplicity as a way of life in *Freedom of Simplicity*.[357] For Foster, the spiritual disciplines "are the conduit through which our obedience flows; they are visible ways by which we express our discipleship. And more importantly, they set us before God in such a way that we can be transformed and conformed to the way of Christ."[358] Foster believes that simplicity requires precision without legalism,[359] accommodation without compromise—or the tension "of being in the world without being of it"[360]—and voluntary poverty.[361] Unlike Bennett, who argues

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[354] Ibid., 44-45. See also Bennett, *Practices of Love*, 47. Jan Johnson acknowledges that spiritual practices of simplicity can often get overlooked because they often look more like *refraining* than *acting*. But she says both are equally important: "Disciplines of engagement are like breathing in, and disciplines of abstinence are like breathing out. We need to exhale as well as inhale." See Jan Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity: Discovering the Unhurried Rhythms of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 11. She adds that active spiritual practices are not really sustainable without "abstinence disciplines" because the latter prunes away habits that hold us back, like self-indulgence, willfulness, and stubbornness. They replace these habits of the mind with attitudes of contentment, sweetness, and satisfaction. See Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 12-13.

[355] Bennett, *Practices of Love*, 46.

[356] Ibid.

[357] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, chapter 7, 110-126.

[358] Ibid., 184.

[359] Ibid., 111.

[360] Ibid., 113.

[361] Ibid., 116.

that comfort is not incompatible with simplicity, Foster has a more radical view about self-sacrifice, and indeed, he thinks a more dramatic step in the direction of poverty, as opposed to the more mild option of minimizing, can actually be easier:[362]

> Drastic measures are often less painful, a little like tearing off the Band-Aid quickly rather than peeling it back slowly, painfully. This drastic step can sometimes lance the ugly infection of covetousness more readily than anything else. Nothing can strike at the heart of the love of money quite like severing a relationship with money. In many other respects it is less difficult. The break with possessions is clear and clean-cut. Gone is the struggle about this or that—all of it is forbidden. You own nothing. How much easier, how much simpler than our world of endless decisions between acquiring and not acquiring.[363]

In chapter 10 of the book, Foster notes the giant world problems we encounter that simplicity helps us address in small ways in our lives: the principalities and powers,[364] world hunger[365]—and we might add to that, increased natural disasters that exacerbate the basic needs for food, water, and shelter—runaway desire,[366] and powerful multinational corporations.[367] Ultimately, Foster says, "Simplicity is the new necessity of the modern era. Our little planet simply cannot sustain the gluttonous consumption of the wealthy West."[368]

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[362] Ibid.

[363] Ibid. Regardless of whether one chooses the radical or gradual approach, Bruce Epperly notes that Lent may be a good opportunity for followers of Jesus to introduce new practices, or new ways of doing old practices, into their lives. He describes spiritual practices "in terms of pruning a fruit tree, eliminating branches that are dead and get in the way of our spiritual growth." Regardless of what governments and churches do, Epperly believes, followers of Jesus are called to "simplify our lives so our planet can simply live! We need to declutter our homes and also our spiritual lives and domestic lifestyles. Progressive and socially-active followers of Jesus are recognizing that it is essential to balance contemplation and action to enlighten our protests and avoid demonizing our opponents." See Epperly, *Church Ahead*, 66.

[364] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 164-167.

[365] Ibid., 169-173.

[366] Ibid., 173-179.

[367] Ibid., 179-182.

[368] Ibid., 127.

Adele Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, features three separate entries dedicated to simplicity,[369] caring for the earth,[370] and stewardship,[371] which compartmentalize the nuances of "green simplicity." She defines simplicity as "the great art of letting go" and notes that: "Simplicity brings freedom and with it generosity."[372] Some of the practices of simplicity include reducing spending and purging distractions, with a primary focus on the mental health benefits of letting go of things that weigh us down.[373]

Calhoun looks at caring for the earth as a practice that honors the Creator and joins God in delighting over creation.[374] She suggests being mindful of animals, plants, crops, natural resources, energy, and garbage as a way to mimic Jesus, honor God, share with fellow creatures, and evangelize to others.[375] Calhoun addresses the third relevant practice, stewardship, as a catch-all for being aware of and wise with all that God has given us, so that we may be known, not for our consumerism and "affluenza," but for our hospitality, generosity, gratitude, and love.[376] Some of the practices she mentioned for

[369] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 84-85.

[370] Ibid., 202-203.

[371] Ibid., 224-225.

[372] Ibid., 84.

[373] Ibid., 84-85.

[374] Ibid., 202.

[375] Ibid., 202-203.

[376] Ibid., 224-225. See also Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 4-6; Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, "What Is Affluenza?" in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 93.

stewardship were generous tithing, thoughtful investment, and the intentional sharing of time, energy, and resources.[377]

Wendell Berry also talks about stewardship as a spiritual practice. For him, stewardship as a discipline is a way to fulfill "the divine mandate to use the world justly and charitably," and it requires "long-term courage, perseverance, devotion, and skill" that is developed through "everyday proprieties in the practical use and care of created things."[378] Stewardship as a discipline views all life as holy, and thus refuses to participate in "economic practices that daily destroy life and diminish its possibility."[379] Our economic life, for Berry, is integrally connected with our faith, and it must be disciplined, like all of our behaviors and choices.[380] This means we are called to be "responsible consumers" and "responsible conservationists" as a manifestation of a "responsible life" that honors God and respects the world envisioned in the Bible.[381]

Sallie McFague similarly weaves together simplicity and creation care as a practical response to the overwhelming reality of climate change. For her, spiritual practices emerge from "a different view of who we are."[382] For practices of simplicity and creation care, she suggests starting with simply:

> … noticing our own breath, the taking in of life-giving oxygen second by second by second as we traverse the time, whether short or long, between our birth and our death. What we do during our lives, who we become and what we accomplish—all of this depends on the simple, continuous act of breathing. We

[377] Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 224.

[378] Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 299.

[379] Ibid., 309.

[380] Ibid., 315.

[381] Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 25.

[382] McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, 15.

> must begin to reflect upon ourselves from the perspective of the basics, not in terms of our "additions." We must consider what allows us to exist in the first place, not what we can accomplish. … [W]e addicts of the high-consumption lifestyle that is changing the very composition of the air we breathe must let go of our greedy, controlling practices and respect the real basis of our existence, earth's atmosphere. Once we make this fundamental move, we open ourselves to understanding our dilemma in a new way. We begin to see how the interlocking systems of our planet are changing under the weight of the human population and its desired lifestyle. Our minds become available to accept an interpretation of our world that is dramatically different from the modern, individualistic picture of human beings as superior to—possessing and controlling the rest of nature.[383]

McFague believes that as we discipline ourselves to notice our breath, more practices will emerge out of a place of conviction and hope.[384] Our personal spiritual practices, in her view, matter deeply, because they bridge the gap between the personal and the practical where "important work needs to be done. It is not the only work that needs doing, for every activity people engage in must change from how we grow food and make cars to how we educate our children and take vacations. But the particular passage from personal belief to corporate regulatory action is a critical one."[385]

A devotional series for popular lay consumption, called *Everyday Matters Bible Studies for Women*, has a booklet devoted to simplicity and another on stewardship. The series defines spiritual practices as "holy habits," "rooted in God's word, and they go back to creation itself. … The holy habits that we call spiritual practices are all geared to position us in a place where we can allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us, to grant us power and strength to do the things we can't do on our own."[386] When we

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[383] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 15-16.

[384] Ibid., 23.

[385] Ibid., 25. See also McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, 26-29.

[386] Everyday Matters Bible Studies for Women—Simplicity, *Simplicity: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, ProQuest eBook (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2021), 4.

integrate "holy habits" into our everyday lives, we experience consistent intimacy with God, enjoy the richness of God's blessings, and find that daily life is "easier."[387] In the booklet on simplicity, the series focuses on removing those extraneous things that come between us and God," with an emphasis on Matthew 6.[388] The devotional warns readers of the dangers of greed and deceit (e.g., Ananias and Sapphira),[389] and places idolatry at the heart of complexity, especially when we crowd our attention with things like money, work, fashion, and food.[390] In the booklet on simplicity, the series, like Calhoun, expands the notion of *stewardship* beyond tithing—the context in which most people hear the term—into a more holistic consciousness of everything God has given us, including natural resources.[391] The booklet roots stewardship of the earth in God's sovereignty and the trust placed on humans to care for the earth well.[392] In obedience to and reflection of Christ, being stewards of the earth as God's kingdom representatives means people should actually put ourselves *last*, rather than above and before the rest of creation.[393]

Conclusion

My hope is that this overview offers a glimpse into the extensive biblical and theological resources for *green spiritual practices of simplicity*. The creation narrative,

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[387] Ibid.

[388] Ibid., 8.

[389] Ibid., 11-12.

[390] Ibid., 16.

[391] Everyday Matters Bible Studies for Women—Stewardship, *Stewardship: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, ProQuest eBook (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2021), 7.

[392] Ibid., 9-13.

[393] Ibid., 16.

the psalms, and the Sermon on the Mount; the Trinity, *kenosis*, and divine immanence; Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection; and the Kingdom of God, Sabbath, and the promise of new creation together serve as a robust foundation from which followers of Jesus can respond to the climate crisis. While advocacy and systemic justice are an important part of how we integrate ecological ethics into our theology, this project is interested in how we embody ecotheology in our daily lives through ordinary spiritual practices. In the next chapter, I introduce how green spiritual practices of simplicity could be relevant to emerging adults and explore the term *simplicity* in more depth.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Simplicity in Light of Emerging Adulthood

In this chapter, I explore some of the most relevant factors of emerging adulthood—what it is, their spiritual lives, and their interest in environmental justice—and then explore three prominent expressions of Christian simplicity.[394] In the final section, I synthesize the most relevant facets of green simplicity for my study on how Christian emerging adults practice green simplicity in their lives.

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is the term used to describe the elongated growth into full-fledged adulthood that people in their 20s experience. The typical markers of adulthood—financial independence, a long-term career, marriage, and parenthood—come about much more slowly for today's emerging adults, and they feel a sense of freedom to grow into adulthood at their own pace.[395] Emerging adulthood is a result of several macro social changes, including a rise in higher education, a delay in marriage, a decline in stable lifelong careers, and an increased willingness of parents to support their children further into adulthood.[396] In sum, the primary marker of adulthood, self-sufficiency, is

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[394] I found no literature that explores simplicity (or related spiritual practices, like asceticism) in light of contemporary emerging adulthood directly.

[395] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3, 7; Jennifer L. Tanner and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Presenting 'Emerging Adulthood': What Makes it Developmentally Distinctive?" in *Debating Emerging Adulthood: Stage or Process?*, eds. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Marion Kloep, Leo B. Hendry, and Jennifer L. Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13; Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Conceptual Foundations of Emerging Adulthood," in *Emerging Adulthood and Higher Education: A New Student Development Paradigm*, eds. Joseph L. Murray and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (New York: Routledge, 2019), 12-13.

[396] Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5; Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson, "Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: An Understudied Approach to the Third Decade of Life," in

less readily attainable for economic and social reasons, and, for some, it is less desirable, too.[397] Many of them do not pursue these life markers as *achievements*, with the same aspirational attitude as past generations did.[398] As one of the premier scholars on emerging adulthood, Jeffrey Arnett, notes, "Adulthood and its obligations offer security and stability, but they also represent a closing of doors—the end of independence, the end of spontaneity, the end of a sense of wide-open possibilities."[399]

It is challenging to describe emerging adulthood with a specific age range. Unlike adolescence, it is informed not by *biological* factors but rather by the *social and cultural* realities of industrialized societies over the past half-century.[400] Most scholars describe emerging adulthood between 18 and 29 years old.[401] However, some people attain the markers of full-fledged adulthood well before age 29, while others are not self-sufficient

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Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life, eds. Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

[397] Melinda Lundquist Denton and Richard Flory, *Back-Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 34; Tim Clydesdale and Kathleen Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14.

[398] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 6-7; Arnett, "Conceptual Foundations of Emerging Adulthood," 13.

[399] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 6.

[400] Tanner and Arnett, "Presenting 'Emerging Adulthood,'" 13, 15; Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Leo B. Hendry, Marion Kloep, and Jennifer L. Tanner, "The Curtain Rises: A Brief Overview of the Book," in *Debating Emerging Adulthood: Stage or Process?*, eds. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Marion Kloep, Leo B. Hendry, and Jennifer L. Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4. While emerging adulthood varies by cultural context, educational attainment, and social class, it has been researched as a worldwide phenomenon with striking demographic similarities in various contexts. See Arnett, Hendry, Kloep, and Tanner, "The Curtain Rises," 7.

[401] Denton and Flory, *Back-Pocket God*, 5; Tanner and Arnett, "Presenting 'Emerging Adulthood,'" 13; Arnett, "Conceptual Foundations of Emerging Adulthood," 11-12; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 4-5; Leo Mickey Fenzel and Kathy D. Richardson, "The Stress Process Among Emerging Adults: Spirituality, Mindfulness, Resilience, and Self-Compassion as Predictors of Life Satisfaction and Depressive Symptoms," *Journal of Adult Development* 29 (2022): 1.

until their mid-late thirties.[402] In this sense, *emerging adulthood* is not a helpful term in every circumstance, because it does not grasp the nuances of every individual's trajectory. Nevertheless, it has been used in countless studies across many disciplines, including psychology, education, theology, and law. Similar to generational language, developmental stage theories, of course, can never be universally applied, and yet, being able to name trends with broad language has immense value for helping us craft narratives that help us make sense of the world around us.[403]

More importantly than an age-range, emerging adulthood is "characterized—though not wholly defined—by its transitional nature."[404] More specifically, the five features that Arnett and other scholars use to describe emerging adulthood are: (1) identity exploration; (2) instability; (3) self-focus (not to be confused with selfishness); (4) feeling "in-between" or being in transition; and (5) optimism about the possibilities of the future.[405] Arnett believes that the first of these, identity exploration, is "perhaps the most central feature of emerging adulthood," since it is "the time when young people

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[402] Denton and Flory, *Back-Pocket God*, 5; Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 6.

[403] For more details about the debate regarding the term, *emerging adulthood*, see Arnett, Hendry, Kloep, and Tanner, "The Curtain Rises," 7. I myself do not fit the mold of emerging adulthood as Arnett defines it: I married at 21 immediately after college; my spouse and I have been financially independent and debt-free since I was 23; and while we toyed with the idea of not having kids at all, I am now pregnant with our first baby, and I am not yet 30. Yet, other parts of the emerging adult narrative ring true in my life, too: We lived in seven different spaces across three cities in our first six years of marriage; even the jobs we have held for more than a year have shifted in structure and responsibility approximately every six months; and between graduate school, the pandemic, and moving between states and continents, we have not been able to get our footing on the rhythms and seasons that bring a sense of stability and predictability to the years.

[404] Joseph L. Murray and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Introduction," in *Emerging Adulthood and Higher Education: A New Student Development Paradigm*, eds. Joseph L. Murray and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (New York: Routledge, 2019), 5. See also Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 34.

[405] Murray and Arnett, "Introduction," 5. See also Gina Magyar-Russell, Paul J. Deal, and Iain Tucker Brown, "Potential Benefits and Detriments of Religiousness and Spirituality to Emerging Adults," in *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality: Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition*, eds. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39.

explore possibilities for their lives in a variety of areas, especially tove and work."[406] The exploration process helps them clarify their sense of self, their values, and their goals, since they are independent of their parents but not yet committed to a career or spouse.[407]

This exploration process also contributes to the sense of *instability* that also characterizes emerging adulthood: Because they have no long-term commitments, love and work is open to revisions—sometimes a lot of them.[408] Identity formation helps explain why emerging adults are focused on themselves, rather than the long-term commitments that characterize full-fledged adulthood,[409] and their sense of being perpetually in transition.[410] While this can contribute to anxiety, most emerging adults experience "high hopes and great expectations" as they contemplate and pursue the many possible futures open to them.[411] It is important to note that many of the stereotypes surrounding emerging adults are both judgmental and false: They are neither lost nor irresponsible nor selfish, but rather deeply committed to service, justice, and care for others, and ultimately, there is more that makes them like previous generations than unlike them.[412] However, understanding the important economic, cultural, and religious

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[406] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8. See also Padilla-Walker and Nelson, "Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood," 5; Daniel Lapsley and Sam A. Hardy, "Identity Formation and Moral Development in Emerging Adulthood," in *Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life*, eds. Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 14.

[407] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8; Tanner and Arnett, "Presenting 'Emerging Adulthood,'" 16; Lapsley and Hardy, "Identity Formation and Moral Development in Emerging Adulthood," 32.

[408] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 10; Tanner and Arnett, "Presenting 'Emerging Adulthood,'" 16.

[409] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 12.

[410] Ibid., 14.

[411] Ibid., 16. See also Tanner and Arnett, "Presenting 'Emerging Adulthood,'" 16.

[412] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 12; Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 47; Padilla-Walker and Nelson, "Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood," 3-4, 7; Pamela Ebstyne King and Christine M. Merola, "Crucibles of Transformation: Religious Service and Emerging Adults," in *Flourishing in*

contexts that are changing rapidly for emerging adults can make us not only more empathetic to their experiences, but also better equipped to help them navigate the future.[413] With that, we will now focus more specifically on the spiritual lives of emerging adults, their interest in climate change and social justice, and how ministers and higher-education professionals can care for and learn from the people in this stage of life.

The Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults

Despite the stereotypes of secularization, religion and spirituality are important to emerging adults, though the ways they observe their faith and express their beliefs often looks different and less outward-facing than traditional religious practice.[414] In 2014, Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena observed that about 70 percent of emerging adults in the U.S. said religion was important or very important to them, and more students than not "reported a strengthening of religious convictions and beliefs by the end of college."[415] At the same time, of these same emerging adults, two-thirds

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Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life, eds. Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 330-333; Michael W. Pratt and M. Kyle Matsuba, *The Life Story, Domains of Identity, and Personality Development in Emerging Adulthood: Integrating Narrative and Traditional Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 263.

[413] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 12.

[414] Magyar-Russell, Deal, and Brown, "Potential Benefits and Detriments," 41; Fenzel and Richardson, "The Stress Process," 2; Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena, "Seeing the Forest and the Trees: How Emerging Adults Navigate Meaning-Making," in *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality: Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition*, eds. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3-4. This reality is often nicknamed "spiritual but not religious," though the accuracy of this generalization is contested. See Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 36. Young people are terrified of the specter of meaninglessness and long for experiences of transcendence. See James K. A. Smith, *How (Not)to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 61-62, 130-132.

[415] Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena, "Emerging Adults' Religious and Spiritual Development," in *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality: Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition*, eds. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25. See also Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 16.

identified themselves as moral relativists, agnostics, or skeptics.[416] This paradox is less surprising when we consider the self-exploration that characterizes emerging adulthood, since spiritual development intersects with all other facets of human development and identity formation.[417] A huge chunk of identity differentiation occurs during the emerging adult years, and religious observance (or the lack thereof) is often a place where emerging adults assert independence, autonomy, and difference from their parents.[418]

In specifically Christian contexts, emerging adults are more engaged than they are often given credit. In 2019, Tim Clydesdale and Kathleen Garces-Foley observed that approximately one-third of emerging adults attend church, volunteer, and financially support a congregation regularly.[419] An additional 10 percent on top of that (for a total of 44 percent of emerging adults) identify as evangelical or mainline Protestant Christian, even if they are not presently active in their faith.[420] Many people move toward being non-religious during emerging adulthood, and they generally report experiencing an increased distance from God, if they believe in God at all.[421] Still, a significant number of emerging adults continue to affirm traditional religious beliefs, like the lordship of Jesus and God as the Creator (whether through evolution or not).[422] Nearly half of all the

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[416] Barry and Abo-Zena, "Emerging Adults' Religious and Spiritual Development," 24-25

[417] Ibid., 34; Lapsley and Hardy, "Identity Formation and Moral Development in Emerging Adulthood," 15.

[418] Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 78.

[419] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 16. One of the reasons why emerging adults are less active in faith communities than their predecessors may be because highly transitional stages of life correlate negatively with religious practices, like participating in a faith community. See Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 75.

[420] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 23.

[421] Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 108-121.

[422] Ibid., 121-123.

emerging adults report at least two experiences that are miraculous, divine, or sacred in nature.[423] Moral therapeutic deism is not the *de facto* religion of emerging adults. While it is still present, there is also a diversity of other ways of thinking about religion.[424] One common posture toward religion is that it is more like a buffet than a coherent shared meal; taking what is helpful and leaving the rest is not only common, but expected and normalized among many emerging adults.[425] To most emerging adults, religion is deeply personal with few or no institutional or communal implications, and "institutionalized religion" is viewed with suspicion, if not hostility.[426] When they are religiously active or seeking, their primary priorities for church affiliation include finding a community of other like-minded young adults and values such as inclusivity, orthodoxy, authenticity, intellectuality, and quality of the worship experience.[427]

Indeed, religious affiliation and practice has been found to have a positive effect on the lives of emerging adults. Elements of spirituality like mindfulness, self-compassion, and resilience are important resources for coping with stress, increasing a sense of life satisfaction, and decreasing the symptoms of depression.[428] Intentional

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[423] Ibid., 127-128.

[424] Ibid., 154-156.

[425] Ibid., 156-157.

[426] Ibid., 162-163.

[427] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 18; Magyar-Russell, Deal, and Brown, "Potential Benefits and Detriments," 47; Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 314. On the other hand, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley also argue that emerging adults tend to view God as less of a powerful and transcendent being and more as a personal, useful, easily-accessible and -controllable force that is available to serve their needs and desires. However, their research methods were not as wide-scale as those of some of the other resources referenced here. See Denton and Flory, *Back-Pocket God*, 7.

[428] Fenzel and Richardson, "The Stress Process," 1-3, 9-10. See also Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 6 for a more in-depth connection between coping strategies and the climate crisis.

spiritual seeking helps emerging adults in their exploration of self and how they relate to the sacred, while *spiritual dwelling* and its corresponding sense of commitment, provides opportunities for secure attachment and intimacy with community.[429] Further, greater religious commitment leads to a greater sense of God's presence, which has been found to correspond with greater emotional self-regulation.[430] The self-reflection and sense of moral order that is facilitated by spiritual reflection also protects against risky behaviors, like substance abuse and criminal activity, as well as general obstacles to wellbeing, like physical health, mental health, and self-esteem.[431] Religious emerging adults tend to experience more positive life outcomes—including relational satisfaction, sexual health, community service, and resistance to consumerism—than their nonreligious peers.[432]

Religious engagement also has a positive correlation with service: Emerging adults who identify as spiritual or religious participate in more acts of service than their unspiritual or unaffiliated peers, which in turn provides them with more opportunities for self-exploration, meaning-making, and feeling a part of a larger, more transcendent whole.[433] Religious and spiritual traditions also help emerging adults resist individualism and, in its place, "generate a sense of meaning, order, and place in the world that is crucial to development."[434] Religious communities offer opportunities for emerging

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[429] Peter J. Jankowski, Steven J. Sandage, David C. Wang, and Peter Hill, "Relational Spirituality Profiles and Flourishing Among Emerging Religious Leaders," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* (2021): 2, 12.

[430] Ibid., 3.

[431] Magyar-Russell, Deal, and Brown, "Potential Benefits and Detriments," 40, 42-44.

[432] Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 275-276.

[433] King and Merola, "Crucibles of Transformation," 336, 341, 346, 354. It is important to note, however, that most of the data seems to show that, on the whole, emerging adults are neither more nor less engaged in service and volunteerism than previous generations. See Denton and Flory, *Back-Pocket God*, 45.

[434] King and Merola, "Crucibles of Transformation," 342. See also Pratt and Matsuba, *The Life Story*, 273.

adults to connect with older adults who can have a highly positive influence in their lives.[435]

Nevertheless, American Christianity is still generally struggling with "an image problem" among emerging adults.[436] Polls have shown that emerging adults nationwide associate Christians not primarily with love, but with being self-righteous, judgmental, hypocritical, hyper-political, nationalistic, irrelevant, negative, and angry.[437] Evangelicals in particular are perceived as "antigay, antifeminist, antienvironment, proguns, prowar, and pro-capital punishment."[438] In contrast, about 60 percent of emerging adults report a high interest in questions of justice.[439] Yet, despite the negative perceptions that most emerging adults have of *Christians*, those negative perceptions don't seem to translate to *churches*, of which they have rather high regard.[440] Most emerging adults, both Christian and unaffiliated, recognize places of worship as "effective in helping people find meaning in life."[441] Contrary to being categorically anti-religion, the data shows that

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[435] King and Merola, "Crucibles of Transformation," 345; Magyar-Russell, Deal, and Brown, "Potential Benefits and Detriments," 42.

[436] Shane Claiborne, "Evangelicalism Must Be Born Again," in *Still Evangelical? Insiders Reconsider Political, Social, and Theological Meaning*, ed. Mark Labberton (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 153.

[437] Ibid., 153-154, 168; Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 33; King and Merola, "Crucibles of Transformation," 348.

[438] Claiborne, "Evangelicalism Must Be Born Again," 154. See also Tom Lin, "Hope for the Next Generation," in *Still Evangelical? Insiders Reconsider Political, Social, and Theological Meaning*, ed. Mark Labberton (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 184-185; David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church… and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011); David Kinnaman, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007).

[439] Denton and Flory, *Back-Pocket God*, 44.

[440] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 33-34. On the other hand, painful historical events—like 9/11 and the systemic abuses recently uncovered in the Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, and large megachurches like Mars Hill—have also disillusioned young people away from institutionalized ideologies. See Magyar-Russell, Deal, and Brown, "Potential Benefits and Detriments," 45.

[441] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 33.

emerging adults long for faith communities that embody an ethic of life that is holistic: that cares for the earth, the poor, the refugee, and the immigrant, and that resists racism, militarism, and violence in all its forms.[442] Indeed, *half* of emerging adults who religiously identify as "none" affirm justice as a "deep passion," while that is a little less than half among active Protestants.[443] Without substantive communities to meet these needs, the rate of disaffiliation will continue to increase.[444]

While questions of justice matter broadly to emerging adults, the environment is not only one of their highest concerns, but there is also a connection between their experiences of religion and their experiences of the environment. Clydesdale and Garces-Foley put it this way:

> [T]here is, to some extent, a measure of poetic resonance entailed in investigating the spiritual practices of emerging adults alongside humanity's relationship to creation. Climate change has shifted both the ecological and the political atmosphere of the globe; our technological developments have changed the lives of those emerging into adulthood just as profoundly as they have affected the planet. How will humanity and the earth move forward together?[445]

In the next section, we explore how emerging adults navigate this important question.

Emerging Adults' Beliefs about the Climate Crisis and Pro-Environmental Behavior

Maria Ojala studies environmentalism among emerging adults in Sweden. She believes this is a critical age group for addressing the climate crisis because emerging adults are in a transitional phase when they are beginning the process of establishing their

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[442] Claiborne, "Evangelicalism Must Be Born Again," 162-163. See also King and Merola, "Crucibles of Transformation," 347.

[443] Clydesdale and Garces-Foley, *The Twenty-Something Soul*, 135, 157.

[444] Ibid., 37.

[445] Ibid., 18.

values and household habits.[446] Her work has revealed that for many emerging adults, a mixture of *worry* about environmental problems and *hope* in humanity's ability to resolve those issues positively correlates with higher rates of recycling, lower energy usage, greener food choices, and by extension, other pro-environmental behaviors.[447]

While learning about climate change is an important first step, their coping strategies influence how emerging adults emotionally and behaviorally *respond* to information about environmental degradation.[448] Therefore, Ojala found that ambivalence—particularly uncertainty about the impact of individual actions in the face of systemic issues—is the primary barrier to emerging adults' investment in pro-environmental behaviors.[449] In place of ambivalence, Ojala encourages *dialectical thinking* as a way to synthesize paradoxes (e.g., worry and hope) in a way that acknowledges the complexity of problems and makes room for creative, holistic, and flexible coping mechanisms and problem solving.[450]

In 2018, Karen O'Brien, Elin Selboe, and Bronwyn M. Hayward focused on adolescents and emerging adults in their exploration of climate change activism.[451] They

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[446] Maria Ojala and Malin Anniko, "Climate Change as an Existential Challenge: Exploring How Emerging Adults Cope with Ambivalence Concerning Climate-Friendly Food Choices," *Psyke & Logos* 41 (2020): 18.

[447] Ibid., 22-23, 26-27; Maria Ojala, "Recycling and Ambivalence: Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of Household Recycling Among Young Adults," *Environment and Behavior* 40.6 (2008): 777.

[448] Ojala and Anniko, "Climate Change as an Existential Challenge," 18-19; Maria Ojala, "Regulating Worry, Promoting Hope: How Do Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults Cope with Climate Change?" *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education* 7.4 (2012): 537. See also Sanson and Burke, "Climate Change and Children," 354.

[449] Ojala and Anniko, "Climate Change as an Existential Challenge," 19-20.

[450] Ibid., 21-22.

[451] Karen O'Brien, Elin Selboe, and Bronwyn M. Hayward, "Exploring Youth Activism on Climate Change: Dutiful, Disruptive, and Dangerous Dissent," *Ecology and Society* 23.3 (2018): 1-13.

specifically focused on the tension between the systemic need for change and the desire of those who will be most affected by the climate crisis to act and to participate in decision-making processes.[452] The researchers found that focusing on the diversity of activities that are included in environmental activism gives a fuller picture of the "different ways that youth are challenging power relationships that are used as a means to constitute, legitimate, and normalize certain imaginaries and practices that perpetuate climate change."[453]

In all its forms, dissent to climate change "requires a mature level of social consciousness, moral reasoning, and insight into the situation that an individual or community is experiencing," which means that youth need to be equipped with both information and courage.[454] Thus, instead of assuming that young people are apathetic to climate change and other justice issues, they concluded that it is important to expand our understanding of what it means to dissent in "the complex situation facing new generations."[455] They synthesized young people's activism against climate change into: (1) dutiful dissent, which entails working within existing institutions;[456] (2) disruptive dissent, which entails an explicit challenge to the status quo in order to change existing political and economic systems;[457] and (3) dangerous dissent, which entails "initiating,

[452] Ibid., 1; Sanson and Burke, "Climate Change and Children," 346-347.

[453] O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward, "Exploring Youth Activism on Climate Change," 1. See also O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward, "Exploring Youth Activism on Climate Change," 8.

[454] Ibid., 3.

[455] Ibid., 4.

[456] Ibid.

[457] Ibid., 5.

developing, and actualizing alternatives that inspire and sustain long-term transformations."[458] Dangerous dissent is not necessarily *physically* dangerous, but dangerous because it focuses on "creating alternatives that in the long run can threaten vested interests and the status quo in unconventional ways."[459] The authors believe that all three types of dissent are necessary for sustainable social transformation and effective solutions to the climate crisis.[460]

Through their 2017 article, " Environmental Activism in Emerging Adulthood," M. Kyle Matsuba, Susan Alisat, and Michael W. Pratt are some of the few scholars who have explicitly explored emerging adults' *tangible* interest in environmentalism. They found that while emerging adults (more than one-third) are more concerned with the climate crisis than older people (less than one-quarter), there has been a steady decline in engagement in environmental causes in the last few decades.[461] The authors argue that

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[458] Ibid., 6.

[459] Ibid., 7.

[460] Ibid. See also Sanson and Burke, "Climate Change and Children," 350-351.

[461] Pratt and Matsuba, *The Life Story*, 279; M. Kyle Matsuba, Susan Alisat, and Michael W. Pratt, "Environmental Activism in Emerging Adulthood," in *Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life*, eds. Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 175. More recent surveys have confirmed that young people are both more concerned by the climate crisis and are more engaged in advocacy and climate solutions than older generations. On social media, Gen Z (45 percent) and Millennials (40 percent) are more likely to engage with climate-related content and express more anxiety and anger about it than are older people: Only 27 percent of Gen X and 21 percent of Baby Boomers engage with content about climate change. Similarly, more than half of Gen Z and Millennials say they are motivated to learn more about the climate crisis, while only about 40 percent of Gen X and Baby Boomers responded the same way. See Cary Lynne Thigpen and Alec Tyson, "On Social Media, Gen Z and Millennial Adults Interact More with Climate Change Content Than Older Generations," *Pew Research Center* (June 21, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/06/21/on-social-media-gen-z-and-millennial-adults-interact-more-with-climate-change-content-than-older-generations/. However, these trends remain true offline, too. More Gen Z and Millennials than Gen X and Baby Boomers believe that climate change should be a top priority of the government, consider it a top personal concern, and have personally taken action to address climate change within the last year. The discrepancy is approximately 10 percentage points for each category. For more details on these stats, see Alec Tyson, Brian Kennedy, and Cary Funk, "Gen Z, Millennials Stand Out for Climate Change Activism, Social Media Engagement with Issue," *Pew Research*

there needs to be a "fundamental paradigm shift" to help young people care about the planet, both for the sake of humans and for the sake of the biodiversity of the earth, which is inherently valuable.[462]

This paradigm shift can come about in many ways, but three factors that the authors highlight are identity development, intimacy, and exposure to a diversity of expressions of environmental activism. Maturation of an emerging adult's sense of identity is correlated with their likelihood of participating in pro-environmental behaviors in adulthood, as they recognize an increased connection between themselves, the environment, and morality.[463] Intimacy, in contrast to isolation, is also important to emerging adults' active care for the environment: As they experience a deeper connection with others, they also show an increased capacity to care for future generations and other species, in part because of a desire to contribute meaningfully to their community.[464] Like the 2018 article on youth activism, these authors, too, found that exposing emerging adults to the diversity of activities that are included in environmental activism is an impetus for participation.[465] Likewise, the researchers found that tapping into a diversity of values to encourage and justify pro-environmental behaviors is also helpful; for

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Center (May 26, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2021/05/26/gen-z-millennials-stand-out-for-climate-change-activism-social-media-engagement-with-issue/.

[462] Matsuba, Alisat, and Pratt, "Environmental Activism in Emerging Adulthood," 176.

[463] Ibid., 184; Pratt and Matsuba, *The Life Story*, 285. Instead of maturation of identity, Rohana Ulluwishewa calls this being "spiritually evolved," and makes more explicit connections between our spiritual development and our capacity to look beyond ourselves in care for others. See Rohana Ulluwishewa, "Spirituality, Sustainability and Happiness: A Quantum-Neuroscientific Perspective," *Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches*, eds. Joan Marques and Satinder Dhiman (New York City: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 164.

[464] Matsuba, Alisat, and Pratt, "Environmental Activism in Emerging Adulthood," 177-178; Pratt and Matsuba, *The Life Story*, 292.

[465] Matsuba, Alisat, and Pratt, "Environmental Activism in Emerging Adulthood," 179.

example, language of care and harm is motivating for people who lean left ideologically, while language of purity and sanctity is more motivating for people who lean right.[466]

Annick de Witt calls this paradigm shift an "integral or integrative worldview."[467] What we once saw as mutually exclusive and individualistic, we now recognize as unified.[468] Some abstract examples she gives are "science and spirituality, logic and imagination, object and subject, and ecology and economy."[469] In particular, instead of viewing nature as essentially functional, nature is again infused with a sense of enchantment and inherent value.[470]

Churches have a golden opportunity, not only to *address* the injustices that many emerging adults already recognize about the climate crisis, but also to *invite* more emerging adults into the story of God with God's creation through environmentalism. An interdisciplinary metaanalysis by Susan Brown and Raichael Lock in 2018 found that intentional, intergenerational communication about climate change "can act as a reminder of the contract between past, present, and future generations in socio-environmental terms" and "can conserve and generate local knowledge and insights needed to challenge and adapt to socio-environmental change in communities."[471] It works both ways, too:

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[466] Ibid., 185.

[467] de Witt, "Global Warming Calls for an Inner Climate Change," 209.

[468] Ibid., 204.

[469] Ibid., 209.

[470] Ibid., 204.

[471] Susan A. Brown and Raichael Lock, "Enhancing Intergenerational Communication about Climate Change," in *Handbook of Climate Change Communication: Case Studies in Climate Change Communication*, vol. 3, Climate Change Management, eds. Walter Leal Filho, Evangelos Manolas, Anabela Marisa Azul, Ulisses M. Azeiteiro, and Henry McGhie (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 386. See also Pratt and Matsuba, *The Life Story*, 286; Sanson and Burke, "Climate Change and Children," 353.

Socio-environmental issues also facilitate greater intergenerational learning and connection.[472]

While green spiritual practices of simplicity are relevant and applicable for all followers of Jesus, this project is especially interested in how emerging adults express their faith through green spiritual practices of simplicity, and how green spiritual practices of simplicity can help faith communities and religious leaders more holistically meet the needs and interests of emerging adults. Knowing where many emerging adults are with spirituality and justice is a key part of this process. We now turn our attention to simplicity to finish fleshing out the various facets of our exploration.

Popular and Traditional Simplicity in Christianity

Though simplicity is rarely mentioned in the Bible directly, it has been a central expression of Christianity, Judaism, and ancient Israelite religion since the opening pages of Genesis. In this section, I move chronologically backward through three expressions of simplicity in the Christian faith. I examine the minimalist and voluntary simplicity movements for their relevance, strengths, and disadvantages. I then conclude this section with a synthesis of ancient Christian asceticism, the root practice of all other forms of simplicity, as well as its contemporary modifications.

Contemporary Minimalism

For the time that it was en vogue, minimalism may have been a helpful entry point for thinking about the confluence of spirituality and sustainability, but its weakness is its trendiness. Minimalism is a primarily Millennial trend; *maximalism*—which is a

[472] Brown and Lock, "Enhancing Intergenerational Communication about Climate Change," 387.

design style that is not only about bright colors and patterns, but is also a philosophical trend that values surrounding oneself with beautiful things a person loves, regardless of utility—is trending for Gen Z.[473] From a stylistic perspective, maximalism's proponents and practitioners insist that there are ways to practice maximalism sustainably (in terms of home decor, fashion, and architecture),[474] but as a philosophical posture, maximalism has significant ecological and spiritual implications. Either way, the trend-oriented connotations of both terms, *minimalism* and *maximalism*, make it an unhelpful category for thinking about green spiritual practices of simplicity, especially insofar as we hope to make those practices accessible and attractive to emerging adults today and in the future. However, I start with a brief synthesis of pop minimalism because of its familiarity to many people and the potential for being positively influential. There are an overwhelming number of minimalism "experts" out there, but I focus on Joshua Becker's works here, since he is widely published, continues to be relatively popular, and is known as a Christian minimalist.

Becker defines minimalism as "a lifestyle where people intentionally seek to live with only the things they really need."[475] He says it's not about depriving ourselves or being trendy, but about "the intentional promotion of things we most value and the

[473] For example, see, Fendi Wang, "Is Minimalism Dead? More Is Now More: After a Year of Sacrifice, People Are Filling Their Homes with What They Love," *Deseret News*, September 18, 2021, https://www.deseret.com/2021/9/18/22669245/is-minimalism-dead-more-is-now-more-home-design-trends.

[474] For example, see Emily Torres, "How to Be A Sustainable Maximalist," *The Good Trade*, 2022, https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/maximalist-style-sustainable-living. A quick Google search of "sustainable maximalism" produces dozens more results.

[475] Joshua Becker, *Clutterfree with Kids: Change Your Thinking, Discover New Habits, Free Your Home* (Peoria: Becoming Minimalist, 2014), 20.

removal of anything that distracts us from them."[476] His approach to minimalism is compelling in the simplicity of its argument: We can spend more time with the people we really love when we are not bogged down by material possessions.[477] He focuses more on getting rid of things (de-owning) than the consumeristic impulse to merely organize excessive belongings (decluttering).[478] Most of his works highlight statistics about debt, excessive belongings, and the costs (both financial and otherwise) of consumerism.[479] According to Becker, minimalism is the answer to our consumeristic problems, because of its practical benefits to the individual: It increases contentment, generosity, gratitude, self-control, honesty, and appreciation, not to mention saving money, enjoying what we actually like, and easing our chore load.[480] He critiques the ways in which advertisements equate happiness and success with consumption and purchasing.[481] Instead, he encourages his readers to keep only the items "that have a purpose that aligns with your life purposes," which he calls The Becker Method.[482]

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[476] Joshua Becker, *The Minimalist Home: A Room-by-Room Guide to a Decluttered, Refocused Life* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2018), 9. See also Joshua Becker, *Simplify: 7 Guiding Principles to Help Anyone Declutter Their Home and Life* (Peoria: Becoming Minimalist, 2010), 36-38.

[477] Becker, *Clutterfree with Kids*, 20, 23.

[478] Ibid., 17-19.

[479] Joshua Becker, "21 Surprising Statistics That Reveal How Much Stuff We Actually Own," *Becoming Minimalist* (May 2015), https://www.becomingminimalist.com/clutter-stats/. J. Matthew Sleeth fleshes out the connection between simplicity and consumerism using the book of Philippians in the Bible. See Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, 169-182.

[480] Becker, *Clutterfree with Kids*, 27; Becker, *Simplify*, 10-11; Becker, *The Minimalist Home*, 4, 15.

[481] Joshua Becker, *The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2016), 45.

[482] Becker, *The Minimalist Home*, 17.

Instead of orienting our lives around the "lesser goods" of happiness, money, possessions, praise, leisure, and technology,[483] Becker argues that we need to prioritize meaning and purpose.[484] For Becker, spirituality and the environment are only means to this end. He recognizes "soul-care" as a benefit of minimalism,[485] and he believes that minimalism can help remind us that we are more than physical matter whose decisions are based on what everyone else is doing.[486] He also recognizes that minimalism is a way to "honor" the environment.[487] He says that discontentment, more than a concern for the environment, was his major motivation for his own journey into minimalism, but he appreciates that using and discarding fewer resources is a byproduct of a minimalist lifestyle.[488]

Other authors make more explicit connections between spirituality and the historical and traditional roots of simplicity from which minimalism emerges. One example is Adam Hamilton in his book, *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity*. He, too, uses statistics to show how the diseases of overconsumption (*affluenza*) and debt (*credit-itis*) take a toll on people's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.[489] For Hamilton, healthy financial practices mean having the freedom to live

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[483] Joshua Becker, *Things That Matter: Overcoming Distraction to Pursue a More Meaningful Life* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2022), 71-192.

[484] Ibid., 18, 209.

[485] Becker, *Clutterfree with Kids*, 21.

[486] Ibid., 44.

[487] Becker, *Simplify*, 12-13.

[488] Becker, *Clutterfree with Kids*, 29-30.

[489] Adam Hamilton, *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 5-7, 14-16.

counter-culturally, to seek first the kingdom of God, and to be generous.[490] He counters success and happiness—the focus of consumerism—with an emphasis on cultivating gratitude and contentment.[491] For Hamilton, the answer is not minimizing what we own alone, but a more holistic view of simplicity that "says less is more," including our material belongings.[492] Simplicity requires from us and grows in us self-control, generosity, and other-orientation.[493] He spends significant time exploring not just the practical benefits of simplicity, but the spiritual transformations that emerge from a lifestyle of simplicity, and he offers spiritual practices that help us implement simplicity holistically in our lives.[494]

The literature shows a profound depth of simplicity that moves beyond trends and fads, roots in the historical Christian witness to Jesus Christ, and embodies the gospel that Jesus proclaimed through his life and ministry.[495] Simplicity is not a decision to be made, but a character to be cultivated in partnership with the Spirit.[496] For that reason, we turn now to the twentieth-century movement called *voluntary simplicity*, which sought to bring the historical Christian practices of simplicity into the modern world.

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[490] Ibid., 25.

[491] Ibid., 55-63.

[492] Ibid., 65.

[493] Ibid., 70-79.

[494] Ibid., 88-102.

[495] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 3-4; Wendy J. Miller and Elaine A. Heath, *Simplicity: Spiritual Practices for Building a Life of Faith*, ProQuest eBook (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 9.

[496] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 9.

The Voluntary Simplicity Movement

The term "voluntary simplicity" was coined by Richard Gregg in his 1936 book, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*.[497] While Gregg drew from ascetic practices, he perceived asceticism to be "austere and rigid," while he described *simplicity* as a "relative matter," adaptable to the customs and climate of one's cultural context and the unique character and propensities of each individual's personality.[498] Gregg elaborates on voluntary simplicity this way:

> Voluntary simplicity involves both inner and outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose.[499]

For Gregg, voluntary simplicity allows for *each person* to evaluate their own life purposes and to discard those possessions or activities that detracted from those purposes, while keeping those that contribute to their lives in meaningful ways.[500] Therefore, Gregg

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[497] Mark Burch, *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet* (Gabriola Island: New Catalyst Books, 2000), 9-10.

[498] Richard B. Gregg, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), 5. Alan Durning, also preferring not to connect voluntary simplicity with "ascetic self-denial" calls it instead "unadorned grace." See Alan Durning, "A Culture of Permanence," in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 237. Mark Burch emphasizes that "voluntary simplicity is not new. Those who portray it as some radically new social innovation overlook its deep roots in traditional values and virtues. Thrift, temperance, co-operative self-reliance, community interdependence, harmony with nature and the pre-eminence of spiritual and interpersonal values over material and consumer values have a far older heritage in our culture than the more recent messages to spend, consume, compete and radically isolate oneself through the 'in-your-face' behavior celebrated by consumerism. Voluntary simplicity reaffirms values that have an established track record in contributing to survival and human well-being than anything emerging from the muddy dreams of advertising agencies." See Mark Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity: The 'Middle Way' to Sustainability," in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 39-40.

[499] Gregg, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*, 5-6.

[500] Ibid., 6. See also Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 10, 23, 34-35.

was not categorically against possessions or technology, but he was concerned that the benefits of technology are distributed inequitably, and that, while consumption allows for more leisure, it also exacerbates some of humanity's greatest moral problems.[501] From his observations, Gregg deduced:

> [T]he way to master the increasing complexity of life is not through more complexity. The way is to turn inward to that which unifies all, not the intellect but the spirit, and then to devise and put into operation new forms and modes of economic and social life that will truly and vigorously express that spirit. As an aid to that and as a corrective to our feverish over-mechanization, simplicity is not outmoded but greatly needed.[502]

Since Gregg, many others have resonated with the term *voluntary simplicity* and the movement it describes. In the 1980s and 1990s, Duane Elgin was one of the primary proponents for voluntary simplicity.[503] Witnessing even greater changes in technology than in Gregg's day, Elgin argued that humans have an "enormous opportunity to fundamentally reconsider the ways in which we choose to live our daily lives," and he believed that voluntary simplicity was an "innovative" response to " the pushes and pulls of our times."[504] In the 1950s through the 1980s, Elgin observed that simplicity had been

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[501] Gregg, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*, 12-13. See also Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 41. For more on the consequences of inequity and its connection to consumerism, see Amatai Etzioni, "A New Social Movement?" in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 71; Alan Durning, "The Conundrum of Consumption," in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 107.

[502] Gregg, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*, 18.

[503] Etzioni, "A New Social Movement?" 56. Elgin synthesizes ten alternative phrases to "voluntary simplicity": green lifeways, Earth-friendly living, soulful living, simple living, sustainable lifestyles, living lightly, compassionate lifeways, conscious simplicity, Earth-conscious living, and simple prosperity. See Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1993), 17. For more specificity about the ways in which Gregg influenced Elgin, and the voluntary simplicity movement more broadly, see Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 91.

[504] Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle that Promotes Personal and Social Renewal* (New York: Random House, 1982), vii. See also Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 80.

stereotyped as a regression movement, but he and others worked to recast simplicity as "a path to a new kind of progress and social vitality."[505] In the face of climate disasters and economic breakdowns, Elgin insisted that the average person is not helpless, but rather, that "only changes in our individual lives can establish a resilient and strong foundation for a promising future."[506] Rather than focusing on what voluntary simplicity is *against*—that is, withdrawing from deconstructive consumerism—Elgin focused on what voluntary simplicity is *for*: "connecting with and caring for life" and "a more balanced and integrated approach to living."[507]

For Elgin, a key facet of the voluntary simplicity movement is that it is *voluntary*. First, this means avoiding the glorification or justification of poverty:

> To live sustainably, it is vital that we each decide how much is "enough." Simplicity is a double-edged sword: Living with either too little or too much will diminish our capacity to realize our potentials. Balance occurs when there is neither material excess nor deficit. To find this in our everyday lives requires that we understand the difference between our needs and wants. "Needs" are those things that are essential to our survival and our growth. "Wants" are those things that are extra—that gratify our psychological desires. … The hallmark of a balanced simplicity is that our lives become clearer, more direct, less pretentious, and less complicated. We are then empowered by our material circumstances rather than enfeebled or distracted by them. Excess in either direction—too much or too little—is complicating. If we are totally absorbed in the struggle for subsistence or, conversely, if we are totally absorbed in the struggle to accumulate, then our capacity to participate wholeheartedly and enthusiastically in life is diminished.[508]

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[505] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, xxvii. Mark Burch puts it this way: "Voluntary simplicity is not about 'dumbing down' our lives. Voluntary simplicity is built on paradox—the paradox that less can be more, that growth can be deadly, that affluence destroys happiness, that making life more 'difficult' can make it easier, and that simplicity enfolds complexity. The practice of simplicity consists in the voluntary removal of *extraneous complexity* so that more mental, emotional, and physical energy is available to engage *meaningful complexity*." See Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 32, emphasis original.

[506] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 1. See also Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 26, 69, 166; Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle*, vii.

[507] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, xxviii. See also Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 8, 173.

[508] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 99-100. See also Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle*, 129-131. See also Amatai Etzioni's definition of voluntary simplicity: "Voluntary

In other words, voluntary simplicity is deliberately, intentionally, and consciously chosen to support a higher quality of life, including harmony with the earth and its resources, fair and equitable distribution of resources, awareness of the Creator, prioritization of the relationships that matter most, a deeper sense of belonging and common purpose with our communities, and a richer and more profound self-understanding by harnessing awareness of one's own life.[509] Because it is voluntary, it is not a sacrifice; the real sacrifice, Elgin says, is being overworked, overstressed, dissatisfied, disconnected, and disintegrated; it is mass species extinction, poisonous food, and global climate disruption.[510] So voluntary simplicity is not self-deprivation, it is life-affirmation.[511] However, that doesn't necessarily make simplicity simple: To "remember ourselves" is to "become conscious of what it feels like to be conscious," and this is a higher mode of perception than the autopilot to which many of us are accustomed.[512]

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simplicity refers to the decision to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services and to cultivate nonmaterialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning, out of free will rather than out of coercion by poverty, government austerity programs, or imprisonment." See Etzioni, "A New Social Movement?" 56.

[509] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 4-5, 7, 24, 74-75, 111; Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle*, 113-114. For more on consumerism and inequity, see Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 25.

[510] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 5-6. See also Etzioni, "A New Social Movement?" 63; Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 51. For more on disconnectedness, or how wealth separates us from our neighbors, see Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 29-30.

[511] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle*, 134. Alan Durning's following statement helps illustrate this point: "[L]ife's most meaningful and pleasant activities are often paragons of environmental virtue. The preponderance of things that people name as their most rewarding pastimes—and, interestingly, the things terminally ill individuals choose to do with their remaining months—are infinitely sustainable. Religious practice, conversation, family and community gatherings, theater, music, dance, literature, sports, poetry, artistic and creative pursuits, education, and appreciation of nature all fit readily into a culture of permanence—a way of life that can endure through countless generations." See Durning, "A Culture of Permanence," 235-236.

[512] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle*, 118. Mark Burch calls this "mindfulness." See Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 15.

In a survey conducted in the 1970s among 400 people, the researchers found that most people who identified with voluntary simplicity did so for the sake of frugality, compassion, ecological justice, responsibility, independence, freedom, morality, fuller life and relationships, equity, and spiritual formation.[513] However, the most common factor that led the survey respondents to participate in voluntary simplicity was the last of these, the spiritual motivations.[514] It was for "inner growth and being awake to the miracle of life."[515] Elgin believes that this taps into the wisdom traditions of all the great world religions, and he specifically points out that Jesus embodied a life of "compassionate simplicity" and encouraged his followers to "develop our capacity for loving participation in life."[516] A key part of this spirituality is finding our identity not in what we consume—so that we are "possessed by our possessions"—but instead rooting our identities in freedom and authenticity.[517]

Elgin believes that while voluntary simplicity is a personal lifestyle choice, it is not individualistic; it is a "social pathway leading to civilizational revitalization."[518] At its core, emphasizing nonviolent interactions with other people and creation, and prioritizing

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[513] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 27-38. See also Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 15, 24.

[514] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 140.

[515] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 49. On the other hand, Mark Burch emphasizes that voluntary simplicity is not a unified lifestyle, but that a diversity of people are attracted to voluntary simplicity for a diversity of reasons. See Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 28-30; Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 9.

[516] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 136-137. See also Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 90; Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 40. Alan Durning adds that: "Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Augustine, and church leaders through the ages have all held immoderate wealth a sin, and from ancient to Medieval times, monks under their vows of poverty held higher social rank than successful merchants." See Durning, "A Culture of Permanence," 240.

[517] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle*, 133.

[518] Ibid., 145. See also Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 28.

a connection with all life, will bring not only individuals, but communities into a time of renewal.[519] A significant facet of that spiritual and communal renewal is ecological. As he puts it, "living more consciously promotes an ecological orientation toward all of life. With conscious attention to our moment-to-moment experience, we begin to directly sense the subtle though profound connectedness of all life."[520] He elaborates this way:

> In living with simplicity, we encounter life more directly—in a firsthand and immediate manner. To live more simply, then, means to encounter life more directly, fully, and wholeheartedly. The value of bringing conscious simplicity into our lives thus seems directly proportional to the value we place upon living. We need little when we are directly in touch with life. It is when we remove ourselves from direct and wholehearted participation in life that emptiness and boredom creep in. It is then that we begin our search for something or someone that will alleviate our gnawing dissatisfaction. Yet, the search is endless to the extent that we are continually led away from ourselves and our experience in the moment. If we fully appreciate the learning and love that life offers to us in each moment, then we feel less desire for material luxuries that contribute little to our well-being and that deprive those in genuine need of scarce resources. When we live with simplicity, we give ourselves and others a gift of life.[521]

Seeking sustainable ways to exist in the world is a natural outgrowth of self-awareness and life-affirmation, according to Elgin.[522] It encourages us to work in harmony with the earth and its resources as we consume and provide food, healthcare, housing, transportation, and energy.[523]

Mark Burch's work on voluntary simplicity in the 2000s builds on Elgin's ecological emphasis. First, Burch identifies nine characteristics of voluntary simplicity, which hint at the connectedness between choice, spirituality, and ecology: (1) anti-

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[519] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle*, 153.

[520] Ibid., 124.

[521] Ibid., 130.

[522] Ibid., 135.

[523] Ibid.

consumerism, (2) self-reliance, (3) connection with others and the earth, (4) mindfulness and spirituality, (5) ecologically conscious consumption practices; (6) the fulfillment of potential, (7) nonviolence and the common good, (8) intentionality, and (9) holistic health.[524] Though there are many reasons to practice voluntary simplicity—e.g., to find peace, to prioritize relationships, to reduce debt—Burch believes that since the 1960s, the most pressing reason has been as a response to the consumerism that destroys life, exhausts resources, and changes the climate.[525] He notes that practicing voluntary simplicity for the sake of the environment generally can take three forms: (1) the voluntary choice to reduce waste; (2) the intentional choice to responsibly de-junk our lives; and—most importantly for ecological stewardship—(3) the deliberate choice to reduce consumption.[526] For Burch, stewardship is a central value of voluntary simplicity, and he especially emphasizes a healthy sort of materialism that finds beauty and wonder in nature and the physical world.[527]

Burch is under no disillusionment that voluntary simplicity will automatically fix all the world's complex, systemic problems, especially since voluntary simplicity is adaptable to individuals' lives.[528] However, unlike other piecemeal solutions, he also

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[524] Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 11-21; Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 31-39. In terms of spirituality, Burch puts more of a generic emphasis on fulfilling potential than a specific emphasis on the ways of Jesus. See Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 17-18. On the other hand, he does, in other sections, mention how voluntary simplicity enhances our connection with "Divine Being." See Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 183.

[525] Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 77.

[526] Ibid., 83-89. See also Mark Burch, "Why Simplify?" in *Voluntary Simplicity: The Poetic Alternative to Consumer Culture*, ed. Samuel Alexander (Whanganui: Stead and Daughters Limited, 2009), 200-201. For more on responsible and "contemplative" de-junking, see Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 86.

[527] Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 26; Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 45.

[528] Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 32-33. Alan Durning points out that the history of simplicity testifies that it is not the solution to North America's broken systems: "The history of Voluntary Simplicity Movements, furthermore, is not encouraging. … [T]he call for a simpler life has been perennial throughout the history of North America, from the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay to the back-to-the-landers of 20 years ago. None of

believes that voluntary simplicity is a practical, tangible step that is accessible to every person to begin to address the intricately interconnected global problems we face, like resource depletion, habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, pollution, willful ignorance, militarism, violence, poverty, inequity, social unrest, alienation, political corruption, exploitation of labor and resources, and other social injustices and their contributors.[529] Through this lens, Burch calls voluntary simplicity an act of "social solidarity that is driven by compassion."[530] When we become attuned to the community of which we are a part—not just humanity, but the community of all life, the ecosphere—we become mindful of our interconnectedness and expand our understanding of *neighbor* to the bioregion in which we live and all the creatures with whom we share it.[531] Thus, voluntary simplicity is not an end in itself, but a means to a new way of being in the world that achieves greater freedom and flourishing for ourselves, other people, and the earth itself.[532]

Mary Grigsby published a history of the voluntary simplicity movement in 2004. Alongside many of the observations already noted through the work of Gregg, Elgin, and Burch, Grigsby examines how "simple livers"—what she calls those who participate in voluntary simplicity—benefit from simplicity and contribute positively to justice issues,

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these movements ever gained more than a slim minority of adherents. And while simplicity fads have swept the continent periodically, most have ended in consumption binges that more than made up for past atonement." See Durning, "A Culture of Permanence," 238. Mary Grigsby also wonders about the transformative potential of voluntary simplicity. See Mary Grigsby, *Buying Time and Getting By: The Voluntary Simplicity Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 165.

[529] Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 81, 87, 173, 176; Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 27; Burch, "Why Simplify?" 181, 199.

[530] Burch, *Stepping Lightly*, 177.

[531] Ibid., 77, 82-83, 178.

[532] Ibid., 181; Burch, "Voluntary Simplicity," 42.

like race and gender, on top of environmental and socioeconomic justice.[533] She observes:

> The ideas that are being worked on in the voluntary simplicity movement by people in circles and in books and the media draw on the dominant culture, earlier ideas, and cultures of resistance found in the environmental movement and to a lesser extent the feminist and civil rights movements, and diffuse through the culture. Voluntary simplicity encompasses a broad range of prescribed practices and is characterized by flexible and emergent ideology. Among participants, simple living is seen as a process, not something that one achieves as a stable state. This produces elasticity in terms of the range of practices present within the movement and gives insider status to those seeking to simplify as well as those who are closer to the ideals of simple living found in the how-to literature and described by simple livers.[534]

Grigsby is conscientious of the many layers of social hierarchy, and notes that most simple livers are, like her, on the more dominant end of those hierarchies (e.g., middle-class, White, Western, heterosexual, educated).[535] This is unsurprising, since a major goal of voluntary simplicity is to "reduce careerism and consumerism … on the part of affluent individuals."[536]

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[533] For example, in terms of how voluntary simplicity engages gender: "Male simple livers reject aggression, competition, and emotional detachment, claiming they are pacifists, don't want to compete and make lots of money, and don't want to dominate others. They say they want to be part of a meaningful and fulfilling community. They don't want waged work or the male breadwinner role to define them." See Grigsby, *Buying Time and Getting By*, 79.

[534] Grigsby, *Buying Time and Getting By*, 7.

[535] Ibid., 22, 123. Many simple livers practice voluntary simplicity as an antiracist act, but Grigsby also offers critiques of the predominantly White movement: "The discourse of the movement gives salience to the affluent, Western, middle-class part of the definition, but the way language about this category is used demonstrates that whiteness is the silent companion of middle-class identity and practice. Simple livers tend to unselfconsciously blend whiteness and being middle class at times. At other times they recognize their whiteness as significant. They make the emptiness of whiteness a problem to solve by building community and changing practices so white culture becomes a positive force rather than a negative one. But in terms of themselves personally, they don't generally feel their whiteness as a privilege. Those with ethnic identities shift back and forth between ethnic white and dominant white discourse about themselves. They feel they have rejected white privilege by adopting voluntary simplicity." See Grigsby, *Buying Time and Getting By*, 157.

[536] Ibid., 26.

Similar to Elgin and Burch, Grigsby believes that "an ecological ethic" is "at the heart" of voluntary simplicity.[537] She maintains that our most significant social problems have an environmental component or cause, fed by a culture of greed and overconsumption that ignores the interdependent relationships of all things on earth.[538] However, simple livers insist that it is important not to blame individuals for problems that are culturally and economically created; individuals are hoodwinked into participating in consumerism through media and social structures, and blaming and judging individuals only discourages them and proves counterproductive.[539]

A final couple of names that are important to note as we overview voluntary simplicity: Samuel Alexander, another prominent author for the voluntary simplicity movement, believed Henry David Thoreau to be an important predecessor to the voluntary simplicity movement. As a transcendentalist, Thoreau explored "what a flourishing and sustainable life might look like."[540] Thoreau was devoted to Christ; though he eschewed institutional religion, he was a mystic who encountered God and expressed his spirituality through a connection to nature, and practices of simplicity that were rooted in the Christian tradition.[541] He rejected "mammon" as a "tyrant" that leads people away from the fullness of life by distracting us with "incessant business" that

[537] Ibid. See also Grigsby, *Buying Time and Getting By*, 30, 34.

[538] Ibid., 29-30.

[539] Ibid., 43.

[540] Samuel Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty: Thoreau's Alternative Economics* (Melbourne: Simplicity Institute, 2016), xi. For more on transcendentalism as a predecessor to voluntary simplicity, see Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 139.

[541] Alda Balthrop-Lewis, *Thoreau's Religion: Walden Woods, Social Justice, and the Politics of Asceticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), xi, 22-23, 127, 159, 180, 200-206.

focuses solely on profits and acquisition.[542] In response to the economic transformations of the mid-nineteenth century, Thoreau isolated himself in the woods, not to escape work, but to experience reality, "to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life."[543]

According to Alexander, Thoreau was not an ascetic in the puritanical sense, but like many Christian ascetics, he believed that comforts are an addictive distraction from the freedom of living passionately.[544] He viewed simplicity as a key facet of this freedom, but he distinguished simplicity from destitution, since poverty is also a hindrance to flourishing.[545] He specifically advocated for simplicity of clothing, shelter, food, and labor.[546] Beyond freedom and flourishing, Thoreau believed that simplicity helped reconnect us with the land, and to feel a direct, consistent connection with nature is a way to cultivate one's own soul and to be fully human.[547] Indeed, Thoreau also experienced his simple lifestyle in the woods as an act of civil disobedience, in which he encountered those outside of his racial and socioeconomic group.[548] Reflecting on Thoreau's life,

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[542] Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty*, 5. See also Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty*, 7.

[543] Ibid., 9, cf. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854), 343-344. See also Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty*, 11-12; Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 47; Balthrop-Lewis, *Thoreau's Religion*, 1-2.

[544] Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty*, 34, 38. Alda Balthrop-Lewis argues that Thoreau *is* an ascetic, specifically a *political ascetic*, "whose function is to transform self, community, and broader political conditions." See Balthrop-Lewis, *Thoreau's Religion*, 163.

[545] Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty*, 15, 36.

[546] Ibid., 16-22.

[547] Ibid., 23-24.

[548] Balthrop-Lewis, *Thoreau's Religion*, 7, 10.

Alexander argues that Thoreau is a compelling example for how simplicity can help us live with more freedom, creativity, and conviction.[549]

Christian Asceticism

It is impossible to use the word *simplicity* without addressing its roots in the ancient practice of *asceticism*: self-control in order to care for ourselves by eliminating unnecessary and burdensome distractions.[550] Christian asceticism puts to death our sin and selfishness so that we may further transform into Christ-likeness and serve the people and creation around us.[551] Discipline, not in the sense of punishment, but in the sense of teaching, guidance, and formation is a key facet of asceticism. Through asceticism, we discipline our minds, hearts, and bodies into a singular focus on God alone, so that—through the power of the Spirit—we can make choices that reflect the justice, compassion, self-sacrifice, hope, and love of Jesus.[552] While I personally find the word *asceticism* helpful because of its ancient roots, I have chosen the word *simplicity* for this project because of its more positive connotations and its accessibility.

In the Christian context, asceticism often brings to mind the monastic tradition: monks and nuns who have taken lifelong vows to abstain from earthly pleasures, like sex,

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[549] Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty*, 47-48.

[550] Evelyn Toft, "Asceticism," in *Ethics*, vol. 1, rev. ed., ed. John K. Roth (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2005), 94-95. I do not use *asceticism* in the sense of "complete renunciation of the flesh," including self-mortification. See Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 42. Also, the best definitions and practice of asceticism are not dualistic, as ascetics are so often stereotyped. See Patrick Hagman, "The Naked Intent: On Connecting Asceticism and Activism," *International Journal of Public Theology* 13.3 (2019): 263.

[551] Toft, "Asceticism," 95.

[552] Ibid., 95-96; Inbar Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind: Forms of Attention and Self-Transformation in Late Antique Monasticism* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2018), 89-90.

material wealth, and food beyond the purpose of sustenance.[553] *Asceticism*, however, can also be used in a broader sense, like political asceticism or ascetic practices, that are geared not toward self-*denial*, but toward self-*control*, which entails disciplining our will and desires for the sake of freedom, beauty, and joy.[554] Even without a lifelong vow of abstinence, however, ascetic tradition requires mental and physical habits—like fasting, prayer, and solitude—in order to achieve individual, social, and political transformation.[555]

Though asceticism most immediately impacts the inner development of an individual, it is never an isolated act; *communal* transformation is always at the heart of ascetic practice.[556] For contemporary Westerners, who are accustomed to our society and ourselves having a significant amount of control over our environment, this may feel counterintuitive.[557] However, the wisdom of ancient Christian asceticism is that nothing transforms our world more than when we focus our attention on God and experience transformation within ourselves.[558] We do not practice asceticism in order to procure

[553] Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind*, 5, 19; Hagman, "The Naked Intent," 267; Gavin D. Flood, "Asceticism and the Hopeful Self: Subjectivity, Reductionism, and Modernity," *Cross Currents* 57.4 (2008): 481-483; Patrick Hagman, "The End of Asceticism: Luther, Modernity and How Asceticism Stopped Making Sense," *Political Theology* 14.2 (2013): 177; Charles Cummings, *Monastic Practices*, 2nd ed., vol. 47, Monastic Wisdom Series, ProQuest eBook (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), 38, 116.

[554] Flood, "Asceticism and the Hopeful Self," 483-484, 487; Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind*, 72, 162, 185, 196.

[555] Flood, "Asceticism and the Hopeful Self," 484; Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind*, 21-22; Cummings, *Monastic Practices*, 7-8.

[556] Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind*, 1, 5, 19.

[557] Ibid., 188.

[558] Ibid.

favor or pity from God, but to draw intimately close to the God who longs for us to experience freedom from idolatry and the unnecessary burdens of humanity.[559]

While traditional ascetic practices remain valuable for this transformational process, we, like the ancient ascetics, can also be innovative in how we cultivate productive, countercultural habits in our contemporary contexts and institutions.[560] Patrick Hagman argues that contemporary ascetic adaptations are a meaningful way for followers of Jesus to practice political activism as an expression of their faith, for example, eco-fasting—or giving up meat—to reduce one's carbon footprint in response to climate change.[561] Other scholars also affirm the relevance of asceticism to the climate crisis. Just as consumerism alienates us from the earth from which we came, ascetic practices help us reconnect with nature, and by extension, with God.[562] Asceticism, since its earliest years in the book of Acts, has been about gentleness and equity; its focal point is nature and an earth-honoring ethic; it requires the discipline of overcoming greed and materialism and the control of overconsumption and impulsivity; it affirms the interconnectedness of life and the good of all living things in a community.[563] By prioritizing simplicity and a mindset and reality of enoughness, asceticism is a pathway into sustainability by helping us become aware of consumerism and our responsibility to

[559] Hagman, "The End of Asceticism," 185-186.

[560] Hagman, "The Naked Intent," 259, 267, 277; Larry L. Rasmussen, "Earth-Honoring Asceticism and Consumption." *Cross Currents* 57.4 (2008): 499.

[561] Hagman, "The Naked Intent," 260.

[562] Rasmussen, "Earth-Honoring Asceticism and Consumption," 498-499.

[563] Ibid., 503, 505, 506-508; Jay McDaniel, "Simplicity and Asceticism," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 365.

the earth.[564] This mindfulness helps us recognize the sacredness of everyday practices, like gardening, walking, and eating.[565]

In Hagman's article, he particularly focuses on the Buy Nothing Year, a theory and practice developed in 2013 by two Canadians, Julie Phillips and Geoffrey Szuszkiewicz, who, for one whole year, bought nothing but necessities; everything else they bartered for, created, or went without.[566] The practice compelled them to walk or bike instead of drive, to repair clothes instead of buying new ones, to cook and host gatherings instead of going out, and to make new connections with people who supported them and challenged them to go deeper instead of maintaining their shallower former friendships.[567] They reported that the practice made them more mindful of their choices, surroundings, and selves, and helped them realize the advantages of living at a slower pace with an ecological ethic.[568] Not only did these benefits and the virtue of frugality follow them past their Buy Nothing Year, but they said that they also became more attuned to societal problems and their role within them, especially consumerism.[569] Like the ancient ascetics, Hagman points out that what Phillips and Szuszkiewicz experienced was how action shapes our passions, modifies our habits, and reforms our character,

[564] McDaniel, "Simplicity and Asceticism," 365-366.

[565] Ibid., 365.

[566] Hagman, "The Naked Intent," 269.

[567] Ibid., 269-270, 273.

[568] Ibid., 273.

[569] Ibid., 272.

which in turn impacts our communities.[570] To drive home the relevance of asceticism to contemporary culture, Hagman says the following:

> The important, but difficult, work that needs to be done is to revisit those traditional ascetic techniques, like fasting, vigils, and voluntary poverty. What might they signify and represent in a world so very different from that in which they became a part of the Christian tradition (though these practices were done by people who had bodies that functioned more or less the same as ours)? Some of these methods are still relevant in the struggle against the principalities and powers of the contemporary world; others need to be reinterpreted, and new ones invented. For a public theology, asceticism can provide a framework for reflection on the way the Christian faith interacts with the public domain and does so in a time that emphasizes the importance of practices, the body, and the interaction of the self with the community and God.[571]

Ecotheology and Simplicity: Five Qualities of Christian Green Simplicity

The chapter up to this point has described simplicity as a key facet of Christian practice, specifically within the context of understanding the spirituality, needs, and experiences of emerging adults. The final section of this chapter synthesizes the theological, biblical, historical, and contextual frameworks covered in this chapter and the previous chapter into five key characteristics of green spiritual practices of simplicity. These five principles are the undercurrent of the practices that the project participants discussed and that are synthesized in Chapter 5.

The Worshipful Focus of Green Simplicity

At its core, green simplicity is an act of worship. As an expression of our love for God, we love what God loves, serve what God serves, and embrace what God

[570] Ibid.

[571] Ibid., 281.

embraces—and God loves, serves, and embraces creation.[572] Simplicity helps us do this by focusing our attention on Christ alone so that every other decision and relationship flows from the singularity of Jesus at the center of our lives.[573] The Shema—"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul [and with all your mind] and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:4-9; Mark 12:29-31)—articulates this *integrity*, or being undivided in our relationship with God.[574] Love of God is meant to be a worshipful choice in favor of life-giving and life-enhancing behaviors, not just for ourselves, but also for the sake of all that God loves.[575] We cannot love the earth as God does while simultaneously committing violence against it.[576]

Jesus embodied this worshipful love for God by slowing and simplifying his life to, what we would call today, an extreme.[577] In a culture where *slow* and *less* are pejorative, Jesus' unhurried commitment to love his neighbors, to have as little impact on the environment as possible, and to experience and share peacefulness epitomizes the upside-down kingdom.[578] Instead of prioritizing money and security, followers of Jesus

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[572] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 15; Malinda Elizabeth Berry, "Shalom Political Theology: A New Type of Mennonite Peace Theology for a New Era of Discipleship," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 34.1 (Winter 2016).

[573] Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 84; Miller and Heath, *Simplicity*, 28; Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 51; Mindy Caliguire, *Simplicity* (Downers Grove: IVP Connect, 2010), 15, 18.

[574] James K. Bruckner, "The Whole and Healthy Person in the Biblical Tradition: Where Is It Written?" *The Covenant Quarterly* 64.1-3 (2006): 259, 261-262, 265-266, 269.

[575] Ibid., 263-264, 271-272.

[576] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 14.

[577] Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 8-10; John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019), 19, 22-23.

[578] Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 18, 135; Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 24-25; Richard W. Carlson and Mary Chase-Ziolek, "Wholeness: Rhythms of Intimacy and Health," *The Covenant Quarterly*

are called to love and imitate God through justice, self-sacrifice, gentleness, and solidarity with the poor.[579] While money and possessions can serve God-honoring purposes, they are cruel to us, our neighbors, and creation when they replace God as our master.[580] We are reminded that the point of simplicity, especially when it is oriented toward creation care, is not efficiency, productivity, or even relaxation (money might be a better master for these goals in some cases); the point, instead, is "making space for treasuring God's own self" and all that God treasures.[581]

The Communal Focus of Green Simplicity

Though green simplicity has many personal benefits, it is not a primarily individualistic act, but a spiritual practice that *emerges from* and *is for* the community, and more specifically, the community of creation. One of the most basic definitions of simplicity is to "take less," which we do so that there is more for other people, other creatures, and the earth.[582] We abandon our selfishness and greed, and the violence that so often accompanies them, for the greater good of seeing the entirety of our environment

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(January 2006): 277; Roger Heuser and Norman Shawchuck, *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving the People*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 34.

[579] Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 231-232; Miller and Heath, *Simplicity*, 40-41; Nouwen, *Following Jesus*, 46-49, 59.

[580] Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 233, 237-238, 240; Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 3; Miller and Heath, *Simplicity*, 15.

[581] Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 10.

[582] Merkel, "Sharing the Earth," 207, 212. See also Miller and Heath, *Simplicity*, 38; Jan Johnson, *Simplicity and Fasting* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 16-17.

flourish.[583] Green simplicity is the recognition that our actions impact our immediate community and, because of globalization, the whole world.[584]

From this perspective, self-sacrifice is certainly a virtue, but the self-sacrifice entailed in green simplicity should not be thought of as one-sided:[585]

> God created all living things—the earth, the sky, the water, the plants, the animals, humankind—and proclaimed them good. God created us deeply connected to each other and deeply connected to all of life. Our bodies cannot exist independent of the rest. We are dependent on the earth for food to eat, water to drink, and air to breathe. Wholeness, thus, ultimately includes all of creation. Throughout the ages, the actions of people around the world have diminished our natural environment beloved by God and so essential to our health. We are part of creation and therefore our wellbeing is dependent upon how we care for creation as well as how we interact with creation.[586]

The personal and the communal are intertwined; spiritual and social transformations cannot be detached.[587] The linchpin is whether we perceive the world to be scarce or abundant: While the empire functions as if life were a zero-sum game, in which I lose if another wins, Jesus lived without anxiety for himself because he trusted that God created a world of abundance, in which there is always plenty for everyone.[588]

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[583] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 19, 212; Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 22; Christopher Key Chapple, "Sacrifice," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 348.

[584] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 3-4.

[585] James A. Nash refers to the virtue of *frugality* in place of *self-sacrifice*, which could be helpful in terms of connotations. See James A. Nash, "Toward the Revival and Reform of the Subversive Virtue: Frugality," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1995): 137-146, 151-160.

[586] Carlson and Chase-Ziolek, "Wholeness," 287. This connects to McFague's application of *kenosis*, as discussed in Chapter 2. See McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 214.

[587] Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 5; James H. Evans, Jr., *We Shall All Be Changed: Social Problems and Theological Renewal* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 10, 89-90.

[588] Nouwen, *Following Jesus*, 38-39, 42; Carlson and Chase-Ziolek, "Wholeness," 274; Wright, *Spiritual Practices of Jesus*, 64.

When we sacrifice the earth and others for what we perceive to be our own benefit, we experience what Hartmut Rosa calls *alienation*: "a mode of relating to the world in which the subject encounters the subjective, objective, and/or social world as either indifferent or repulsive."[589] *Ecoalienation* is when we experience: "a lack of close, positive bonding with nature and an inability to feel at home in God's creation and renewed by relating intimately with it. This is a personal loss, but it also reduces people's motivation to care for the earth."[590] Wendell Berry puts it starkly:

> [W]e can [not] live harmlessly, or strictly at our own expense; we depend upon other creatures and survive by their deaths. To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.[591]

However, the opposite of alienation, *resonance*, is attainable. Resonance, Rosa says, is "a kind of relationship to the world, formed through affect and emotion, intrinsic interest, and perceived self-efficacy, in which the subject and world are mutually affected."[592] In other words, while it may be counterintuitive, self-indulgence is self-destructive, while self-sacrifice for the sake of other people and creation is self-care, because humans cannot flourish without intimacy, and intimacy requires resonance.[593] Each one of us, after all, is a part of the community of creation.

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[589] Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, trans. James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 178.

[590] Carlson and Chase-Ziolek, "Wholeness," 288.

[591] Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 304.

[592] Rosa, *Resonance*, 174.

[593] Carlson and Chase-Ziolek, "Wholeness," 279; McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 19; Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 28.

Berry reminds us that humans are best equipped to worship God by sharing in God's love for the community of creation through the particular: the local or regional environment in which we find ourselves.[594] The health of each of us, our families, our communities, and our species is dependent on the health of the land, and while we cannot solve the climate crisis as individuals, we can all do something to heal the earth that God has given us to steward.[595] This is where green simplicity has immediate and visible ramifications. We can see our choices to share and to serve affirming the community of creation around us; since all things are interconnected, we can trust that our choices to live more simply and sustainably are a small way that we are participating in God's work of restoring the whole world.[596]

The Complexity of Green Simplicity

Green simplicity is not always easy. It's not always convenient, and it often requires more planning. Sometimes it can make life more complex as we figure out how to live differently than the defaults of our cultural contexts.[597] Richard Foster summarizes it this way:

> We must never confuse simplicity with simplism. … Simplistic answers, by their very nature, fail to perceive the rich, ordered complexity of life. … Christian simplicity lives in harmony with the ordered complexity of life. It repudiates easy, dogmatic answers to tough, intricate problems. In fact, it is this grace that frees us sufficiently to appreciate and respond to the complex issues of contemporary society. The duplicitous mind, on the other hand, tends to confuse and obscure. While the dogmatic person cannot understand the diversity in simplicity, the double-minded person cannot perceive the unity in complexity. This brings us to

[594] Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 1.

[595] Ibid., 47.

[596] McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 209; Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 53-54.

[597] Yamasaki, *Sacred Pauses*, 105.

> the central paradox of our study: the complexity of simplicity. The fact that a paradox lies at the heart of the Christian teaching on simplicity should not surprise us. The life and teachings of Christ were often couched in paradox.[598]

Contrary to some popular versions of simplicity, simplicity is not primarily about *refraining* from action in such a way that others must compensate.[599] Simplicity is primarily an active, conscious choice to transform how we live and heal our relationship with creation.[600]

While practices of simplicity can make some facets of life healthier, more interesting, and sometimes, indeed, simpler, ease is not the goal of simplicity; after all, ease rarely makes life more vibrant or meaningful.[601] Instead, the goal of simplicity is integrity: a sense of focus in our purpose and wholeness within ourselves and, by extension, our communities.[602] Using personal testimony, Courtney Carver explains how simplicity helped her own sense of integrity:

> Not being yourself is exhausting and breaks you down from the inside out. Simplifying my life was the way I remembered who I was. When we hear about the benefits of simplicity, we immediately think of organized sock drawers, clean countertops, and tidy bookshelves, but it's much more than that if you want it to be. Remembering yourself, connecting with your heart, making you—these are all surprising results of getting simple. You used to know who you were, but all the stuff, obligations, and craziness of life got in the way and clouded your vision. Getting rid of everything that doesn't matter allows you to remember who you are. Simplicity doesn't change who you are, it brings you back to who you are. Simplifying your life invites you to start peeling back the layers of excess, outside and in. Once you remove all the things that have been covering you up and

[598] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 5.

[599] Patrick M. Carrion, "Simplicity Not So Simple," *Priestalk* 71.5 (May 2015): 30.

[600] Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life*, 8-9.

[601] Caliguire, *Simplicity*, 11.

[602] Ibid., 13, 19; Miller and Heath, *Simplicity*, 38.

> holding you back, you can step into yourself, back into your heart, and be you again.[603]

From this perspective, *duplicity*, as Foster alludes to above, is far more detrimentally complicated than the graceful complexity of simplicity. Duplicity is not only cheating or deception or hypocrisy; it also describes whenever any of us are torn in multiple directions, both inwardly and outwardly.[604] Foster continues on duplicity:

> Duplicity costs the joyful communion with the divine Center, faith that sees everything in the light of God's governance for good, abiding peace, and the ability to walk cheerfully over the face of the earth in the power of the Lord. In short, it costs the abundant life Jesus said he came to bring. Simplicity may be difficult, but the alternative is immensely more difficult. The joyful paradox in all this is that while simplicity is complex it is also simple. In the final analysis we are not the ones who have to untangle all the intricacies of our complex world. There are not many things we have to keep in mind—in fact, only one: to be attentive to the voice of the true Shepherd. There are not many decisions we have to make—in fact, only one: to seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness. There are not many tasks we have to do—in fact, only one: to obey him in all things.[605]

As we discern how to hear God's voice, seek God's kingdom, and obey God's will, green simplicity helps us to remember that the priority is not our own convenience, but the demands placed on the community of creation.[606] As Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo wonder, "What is the cost of our way of life? Whose pain sustains our lifestyle?"[607] Those actions that are momentarily more efficient for us—consider, for example, throwing something in the garbage—may be unfathomably complicated for others, for

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[603] Courtney Carver, *Soulful Simplicity: How Living with Less Can Lead to So Much More* (New York: Tarcher Perigee, 2017), 3-4. See also Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 111.

[604] Caliguire, *Simplicity*, 12, 24; Yamasaki, *Sacred Pauses*, 108; Johnson, *Simplicity and Fasting*, 11-12; Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 18; Wright, *Spiritual Practices of Jesus*, 67, 80-81.

[605] Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 184.

[606] Wendell Berry points out that seeking to avoid the good gift of work that God gave us through the pursuit of convenience and efficiency is damaging, even murderous, to our souls. See Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 12.

[607] Claiborne and Campolo, *Red-Letter Revolution*, 106.

the earth, and for the future generations that have to bear the consequences of our convenience.

The Holistic Harmony of Green Simplicity

Just as integrity within ourselves is a primary goal of simplicity, integrity in the community of creation is also central to green simplicity. The biblical word for this holistic integrity is *shalom*. *Shalom* is often translated as *peace*, but it is also more than that: It is health and wholeness in the deepest and widest sense, both for a community *and* for each person and environmental component that make up that community.[608] Wendell Berry identifies four facets of *shalom*: material well-being and prosperity, just interpersonal and political relationships, morality, and the renewal and transformation of communities.[609] *Shalom* is not only the practice of peaceful nonviolence; it is also the active movement toward healed and harmonious relationships.[610] Ted Grimsrud connects *shalom* with salvation and harmony:

> Salvation has to do with wholeness. To gain salvation leads to harmony with God, other human beings, and with the rest of creation. We need salvation when we live with disharmony, when we experience brokenness instead of wholeness. The Old Testament begins with a portrayal of creation at peace. However, after the beginning, the Bible presupposes disharmony and brokenness—and focuses on the struggle for salvation. Salvation results in healed brokenness, restored health and wholeness. The Bible presents salvation on three levels: (1) salvation as liberation from Powers of brokenness, (2) salvation as restoration of harmony with God, and (3) salvation as restoration of harmonious human relationships. The Old Testament story places priority on salvation in the first sense (liberation). The other two follow from and depend upon the first. Because God acts to deliver,

[608] Bruckner, "The Whole and Healthy Person," 25, 258-259.

[609] Berry, "Shalom Political Theology."

[610] Ibid.

> people are then freed to respond to God and restore harmony in their relationships with God and to live in harmony with one another.[611]

Green simplicity helps facilitate these harmonious relationships with others by caring for the earth and its resources that we share. Berry points out that the opposite of harmony, of *shalom*, is exploitation, which seeks to "divide and conquer."[612] Consumerism that demands an ever-expanding market is a "gluttonous enterprise of ugliness, waste, and fraud [that] thrives in the disastrous breach it has helped to make between our bodies and our souls."[613] Berry elaborates:

> What I have been trying to do is to define a pattern of disintegration that is at once cultural and agricultural. I have been groping for connections—that I think are indissoluble, though obscured by modern ambitions—between the spirit and the body, the body and other bodies, the body and the earth. If these connections do necessarily exist, as I believe they do, then it is impossible for material order to exist side by side with spiritual disorder, or vice versa, and impossible for one to thrive long at the expense of the other; it is impossible, ultimately, to preserve ourselves apart from our willingness to preserve other creatures, or to respect and care for ourselves except as we respect and care for other creatures; and, most to the point of this book, it is impossible to care for each other more or differently than we care for the earth. This last statement becomes obvious enough when it is considered that the earth is what we all have in common, that it is what we are made of and what we live from, and that we therefore cannot damage it without damaging those with whom we share it. But I believe it goes farther and deeper than that. There is an uncanny resemblance between our behavior toward each other and our behavior toward the earth. … By some connection that we do not recognize, the willingness to exploit one becomes the willingness to exploit the other. The conditions and the means of exploitation are likewise similar.[614]

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[611] Grimsrud, *Instead of Atonement*, 27. See also Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 244.

[612] Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 11.

[613] Ibid.

[614] Ibid., 123-124.

As an alternative to this dysfunctional way of living, God invites us into the upside down kingdom. Green simplicity is one way we can live out the holistic harmony that God longs to see permeate all creation.

The Freedom of Green Simplicity

Finally, the fruit of simplicity is freedom. Practices of simplicity are not rooted in fear or rigidity, but in a desire to experience freedom and share freedom, and freedom is the outcome of Christian simplicity.[615] As an embodiment of our devotion to God, simplicity is a discipline to experience the transformation and enrichment of our characters.[616] As an act of trust in God's abundance, simplicity is a release from the anxieties and captivities of a broken world.[617] As an expression of *shalom*, simplicity is an avenue for us to participate in the healing freedom of God's kingdom, however imperfectly.[618] Through green simplicity, we experience a reconnection with God, ourselves, other people, and creation. Instead of binding us, the intimacy we were created for helps us experience true freedom by helping us become fully ourselves and lead us into flourishing. Perhaps even more importantly, green spiritual practices of simplicity allow us to give *creation* the gift of being free, even in miniscule ways, from the unnecessary burdens under which, like us, it groans and aches for freedom.

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[615] Caliguire, *Simplicity*, 76; Carver, *Soulful Simplicity*, xvii; Carrion, "Simplicity Not So Simple," 30; Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 10.

[616] Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 14. For more on the freeing dimensions of discipline, see Cummings, *Monastic Practices*, 85, 87, 91.

[617] Caliguire, *Simplicity*, 16, 85.

[618] Ibid., 82.

Conclusion

As an interdisciplinary theologian, I have a deep appreciation for the work that has been done to explore emerging adulthood, simplicity, and ecology from theological and biblical perspectives. I have called the point of convergence between these ideas *green spiritual practices of simplicity*, with a special emphasis on those practices that are accessible and meaningful to emerging adults. Based on the research presented in the last two chapters, I reiterate this definition of *green spiritual practices of simplicity* that I introduced in Chapter 1: *daily disciplines, which emerge from a commitment to the ways and teachings of Jesus, that help us focus our thoughts, attentions, and desires on God alone so that we can experience oneness with ourselves, others, and creation holistically*. The nuanced overview of each of these individual ideas in the last two chapters has hopefully begun to bring them together on a theoretical and practical level. Ultimately, in this project, I am curious about the ways these subjects intertwine in the daily lived experiences of average Jesus-followers. In the next three chapters, I will describe how I explored green spiritual practices of simplicity with my study participants (Chapter 3), the practices that emerged (Chapter 4), and the themes I drew out from my interviews with them (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Research Question and Hypotheses

In this study, I seek to discover green spiritual practices of simplicity—that, either, (1) emerging adults practice, or (2) would be accessible to emerging adults—and how those practices shape the experiences and expressions of faith for those who observe them. Thus, the primary research question is: How do green spiritual practices of simplicity provide opportunities for spiritual formation and missional participation, especially for emerging adults? To answer this question, I conducted one-on-one interviews and did a thematic analysis of the data.

I hypothesized that green spiritual practices of simplicity have the potential to be accessible and meaningful for: (1) followers of Jesus who want to include creation in their faith, regardless of their age or spiritual journey; (2) churches who want to model the centrality of God's redeeming love for all creation; and (3) faith communities who want to be hospitable and relevant to young people who are transitioning into adulthood. I also hypothesize that these practices help make individuals and communities more conscientious of their relationships to God, themselves, other people, and creation.

Research Procedures and Instruments

To discover and assess green spiritual practices of simplicity, I originally sought to interview 8-10 people who met the following criteria: (a) were 18-35 years old (meaning they are experiencing or have recently experienced emerging adulthood), (b) identified as Protestant Christian with an active faith, and (c) have instituted at least one green spiritual practice of simplicity in their life. I ended up interviewing 20 participants

because of their high interest in participating in my study, the diversity of practices they observed, and to achieve the goal of finding people across the age bracket, from various geographical regions, of both sexes, and—as much as possible—with different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

I found the participants by asking my network of church leaders and university employees to connect me with people they knew. While directly messaging people with relevant accounts on Instagram was unfruitful, it was very effective to email leaders of relevant organizations (like Christian environmental nonprofits and churches with a creation-oriented mission) and to solicit help via Facebook groups that revolve around zero waste, minimalism, environmentalism, and creation care. I posted invitations on social media and sent them via email to recruit people for this project. The two different recruitment texts, which were interchangeable, depending on the recipient or audience, can be found in Appendix A. Once I was in touch with an interested potential participant who met the criteria, I sent them the informed consent document, which can be found in Appendix B, and the multimedia release agreement, which can be found in Appendix C, the latter of which gave me permission to have an audio recording of the interviews. If they signed the documents and sent them back to me, we scheduled a Zoom interview. I told participants I would need a maximum of 90 minutes of their time; most interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes, and none exceeded 90 minutes.

During the interview, I asked the participant the following questions to explore their green spiritual practice(s) of simplicity. The sub-questions listed here were optional for me to ask, either for clarification or additional information, depending on the initial answers to the primary questions.

1. Please briefly describe your spiritual journey and your current relationship with God.

2. What is your green practice of simplicity, and why did you choose to implement it?
    a. What aspects of your faith informed your decision to implement this practice?
    b. For how long have you observed this practice?
    c. How consistent are you about this practice?
    d. Do you anticipate this practice to be a permanent or temporary part of your life?

3. What transformation, if any, have you experienced since implementing this practice?
    a. How, if at all, has your faith and/or theology changed?
    b. How, if at all, has your relationship with God changed?
    c. How, if at all, has your view of God's relationship with creation changed?
    d. How, if at all, has your understanding of your relationship with creation changed?

4. How has this practice shifted your interactions with the earth and with other people?
    a. How do other Christians respond when they hear about this practice?
    b. How do people who are not active Christians respond to this practice?
    c. How has this practice shaped your view of your responsibility to others?
    d. How has this practice shaped your view of the church's responsibility to creation?

I also collected the demographic information that participants felt comfortable sharing, including age, sex, race and ethnicity, geographical region, career field, and denominational affiliation. No participant declined to answer any question at any point in the interview.

Procedures for Analyzing the Data

I used an app called Otter—which uses AI to convert speech into text—to write the first draft of the transcripts while I conducted the interviews. After each interview, I

used the Zoom audio recording to clean up and proofread the transcript. I then permanently deleted all audio recordings.

When all of the interviews and transcripts were completed, I went through each interview and sorted the data based on practices and topics discussed. For example, if one concept was talked about at separate times during the interview, I brought them together and labeled them as a category. At this stage, all data from each interview was categorized in some way, no matter how brief the mention of a particular topic.

I then compiled all of the coded transcripts into one document, and I collected all the connected data into shared categories. For example, if one participant talked about "increased appreciation," two participants talked about "thankfulness,"and four participants talked about "gratitude," I collected all that data into the category called "expressing gratitude." If only one participant made a brief mention of a topic, I deleted it, since that disqualified it from being a theme.

In the last stage of analysis, I organized the categories: (1) I separated the practices from the themes; (2) I combined any remaining redundant categories, as long as putting them together authentically reflected the essence of the data shared in the interviews, and (3) I combined closely related subcategories under umbrella categories. This organization and coding process is how the headings and subheadings of Chapters 5 and 6 took shape. Finally, I synthesized the analysis of the data into its final form in Chapters 5 and 6.

Research Participants

The 20 participants I interviewed covered the full range of 18-35 years old: One participant was in the 18-21 age bracket; five participants were in the 22-25 age bracket;

nine participants were in the 26-29 age bracket; and five participants were in the 31-35 age bracket. Even though I aimed to talk about practices that are accessible and relevant to emerging adults, who are approximately 18-29 or -30 years old, I extended the age range for this study to 35, since I thought including people who are slightly farther (but not too much farther) along on their spiritual and environmental journeys could be valuable. Ultimately, however, age did not seem to be a significant factor in the types of practices that participants engaged in or their reasons for implementing them.

White women made up 14 of the participants: one of them was Australian, one of them immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe as a child, and the rest were native-born Americans. The remaining six participants were men: three were White; one was half-White and half-Asian; one was Black; and one was Hispanic and immigrated to the United States from South America as a college student. I was disappointed that I was not able to recruit more Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) to participate in my study. In my particular context, at Pepperdine University, where most students are women, and the largest racial group is White, there is a high chance that the practices and themes will speak to their own life experiences. I recognize that the lack of diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation limits this project significantly.

The participants were also from a wide variety of regions. One participant each lived in northeastern Australia, Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, central Indiana, central Oklahoma, southern Alaska, and southern Arizona; two participants lived in Virginia; three participants lived in middle Tennessee; three participants lived in North Carolina; and four participants lived in southern California. Some participants also had a

significant background in other geographical regions that influenced their spiritual and environmental journeys, including Maryland, Virginia, eastern Kansas, Iowa, northern Mississippi, southern Alabama, central Texas, northern California, and the Pacific Northwest.

The participants also worked in several fields: one was a professional artist; one worked in healthcare; one was a full-time undergraduate student; one worked in higher education; two were homemakers (one of those also being a veteran); four worked in business administration in some capacity; three worked in sustainability, one of them being explicitly faith-based; and three participants worked in congregational ministry, two were studying ministry full-time, and two worked tangentially in ministry, one through higher education and one through a nonprofit. (Though I did not specifically ask for this information as part of the collection of demographics, the participants offered up their educational background and their socioeconomic status, sometimes directly, and sometimes indirectly. All of the participants had or were planning to have some level of higher education, and all of the participants were middle class.)

The participants also covered a swath of Protestant denominations, and 14 of them identified strongly with just one denomination: one participant each identified as Evangelical Covenant, born-again, ecumenical, and non-denominational; two identified as Mennonite;[619] two identified as Baptist; and six identified as Church of Christ. The remaining six participants identified with two or three of the following denominations or traditions: African Methodist Episcopalian, Assembly of God, Baptist, charismatic,

[619] My research into Christian simplicity consistently brought up the Mennonites as the Christian tradition that is arguably most committed to practices of simplicity and practices that are mindful of the earth. See, for example, Moyer, "Let Earth Rest," 273; Myers, "Introduction," 37; Gregg, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*, 4; Friesen, "A Mennonite Call to Simplicity," 42-43, 49-50;

Church of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, non-denominational, Presbyterian, and red-letter Christian. Some other denominations and traditions that were influential in the backgrounds of some of the participants and that haven't already been mentioned were: Anabaptist, Southern Baptist, Russian Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Anglican, Mormon, and Catholic.

In terms of their faith experiences, broadly: One participant did not grow up Christian; the rest grew up at least nominally Christian, but only nine have remained primarily affiliated with the denomination of their childhood; 13 participants talked about the need to make their faith their own as they have moved into adulthood; 11 participants said they have struggled with a legalistic, strict, fundamentalist, or hyper-conservative congregation or community at some point in their life; 10 participants told a story about overcoming doubt or apathy as an essential part of their faith journey; 10 participants told a story about at least one significant experience or loss that led them to wrestle with, and ultimately, grow in their faith;[620] eight participants said they have left or have considered leaving the church at some point in their lives; and seven participants said that they have struggled with their faith specifically because of their commitments to justice, including environmental justice, and they felt like that wasn't welcome in Christian communities;

[620] This is a common element of faith testimonies. Sallie McFague connects how traumas can influence our spiritual and environmental journeys in McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*, 85: "Something wakes us up—some disorienting event, story, or experience allows us to step outside the conventions of our culture, the egocentric, consumer, individualistic model that results in personal despair as well as public deterioration and injustice. I have been calling this waking up 'wild space, a place to stand and to interpret one's culture from the' outside, as it were. This opening allows us to see differently, to imagine other possibilities, to pay attention to others. It is often associated with moments of beauty or suffering, moments that 'take us out of ourselves' and open our eyes to others—something, someone, valuable in itself apart from its utilitarian importance. It is a movement that most religions find to be essential to change, real deep change, change of mind and of behavior. Many call it 'conversion.'"

but all seven of those have also been reinvigorated in their faith as they have learned more about Christian creation care.[621]

Conclusion

These 20 participants not only had diverse and vibrant practices; they also brought rich insight to the lived experience of implementing green spiritual practices of simplicity. In the following chapters, I explore the 23 practices that they discussed in the interviews (Chapter 4) and the themes of spiritual formation and missional participation that emerged from these practices for these participants (Chapter 5). My hope and belief is that there will be at least one practice that resonates with each reader, and that at least one theme serves as a compelling reason to experiment with green spiritual practices of simplicity in our own spiritual lives.

[621] The numbers in this list do not add up to 20 because most participants fell into multiple categories.

CHAPTER 5: PRACTICES

Green Spiritual Practices of Simplicity that Emerged from the Interviews

In the interviews with the 20 people who participated in this study, we discussed many practices that would qualify as green spiritual practices of simplicity. I had a handful of example practices that I mentioned based on my own experiences with creation care and the resources I read for the preceding chapters of this project. However, I thought it was important to remain open-minded to any and all practices that a participant may bring up, expectedly or unexpectedly, as a green spiritual practice of simplicity. Once the participants knew my definition of *green spiritual practice of simplicity*, I let the participants bring up whatever practices in their lives that they believed qualified. By the end, 23 major practices emerged, which I have organized into five major categories—food, clothing, consumption, movement, and presence—and listed in order of most accessible, or easiest to implement, to least accessible, or most difficult to implement, within each section.[622] All of the participants rooted their environmental practices in their faith convictions, namely, their devotion to God and to the ways of Jesus. I explore these connections more explicitly in Chapter 6. This chapter is meant to provide a brief introduction to what the practices are and how the participants described what it looks like to observe them.

[622] For some of the practices that participants mentioned, I have included their ranking in Paul Hawken, ed., *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017). Hawken and his team projected how specific practices would impact carbon dioxide levels over a 30-year period. Higher ranked practices are projected to have a higher impact on climate change. For more information on how the ranking system works, see Hawken, *Drawdown*, 220. Please note that if a practice in this chapter is not ranked, it is because it did not appear in this resource, but that does not mean it is not a helpful or meaningful practice; Hawken and his team used different measures for what practices to include and how to categorize them. Though not necessarily spiritual practices of simplicity, this resource has a long and thorough list of ideas of how we can care for the environment in our daily lives, both as individuals and communities, and would be helpful additional reading.

While analyzing the data, I narrowed practices down to those that met one of three criteria: (1) it was the *primary* practice that at least *one* participant talked about; (2) it was a noteworthy *secondary* practice that at least *two* participants discussed at some length; or (3) it was a *secondary* practice mentioned briefly by at least *three* participants. Primary practices are practices that are a major passion or focus in the life of the participant, while secondary practices are practices that either: (1) have become so natural for the participant that they don't require as much intentionality anymore, or (2) the participant is actively working toward implementing in their life. In this chapter, I introduce the logistical basics of the practices that the participants shared in order to provide context for the actual thematic analysis in the next chapter, which will focus on the spiritual and missional themes that emerged from these practices and link them more explicitly to simplicity and spirituality.

Practices of Green Simple Food

Of the 20 participants, 16 of them mentioned at least one food-related practice as important to their spiritual life. I include it as the first category in this analysis to honor its importance among the participants, and also because of its importance in environmental and theological literature. Through eating: we demonstrate our need for each other and for all creation; we experience the joy of embodied existence; and we participate in resurrection, as something—plant or animal—dies so that our life may be sustained.[623] Though there are many food-related practices that could qualify as a green

[623] Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 84.

spiritual practice of simplicity, the participants of this study focused on reducing food waste, eating vegetarian and vegan, composting, and gardening.[624]

Reducing Food Waste[625]

Two participants focused on reducing food waste as one of their primary green spiritual practices of simplicity. For both participants, reducing food waste entailed being more mindful of what they purchased at the grocery store and what they choose to eat for any given meal to avoid produce or leftovers going bad. One benefit that both of them mentioned is that it is more economical; it helps save money not to throw items they purchased in the garbage, because even small amounts of food waste can really add up.[626] Both also mentioned that reducing food waste sometimes requires self-sacrifice, since it means not always eating what sounds best, but what needs to get eaten first.

Participant 7 focused on not wasting leftovers, since, coming from a large family, she was accustomed to making large meals, and now she will often make too much when she cooks for only herself and her spouse. To be a good steward of resources, including food and time, she said she is intentional about eating up all the leftovers, sometimes

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[624] See Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 124 for more ideas for green spiritual practices of food, such as avoiding processed foods and eating whole foods.

[625] Reducing food waste is the third best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 42-43.

[626] Unlike farmers, people who live in cities rely on garbage trucks to take our trash out of our sight, and it separates us from the damage that wasted food and disposed-of items inflict on the environment: "We are largely ignorant as to where the garbage goes, how much of it there is, what effects it has on the habitats where it is finally deposited, and what consequences for others follow from the overall disposal process. Since our trained focus is on acquisition rather than disposal, we give no thought to the effects of some of our most basic acts. … Knowing the extreme difficulty of truly beneficial waste disposal, agrarians [on the other hand] will want to limit from the start the practices that necessitate waste production, since the production of any waste represents a loss. In the end, we or someone else will be left to live with our mess." See Wirzba, "The Challenge of Berry's Agrarian Vision," xi.

eating the same meal for days, "even when I'm sick of it. … It's important to me to not waste what God has given you."

Participant 5 said that caring about food waste means she does less impulse buying at the grocery store, and she is more careful about making shopping lists of the things she really needs, so that she knows it will get used up rather than going to waste. Besides her individual practices, Participant 5 is involved in the Food Recovery Network, a national nonprofit dedicated to reducing food waste by taking leftover food from restaurants and grocery stores and donating it to people experiencing food insecurity. She expressed being appalled that we waste such a valuable, life-giving resource when others need that same resource to survive: "I learned more about the stats of food insecurity and then also how harmful food waste is for the environment. It's terrible. And the amount of food waste that occurs in America is embarrassing, frankly. There are so many people in need, and yet there are people who" throw things away even if it is just one day past the expiration date. She added that learning and caring about food waste over the last several years "was actually the precursor and the first main effort within the sustainability movement that I got involved with," and it led to her caring about the environment more broadly and to observing several other green spiritual practices in her life.

Eating Vegetarian[627]

Three participants eat vegetarian as a primary green spiritual practice of simplicity. Four mentioned it as a secondary practice, and one talked about reducing beef

[627] Eating a plant-rich diet is the fourth best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 38-40. Vegetarianism is growing in popularity for religious, ethical, and health reasons, as studies increasingly show that "meat-based diets require more land, energy, and water resources than vegetarianism, and both meat production and overfishing have been linked to environmental degradation." See A. Whitney Sanford,

consumption, though he is not strictly vegetarian. According to the participants, being vegetarian is a practice of simplicity primarily because it places boundaries around cooking and eating practices, and it is a refusal to participate in the ethical and logistical complexities of the contemporary meat industry.

Participant 10 said that becoming vegetarian has opened her eyes to the need for other practices of simplicity that are oriented toward caring for the environment, but being vegetarian is the one about which she is most serious and passionate. She chose to become vegetarian when a professor (who is not vegetarian) in a college class asked a passing question about whether Christians should eat meat. She said she decided right then to cut meat products from her diet, cold turkey, and she has stuck to it without any temptation for several years: "I don't really know that I've ever been so matter-of-fact about anything in my life," she said, "but I've never been so happy with a decision. … This is me, and I am happy with the decision that I made, and I do not ever look back." For her, eating vegetarian is rooted in love and compassion for animals, and a desire to embody the peace and harmony of new creation by eliminating violence against animals from her diet.

Participant 2 said something similar about being vegetarian for the last decade: "It started out as an environmental practice, but it's really become a practice of respect for creatures that are put through the industrial food system; [it's] an act of opting out of the industrial food system and factory farming."[628] He added that spiritual practices that

"Vegetarianism," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 409.

[628] Wendell Berry notes that industrial farms for both crops and livestock are "said to have been patterned on the factory production line. In practice, it looks more like a concentration camp." See Wendell Berry,

revolve around food—and for him, specifically cooking and eating a plant-based diet—allow us to "experience God's love made delectable," he said, citing the words of Norman Wirzba.[629] He elaborated by saying: "Cooking good food that tastes good and is good for the world is reveling in the love of God."[630]

Participant 19 said that "as a 90s kid" he ate "the generic American diet" growing up: mostly processed foods. He became vegetarian as an adult, replacing his diet with mostly whole foods. He noticed a significant change in his health as he replaced "Spaghettios and mac and cheese" with fruits and vegetables: The eczema he suffered with throughout childhood cleared up; the stomach aches he had as a kid went away; and his problems with focusing on school that he experienced when he was younger dissipated. "I was completely ignorant as a kid," he said. "I ate just whatever my parents brought home and didn't really have any understanding of where it came from, or who grew it, or what chemicals are put on it, or how it's affecting other people by what we choose to eat." Because of his faith, he supported animal welfare rights, and he was also disturbed that "all the food that goes to feed animals could feed eight billion people."

Participant 11 also talked about being vegetarian as an important practice for him; the rest of his family is vegan. His city in the Midwest is diverse, and he said that as he has built intercultural relationships, he has learned from indigenous people and people of other nationalities that the American expectation to have meat at virtually every meal is

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"The Pleasures of Eating," *Emergence Magazine* (September 30, 2019), https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/the-pleasures-of-eating/.

[629] Norman Wirzba, "Food for Theologians," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 67.4 (2013): 374. For insight on eating as a sacrament, see Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 266.

[630] For a more thorough social and theological commentary on food, see Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating."

abnormal; many cultures have acceptable meat alternatives and eat "effective, sustainable diets without meat." Participant 8 is not vegetarian, but he mentioned that he is "trying to get better about beef," because beef is especially harmful to the environment.[631] He said for those people who would replace chicken and pork proteins with dairy proteins, like milk and cheese, it would actually be better to cut out or reduce beef only, since cattle's emissions of methane contribute more to climate change than the emissions of other livestock.

Eating Vegan

One participant discussed being vegan as their primary green spiritual practice of simplicity; three other participants mentioned it as an aspirational practice that they hope to implement some day. Participant 5, for example, said that she "dabbles in veganism," but from the research she has done, she understands people to have a bigger impact on the environment when they go from a regular diet to vegetarianism, while the gap between being vegetarian and vegan is significantly smaller, so she focuses on eating a vegetarian diet.

Participant 6, however, is devoted to being vegan. She had been vegetarian since before even being a Christian because she "felt guilty about killing animals." As she deepened in her faith, began studying to become a pastor, and became more serious about Christian environmentalism, she became deeply troubled by the complexity and violence of the meat, egg, and dairy industry in the U.S., and ultimately became vegan as a result:

[631] This is true for factory farms and even typical cattle ranching practices across the United States. However, regenerative cattle ranching can actually produce more beef and allow cows to contribute to (rather than detract from) the health of the soil and crops, leading to lower emissions of heat-trapping gasses than if the cows were not part of the farm at all. For an example of regenerative farming, see Kacie Scherler and Zach Abney, "Re:Farm," *Re:Farm Market*, 2022, https://refarm.market/.

> I think a big reason for that for me, in terms of theology and my relationship with God, is thinking about Kingdom theology, thinking about already-not-yet theology. The idea is that, in the Garden of Eden, we lived in harmony with animals, and we're told in Revelation that, at the end, we will live in harmony with animals. So it seems really backwards to me that, in the middle, we would exploit animals and do all these crazy things. I feel like if we were created to live with animals a certain way, and by the end, we will be back to living with them in that way, why wouldn't we try to pull that aspect of the kingdom into our lives now?

She mentioned that it can be hard for her sometimes to be someone with dietary restrictions, but that people don't seem to mind nearly as much as she anticipates they will. (Participant 10, the committed vegetarian in the last section, said inconveniencing others was one barrier to her going completely vegan, even though she cooks mostly vegan when she is preparing food for herself. However, both Participant 6 and Participant 10 mentioned that they have experienced the care and provision of others when they try to accommodate their dietary needs.)

Composting[632]

One participant talked about composting as her primary practice, two mentioned it as a secondary practice, and one participant said it was something they hope to be able to do in the future. Participant 9 said she became especially interested in serious composting when she and her spouse moved to a house with a yard. In their previous home, they had a communal composting mound down the street as well as a neighbor who was passionate about it and introduced them to the importance of composting food scraps. With a little less than an acre at their new home, and access to manure from local farms,

[632] Composting is the 60th best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 62-63.

she said they now have more latitude to do large-scale composting, which has also piqued their interest in starting a garden, so that they can put the compost to good use.

Gardening[633]

Four participants talked about gardening as a primary expression of their spiritual and environmental commitments, three more mentioned gardening as a secondary practice, and two mentioned it as a practice they are actively working toward. The participants said they think of gardening as a practice of simplicity because it requires them to slow down, pay attention to their bodies, and reconnect with the earth.

Participant 19 said that gardening for him started out as a hobby when he moved to a rural area to pastor a church. He learned from his neighbor, who he described as a master gardener: "For him gardening was a big part of his life and part of his faith, a part of how he lived simply in the world." As Participant 19, who was already vegetarian by this point, began to grow more of his own food, he began to realize how factory and corporate farming were making it more difficult for small family farms in the rural Midwest to survive and for everyone to find healthful and wholesome produce.[634] While reading Wendell Berry essays,[635] he began to question:

> What is the point of all this? Is it to do things so efficiently that eventually we just have robots doing things for us, and we're not living in the places we love, in healthy communities that we love? What is the whole point of even growing food? Is it just to maximize our efficiency as much as possible? Or is it to create healthy communities and healthy ecosystems and healthy bodies? I really just

[633] Growing one's own food wasn't specifically mentioned in Hawken, *Drawdown*, but it is connected to reducing food waste, eating a plant-rich diet, composting, and lowering shipping costs and emissions of produce.

[634] For a more extensive analysis of the physical and spiritual dangers of industrial food production and consumption, see Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating."

[635] Wendell Berry, *What Are People For? Essays*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2010).

> started investigating all these things and making all these connections and thinking about how our faith calls us to eat, and how our faith informs all those many choices we make around what we eat and where it comes from.

Participant 11 focused in particular on *watering* his garden as a green spiritual practice of simplicity. His family collects rainwater in barrels and with a bag attached to the end of their gutter, so they do not have to use a hose but still have plenty of water for their garden. For him, watering the garden is "this really nice pause in how I go about my day, because I'd take the time to water the garden, which is no longer a chore, but an opportunity to really pause and engage the Earth itself."[636] His family eats everything they grow, and they hope to someday grow enough that they are able to eat exclusively from their garden. He said that inviting his young children to garden with him, to try food right off the vine, is another practice for him: "getting to observe their wonder. Making space for wonder and awe is not something I'm great at, and my kids are really good at teaching me. And so our gardening practices absolutely make space for that."

Participant 17, the youngest of all the participants in the study, doesn't have his own space to have a garden, but he participates in a local community garden. The community garden is organic and uses drip irrigation to save water. After being neglected and becoming rundown during Covid, he helped to revive and care for it. The whole process, he said, taught him about planting seeds, nurturing soil, avoiding pesticides, eating seasonal crops, sharing the harvest, thinking sustainably about how food gets to

[636] For more on the significance of being connected to the land and experiencing intimacy with food itself, see Wirzba, "The Challenge of Berry's Agrarian Vision," xiii-xiv, xviii. One of the six healthy spiritual practices that Kellye Fabian suggests is digging in the dirt. See Kellye Fabian, *Holy Vulnerability: Spiritual Practices for the Broken, Ashamed, Anxious, and Afraid*, ProQuest eBook (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 2021), 80-86.

our table, “and then reaping the benefits after; seeing how these organic cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce—seeing the fruit of our work was really cool.”

Participant 8 noted that as he has planted his garden, he has intentionally planted some fruit trees that take awhile to grow and produce fruit, because even though he and his family will likely never eat the fruit of those trees, “someone will.” Participant 7 has not yet started her garden, but she said that she and her spouse are starting to plan out how to raise both crops and meat rabbits. She said rabbits are not common in the American diet, but they are a sustainable protein source, relatively easy and ethical to raise, and rabbit manure is a natural fertilizer.

For those who are interested in gardening, but don’t know where to start, Participant 19 said to start small with easy things to grow, like tomatoes, peppers, or cucumbers. Even with just a small balcony or an indoor space near a window, “It’s amazing what you can do.” Try to find local seed libraries that provide seeds and other gardening resources for free, but be warned, he said: “Gardening is kind of addictive. It’s incredible to watch something grow that you planted, especially a tomato. It’s overwhelming how huge they get. You can’t believe it. It started from little seeds, and it’s just like this massive thing, pumping out fruit. I think that’s a gateway drug, I would say, into eating local, is just starting a small garden.”

For those for whom gardening is inaccessible, Participant 19 suggested buying local produce as an alternative. While many people perceive buying local as cost-intensive, he said that in his experience, shopping at a farmer’s market can be comparable to or even less expensive than grocery stores. Big-city farmer’s markets, co-ops, and upscale grocers like Whole Foods can be “elitist,” but Participant 19 suggested several

other alternatives that would be accessible for people on most budgets. Farmer's markets in small towns, and mid-week farmer's markets in big cities, tend to be more affordable than large weekend markets. When produce is in peak season, ask for farmer's "seconds," the produce that is perfectly good but is blemished or deformed in some way. Many states have great programs at farmer's markets for those who qualify for food stamps. For those who are willing to get creative about buying local produce, "there's definitely ways that you can be pretty cheap about it," he said.[637]

Practices of Green Simple Clothing

While clothing practices could be lumped in with consumption practices more broadly, half of the participants specifically named their clothing habits as spiritual practices separate from other goods. Like food, clothing is an essential that we cannot live without, *and* clothing is sometimes used as an unhealthy status symbol.[638] Participants talked about four practices: prioritizing slow fashion, limiting one's wardrobe, mending clothing, and making clothing.

Prioritizing Slow Fashion

There are many ways that prioritizing slow fashion can manifest, but the one focused on among the participants was purchasing clothing secondhand. Two participants described it as a primary practice, and two mentioned it as a secondary practice.

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[637] Still, it is important to note that there are many circumstances that contribute to the accessibility and affordability of fresh food. For those who live in food deserts, even the solutions listed here may not be viable depending on someone's daily schedule and accessibility to transportation. Furthermore, there are other discrepancies of privilege, like knowing how or having the time to cook.

[638] Several of the proponents of voluntary simplicity noted this reality. See, for example, Gregg, *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*, 5; and Alexander, *Just Enough Is Plenty*, 16.

Participant 12 said she is generally interested in green fashion, especially thrifting nearly all of her clothes and wearing clothes until they are completely worn out, rather than constantly replacing her wardrobe with new things. “Clothes, for me, it’s almost like tying a string around my finger. I’m always wearing clothes, so I’m always gonna have this constant reminder of sustainability on me.” For her, thrifting instead of buying new was a simple change because it saved a lot of money, and it has also led to her being interested in mending and making clothes as well.

Participant 17 said he had never been very interested in fashion, let alone flashy and expensive clothing. Inspired by one of his parents who loves thrifting, he enjoys going to thrift shops and giving a second life to used clothes. In general, he said it is important to him to be conscientious about where his clothes come from: “A lot of the labels say, ‘made in China,’ and what does that mean? It brings together issues of wealth and different labor forces, fossil fuels being used, and different sustainable materials that you’re using as well. … I’m trying to be mindful of what it means to have our clothes made in different countries, for the people working for those manufacturers.”

Limiting One’s Wardrobe

Three participants talked about going one step beyond buying clothes secondhand to limiting the size of their wardrobe all together. All three of them were inspired by the company Wool&, whose products are made out of merino wool, which is resilient, grown and harvested sustainably, and is odor- and pilling-resistant.[639] Participant 8 got two shirts from Wool&’s line for men, Wool&Prince,[640] which he has worn almost

[639] “Wool&,” *Wool&*, 2022, https://wooland.com/.

[640] “Wool&Prince,” *Wool&Prince*, 2022, https://woolandprince.com/.

exclusively for several months. He said he loves it because washing, drying, and buying fewer clothes is better for the environment, and clothes made of higher quality, odor-resistant material, like wool, require far less maintenance and cleaning than cheaper, synthetic clothing. A limited wardrobe also incentivizes more intentional, small-scale upkeep, as opposed to washer and dryer use, since it takes longer to get a full load of laundry. He has also been able to declutter his closet, including donating a bulk of his wardrobe to people in need.

Participant 7 said that participating in Wool&'s 100-Day Dress Challenge[641]—in which participants wear the same dress for 100 days straight—made her more conscientious about where her clothing comes from. Since completing the challenge, she said, "I don't change outfits," meaning she wears the same outfit every day until it absolutely needs to be washed. This reduces her water consumption and extends the life of her outfits. Once it is dirty, she will wear another outfit for multiple days in a row. She said she has decided that when items in her current wardrobe wear out, she will replace them by making clothing instead of purchasing it:

> I noticed that the clothing you can buy in your regular stores is *cheaper* than the fabric it takes to make your own clothes. If you go out and buy fabric from Joanne's or wherever, you would pay more than you would for the already-made garment. And that really made me think about the prices of our clothes, both environmentally and from a human rights perspective, in order to get you that garment so cheaply. So both by doing that [Wool& dress] challenge and looking at fabrics, it made me realize that it is not a good thing for us to go out and buy clothing from companies that are not sustainable. God really put that on my heart.

[641] "Wool& 100 Day Challenge," *Wool&*, 2022, https://journal.wooland.com/post/2020/5/1/100-day-dress-challenge?gclid=CjwKCAjw2rmWBhB4EiwAiJ0mtYvASxmjluN4OhjHpYA3JjxQ-Jw0iQdiM44TQTZaV0szxSwDVVESqBoC78QQAvD_BwE.

Participant 3 has had a limited wardrobe for several years now. She has only three black dresses of different styles and weights to wear in different seasons of the year: "I could probably rob a bank, and if I didn't have on my black dress people would be like, 'We have no idea who this was.'" She said she had always wanted to wear a uniform, like Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs, because she hates shopping and had to replace her clothing often as her weight fluctuated. However, she felt like wearing a uniform was off-limits for women and that her clothing had to express who she was and her authority in the workplace. When she came across Wool&'s 100-Day Dress Challenge, she realized that the versatility of a simple black swing dress was exactly what she was looking for, so she decided to try it for 30 days: "At the end of 30 days, I was hooked. I thought, 'I'm never taking this thing off.'" She posted about it after one year of wearing the same dress every day and was shocked to find how few people had noticed:

> Nobody cares as much as I think they care. I thought I had to wear certain things to project something about who I was, and at the end of the day, people are not looking at me that critically for the most part, so it's been really freeing and really liberating. … So I have no plans to stop wearing this dress. It's possible that it will get to the point of not being something that is life-giving anymore. … Just like this dress has taught me that I'm not defined by what I wear, if it gets to the point where I feel like I can't ever branch out or this is becoming my identity, I would think that I would [stop].

Visible Mending

Two participants mentioned mending clothes as a secondary practice. Participant 1, for example, said she has a time set aside each week when she goes through her family's clothing and makes any necessary mends. Participant 12, however, specifically highlighted visible mending, which is the practice of mending damaged clothes in such a way that the mend is intentionally noticeable. Two common examples are patching a hole

with a fabric of a different texture or pattern, or mending a snag with a colorful darning design, like a flower. Participant 12 said that when an expensive pair of leggings ripped and she couldn't afford to buy a new pair, she sewed them instead, and found that it was simple enough to do whenever her clothes were damaged, whether or not she could afford to replace them. Visible mending was at first a necessity because she wasn't a skilled sewer, but then it evolved into a stylistic choice: "It's not really a movement, but a lot of the intentionality behind that is almost evangelical. Someone asks why your pants look like that, And you can say, 'This is why; this is environmentalism.'" For her, this commitment to environmentalism is rooted in her love of God and her commitment to following Jesus.

Making Clothing

Two participants talked about making clothing as a primary practice, one named it as a secondary practice, and one named it as an aspirational practice. For Participant 14, who is particularly interested in lace spinning, making clothes is an essential expression of her faith. For her, making clothes is rooted in her dislike of plastic in textiles, so she would look for clothing made of natural fibers in thrift stores and other secondhand resources. Then she started spinning lace when she was at a craft fair and stumbled into a class that taught spinning. By the end of the lesson, she wanted to keep practicing and found a spinning wheel: "And then I went through a really traumatic period in my life where my first marriage broke down. How I learned to spin was three or four hours crying at the spinning wheel every night, learning in the dark, … learning how to to basically become one with what I was creating. And there was a lot of time in prayer; there was a lot of time in tears." She said spinning lace became a healing experience for

her, because it is a time-consuming art. Right now, she is spinning her wedding dress and loves that she is creating a dress that reflects who she is and that she can pass down as a family heirloom.

Practices of Green Simple Consumption

Humans need to consume to survive.[642] However, the consumption habits that the participants of this study identified as green spiritual practices of simplicity emphasize consuming *only just enough*. Though all of the practices listed in this chapter could technically be qualified as practices of consumption (whether that's consuming fossil fuels and resources, or time and attention), the practices in this section revolve around general postures of how we consume possessions and resources broadly. All 20 of the participants in this study mentioned at least one of these practices as something they try to practice in their life: decluttering, reducing water or energy usage, purchasing less, purchasing better, avoiding disposable items, repairing and repurposing, and going low- or zero-waste.

Decluttering

Two participants mentioned decluttering as a secondary practice, though for many people who become interested in sustainability in adulthood, decluttering is a necessity for letting go of their former way of viewing the world, success, identity, and belongings. For both of these participants, *how* they decluttered was even more important than the act itself. That is, they wanted to be sure their belongings were rehomed or repurposed,

[642] Satinder Dhiman, "The Case for Eco-Spirituality: Everybody Can Do Something," *Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches*, eds. Joan Marques and Satinder Dhiman (New York City: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 5 says it this way: "We are all born as consumers, true to our self-preservation instinct."

rather than ending up in the landfill. Participant 7 said she didn't notice how much she had accumulated until she and her spouse moved to a new address, and she realized: "I have disrespected the things that God has given me with how many things were boxed up when they moved us to our new house, and most of the things, I didn't even know what they were. I was not honoring what God had given me." She intentionally went through her belongings and made sure they ended up in the hands of people who needed them. Participant 11 said that he and his family have a monthly practice of giving things away. Every month for more than two years, they donate belongings they no longer need to Goodwill or other places who will rehome them: "We don't buy that much stuff, but there's *just always stuff*. We've found that the more we get rid of, the more things we realize we have, … [and] the more we can be really clear about the things we do have that we like."

Replacing Disposables with Reusables

Replacing disposable items (like styrofoam cups, paper plates, and plastic utensils) with reusable alternatives is one of the most basic green spiritual practices of simplicity. None of the participants focused on it as a primary practice, and for some, it had become so second nature, it did not even register as a practice for them at all. Five participants noted specific reusables that are important to them. Participant 9 said that trying not to buy or use plastic naturally led to using reusables instead of disposables. Besides the basic disposables that she avoids, she said she also replaced dryer sheets with wool balls, both for environmental reasons and because of the toxins and chemicals in typical dryer sheets. Participant 4 noted that many people think of bringing a reusable mug for coffee, for example, but often forget to consider takeout containers. As someone

who rarely finishes her entree at a restaurant, she tries to always remember to bring a Tupperware container with her when she goes out to eat so that she does not have to choose between accepting a disposable container or wasting the leftover food.

Participant 1 and Participant 14 highlighted bringing reusable utensils and dishware with them to work. Participant 1 said using silverware in the break room or at her desk has started conversations with coworkers about why she takes the time to carry reusables instead of just using the disposables that are provided at their workplace. Participant 14 said that not only does she feel good about practicing sustainability in this small way every day, but she feels more tenderness toward the items that she brings with her to work: "my pink teacup is … my item to take care of," she said. Participant 20 said he and his spouse love their reusable water bottles and don't understand why people would spend money on plastic disposable water bottles. They also use reusable straws, and they mostly use reusable rags over paper towels.

Reducing Water[643] and Energy Usage

Participant 18 focused on "capturing water" as her primary green spiritual practice of simplicity. When she rinses off vegetables, cleans the fish tank, or heats up water in the sink or shower, she captures the water that would otherwise go down the drain and uses it to water her plants. She started the practice after a lesson at church camp about how people in lower-income countries sometimes have to walk extensive distances to get water. She said ever since then, she has tried to waste as little water as possible, knowing what a precious resource it is. Though it takes some extra work, she said it is a

[643] Water saving at home is the 46th best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 170-171.

surprisingly simple practice, and it means she never has to use the faucet only to water plants. She said not only does that save her money, but it also keeps her mindful of the drought that her region of the West coast is experiencing.

Participant 11 said that he and his family installed solar panels to reduce the footprint of their home by 80 percent. They also decided last year not to go on vacation, and instead purchase e-bikes, which saves energy by not flying and by reducing the use of their car. He acknowledged that both a solar panel and an e-bike are huge investments for some people, and though they have long-term benefits, the ability to make those purchasing decisions "come from a place of economic privilege, where we're not having to choose between two necessities versus this." He added that he wants to contribute to the market in such a way that it incentivizes an increase in production of energy-efficient items, so that they can become more accessible to more people:

> I am anticipating as things like energy resources become more scarce due to things like war, part of my interest in the solar panels is that our energy company has the right to raise rates whenever they want—most energy companies do. … So as those prices get raised, my neighbors who are already struggling under the gentrification of our neighborhood, who have struggled to pay their property taxes, can't pay their electric bill, and then they're displaced. … We can use some of our money to pay folks' property taxes without them knowing, because it's public information, so we can just submit a payment for that to keep people in the neighborhood that otherwise would have to leave, as rising food and energy costs coming from environmental impacts start to hit, our hope, our bet is that the privileges we carry can help reduce the impact of some of those rises.

Purchasing Less

On the front end of decluttering is simply allowing fewer items to come into our space.[644] Five participants talked about shopping less as a secondary practice for them.

[644] Several of the resources in my review of the literature talked about the virtue and practice of frugality. Though none of the participants specifically used the language of frugality, Jan Johnson's description of frugality reflects the essence of what the participants were getting at. See Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*,

Participant 16 named it minimalism, but not in the trendy sense. She described a more practical and flexible minimalism that fits the needs and lifestyles of each individual, while still being mindful about what we consume, how much, and how often. Participant 11 specifically talked about limiting the purchase of toys for his kids: "When we go to a store, there's not even a conversation of visiting the toy aisle. Not because I'm some militant anti-toy, anti-fun person, but we try to create a narrative of enoughness at home by not making an expectation of buying things." Participant 9 said that moving from California to Alaska allowed her and her spouse to reevaluate what they really need: "Just because we want something doesn't mean we need it, doesn't mean we need to buy it." She described herself as "still consumeristic" but actively working on asking herself questions before she buys things. When she does have to buy things, she focuses on buying something that will last and is locally made.

Participant 8 called his practice of purchasing less "delayed gratification." For example:

> I've been wanting a new pair of shoes for about four months now. I have money; [my spouse and I] both have decent, well-paying jobs. I can easily spend 150 bucks on a new pair of shoes for work. But why do I have to have it now? I can wait until Christmas, or wait until the next Christmas. That's something that's very countercultural in our Amazon-Prime, Netflix-streaming, you-can-access-anything-immediately [culture]. I think it's important to delay that gratification, to say, "I want this thing, or even maybe I need this thing, but I don't, like, *need it*, need it." I can wait, and if I still want it in a year, then I might get it, but maybe I'm like, "Oh, well, I can do without that thing."

75-98. To practice frugality is to "refrain from owning things we don't need or using money or goods to gratify a hunger for status, glamor or luxury" (75). Frugality becomes a green spiritual practice when it is practiced outside the bounds of financial necessity and is, instead, a self-imposed limit based on the person's principles and convictions. When it is rooted in the Christian faith, frugality is characterized by fruitfulness, joy, justice, generosity, and abundance, not somber or anxious stinginess. Instead of asking, "Can I afford this?" frugality asks "How might I benefit others?" (89). Instead of asking, "How can I raise my standard of *living*?" frugality asks "How can I raise my standard of *loving*?" (98). To appreciate and enjoy the *plenty* we have, we must refrain from the type of excessive, soul-corrupting self-indulgence that leads to our belongings owning us.

He said for him, a big factor in limiting purchasing is the emissions that come from producing and shipping any given item.

For Participant 1, "consuming less," as she called it, is her primary green spiritual practice of simplicity. She talked about how her life took a turn for the greener when she saw the "True Cost" documentary that exposed the suffering at the root of the fashion industry.[645] Researching her clothing choices more thoroughly ultimately led her to researching everything she purchased more thoroughly: "I've stopped buying anything, pretty much, retail. I switched to thrift stores, and then from there, I realized spending too much time buying stuff at thrift stores was still a lot of wasted time. So consuming less started there." As a parent of two young children, shopping less has financial benefits, but even as her disposable income has increased, she has remained committed to consuming less. She said her extended family has a hard time understanding why she would refrain from buying something unless she absolutely needs it. Even for her, she said the shift hasn't been easy. Growing up, her parents often took her shopping as a form of entertainment, so with her own children, she has to intentionally seek out free experiences, like going to parks, libraries, and free local events, rather than shopping. She said that her local Buy Nothing group has been an important part of helping her consume less.[646] Though it is a rare occurrence, she said that when she does have to purchase something new for some reason, she researches it to make sure it is ethically (and preferably locally) made.

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[645] Andrew Morgan, dir., *The True Cost*, Untold Creative and Life Is My Movie Entertainment (2015), 1h 32m.

[646] Participant 14 and Participant 16 also mentioned their local Buy Nothing group as an important part of their green spiritual practices of simplicity in other contexts.

Purchasing Better

Five participants discussed ethical and intentional purchasing as a primary expression of their spiritual and environmental commitments.[647] Like Participant 1, Participant 16 also purchases mostly from her local Buy Nothing group, "which is the best invention ever." However, when something needs to be purchased, she makes sure the company she buys from doesn't use slave labor. One example she offered of her specific purchasing habits were shoes: "I try to get leather shoes, which I know a lot of people who are eco-friendly don't do leather, [but] that blows my mind. A lot of these animals have already died. If you keep leather well, yes, it's a pain, but it will last me forever. When one of the soles of the shoes break, I take it to a cobbler, and they actually re-sole the shoe, and it costs me like $15."

Participant 11 said that he doesn't "want to continue to invest in things or purchase things that are going to leave a detrimental impact across the globe, and some of that's hard to do." For example, merely owning a cell phone means participating in the unjust extraction of goods from another country where workers are not compensated fairly, if at all. To purchase equitably created clothing is, for most people, an impossibility because of the high costs. While, he said, "there is a way to purchase and source things that are much more holistic and fair," he also acknowledged that "globalization makes this really hard, and I think one of the ways to bridge that is to be, what a pastor friend of mine calls, *hyperlocal*." Living in a dense city, he is able to purchase things that are made and sold locally, like candles, books, clothes, food, and

[647] For more practices that revolve around intentional spending—of both money and time—see Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 118-125.

coffee: “Stuff is made here. So there isn’t the ecological impact of getting it shipped to our house. I could literally ride my bike and get most of our stuff. That’s huge.” His context has allowed his family to reduce their use of Amazon, though he said they haven’t eliminated it completely.

When Participant 5 moved to a new apartment in a big city, she decided to furnish it completely secondhand via Facebook Marketplace. While it started as a budgetary constraint, it evolved into a commitment to keep new things out of circulation while giving a new home to items that still have a lot of life and usefulness in them. While it required more patience, she said it was also more rewarding, and she has a deeper love and appreciation for the items she picked: “I think the positive feelings are higher than when you buy something new, and you get the box, and you have to unbox everything, and everything’s triple boxed, and you have to throw all the bajillions of packaging downstairs in the recycling and garbage. I think you feel much more accomplished and satisfied when you get it secondhand.”

Participant 8 described himself as a “cheapskate” (“my wife calls me Mr. Krabs,” he said), but it is rooted in his commitment to ethical purchases. He said his family knows that to give him a gift that he would really appreciate, it has to be secondhand, from somewhere like Facebook Marketplace or Craigslist, so that it is being rehomed or recycled. Participant 18 said that for Lent a couple years ago, she decided to give up single-use plastic, and, “It was eye-opening. Oh my gosh. I had no idea how much plastic I used. [My spouse] and I were both shocked. It was so hard; it was impossible to do it. But we learned a ton.” Ever since, she has changed her purchasing habits so that items

have as little packaging as possible. For example, they only buy “loose-leaf” produce, meaning it doesn’t come in plastic packaging.

Repairing, Refurbishing, and Repurposing

Five participants mentioned repairing and repurposing—rather than replacing—items as a secondary green spiritual practice of simplicity. Participant 8 said that when his family decided to raise chickens, he built a chicken coop from 100 percent upcycled material that he got from a construction site, except for the hardware. After the last election cycle, he found a yard sign promoting a candidate in the garbage. He took it home and combined it with the old chain link fence that he and his spouse had torn down and replaced with a picket fence. He put the old sign and the old fence together to make a trellis: “In the Bible, it talks about turning swords into plowshares; I turned trash into trellises,” he said.

Participant 4 said she doesn’t have many skills for repairing and building things, and she said the key is being connected to a community: “I don’t have these skills. And so a lot of it is seeking out and having kind people offer to share skills and practices that I don’t already have.” She said she is intentional about her bigger purchases, and how they contribute to what is in circulation. For example, she bought a refurbished iPhone 5, instead of the latest and best new iPhone model. She has also intentionally decided to stick with her old Toyota Corolla—even though it’s full gas—instead of buying an electric car, because she believes using it up is “probably better than manufacturing something new when the old thing works.”

Participant 1, who said she is pretty skilled at mending clothing, said her spouse’s primary green practice—even though he doesn’t consider himself an environmentalist—

is to mend broken and thrown-out appliances, like lawn mowers and weed eaters, and then use them or sell them: "There's an environmental impact on the front end of consumption," she said, "but there's also an environmental impact on the back end of consumption, and stuff ending up in the landfill. We've got this ingrained obsolescence in our society that it's cheaper to buy something new than it is to fix it." Similarly, Participant 14 said that while her fiance isn't as familiar with green spiritual practices, he is committed to refurbishing electronics, like computers.

Participant 16 said that she primarily tries to repurpose items through her art. As an artist who does a lot of mixed media *and* is committed to being zero-waste, she often foregoes traditional art supplies in favor of making her own inks and pigments and foraging for items that she can use to make her art and to be in her art:

> When I find a feather, I am like, "Oh, I can turn this into an earring." When I find a bone, I look at it, and I'm like, "I can carve the tip of this and actually make some kind of pen." Once I found a little bit of deer hair, and I took it home and sanitized it and started making paint brushes [with it]. I'm not good enough at foraging yet to feel competent about it, but I'm learning. I used to walk around outside, and I was *doing something*. And now I walk around outside, and I feel like *I'm a part of it*. I notice everything.

Going Low- or Zero-Waste

One participant mentioned being low-waste as a secondary practice, and one focused on being zero-waste as their primary practice. Four other participants mentioned using less plastic as something they try to do regularly, but don't go out of their way for all the time.

Participant 16 said she is mostly zero-waste; sometimes she has to settle for being low-waste, and she makes only rare exceptions for using plastic, like when she is prescribed medication (though even then she saves up the bottles and sends them to an

organization where she knows they'll be reused or properly recycled). For her, being zero-waste is at the center of all her green spiritual practices of simplicity, because it requires sacrificing other things. For example, being zero-waste with groceries means eating less meat, because it is rare to find meat that is packaged plastic-free, which leads to a more plant-rich diet. She said she hopes to someday live in an off-grid bus or tiny house, like she did a few years ago, because it is even more difficult to create trash and it is easier to be mindful about what she consumes: Living off grid, "it was so much easier to be conscious when you had to be. It forced me out of my comfort zone, it forced me to learn things, … [to] simplify my life to the point where I had the freedom to go where I was needed and do whatever God asked me to do." Though she is not fully zero-waste, she said her dream is to live and make art without producing any waste at all.

Participant 14 described her lifestyle as low-waste. It started as a financial necessity after her marriage ended abruptly and she needed to survive. She said she shied away from practices of simplicity—like buying secondhand and using things up rather than buying the newest and greatest thing as soon as it was available—because in Western culture, those practices are undesirable, weird, and awkward; they are sometimes associated with poverty and a low social status. She said, "It took me about two and a half years, almost, to go from a really consuming lifestyle, to that zero-waste mindset of: What can I do without? What can I change? … Now I do it because it's fun, and it's become a way of life, and it's like, what can I do next?"

Practices of Green Simple Movement

How we get to work and school, or travel to visit friends and family, or vacation to experience the diversity of God's creation, has immense opportunities for increased

simplicity that cares for and is mindful toward the earth.[648] Four participants talked about movement as a primary green spiritual practice of simplicity, and for three of them, how they travel is an essential expression of their spiritual and environmental commitments. Two people mentioned travel practices secondarily (including flying less often, which is not highlighted as one of the practices in this section, since it was too brief), and four more mentioned aspirational practices of movement, like switching to an electric vehicle or using public transportation more often.

Driving Slowly

Participant 8 said driving slowly recently became a primary practice for him. He said he started driving at 60 miles per hour in the slow lane on the highway (he lives in a place where the speed limit is typically 70 or 75). At first, he wanted to save gas, as gas prices rose across the country after Russia attacked Ukraine. Then, he said, he "sat with the spiritual nature of it," and found himself noticing more about his city, becoming more patient, and worrying less about productivity or being late, all while lowering his carbon emissions, even in a small way.

Carpooling[649]

Two participants talked about being a one-car family as a primary spiritual practice. Participant 20 said he and his spouse started carpooling because they had to sell one of their cars. While they were saving up to purchase another car, they carpooled to their shared workplace and found that a second car wasn't essential. He said he is grateful

[648] For more practices related to the simplicity of travel, see Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 125.

[649] Ridesharing is the 75th best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 144-145.

to be able to carpool for logistical and environmental reasons, but also, it has been a relational blessing to have more quality time together while driving to and from work. When their car is in the shop, or if they need to be in different places at different times, carpooling has been an opportunity to "lean on our friends," he said, which has taught them about the importance and interdependence of a community.

Participant 6 said that after a cross-country move, she and her spouse decided to sell one of their cars and only own one. When necessary, they carpool, walk, or take public transportation instead. While she said it has been an easy transition, others "think it's crazy if you don't have a car for every member of your family. We're witnessing that it's possible, and it's totally fine."

Biking[650]

Participant 2 talked about biking, both for commuting and recreation, as a primary spiritual practice. He acknowledged that he is able to ride his bike because he is able-bodied, and that of all his green spiritual practices, bike riding may be the least accessible for some people, depending on their situation, or he may have to give it up at some point in his life, if his circumstances or abilities change. For now, though, he emphasized, bike riding "is such a beautiful form of transportation. … there's such a joy that comes with it for me that I really feel connected with God when I'm on my bike. It's like godly play. It's playful, and it's joyous, and it's a way for me to revel in God's creation." He said when he was in school, he commuted to class every day. After he and his spouse moved

[650] Systemically, making biking more accessible is important: Bike infrastructure is the 59th best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 88-89. Electric bikes are the 69th best practice in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 146-147.

further from campus, his ride increased in length, "so there really was a sacrifice there" to continue biking. Now that he works remotely full-time, he still rides his bike recreationally and to run errands. When he mountain bikes on forest trails, he said he is able to experience plants and animals he wouldn't otherwise encounter, like snakes, turtles, and deer, "all kinds of creatures that make themselves present to me in my bike riding." As someone who works in the field of sustainability, he said bike riding also helps him be a stronger advocate for equitable transit, better public transportation, and more bike infrastructure. "I am invested in it personally," he said, "and I have personally experienced the transformation that can come through that, so that's really important for me."

Commuting by Foot[651]

Participant 4 said walking to work has been one of her most important green spiritual practices of simplicity. She acknowledged that not everyone is fortunate enough to live near where they work, like she does. Every day, she walks half a mile to work and back, snow or shine, freezing or hot, and everything in between:

> I get to experience the seasons more, and I get to truly know what it's like outside every day. … You get to experience the leaves changing. It's fun to see the progression of the flowers that come in, hearing the birds come back in the spring that weren't there in the winter. And it gives me space to be more rooted and grounded, just to process the day ahead, or the day that just passed, and have that mental transition space between home and work. … I can go home and be a whole person and not just that worker bee.

She said she used to walk and take the bus to her first internship when she was in high school and living with her grandparents in a rural area. She said she would come up with

[651] Systemically, creating walkable cities is the 54th best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 86-87.

songs for the plants, birds, and other creatures, and now, she said she feels deeply connected to nature, and nature helps her feel connected to different memories, people, and experiences throughout her life. Ever since, she has prioritized looking for housing as close to her workplace as possible, so that she always has the option to walk instead of drive.

Practices of Green Simple Presence

In some ways, the practices in this section are "miscellaneous," but all three of them describe ways of being in the world that draw our attention to God-With-Us in the present moment. The three green spiritual practices of simple presence that emerged from eight of the participants are grounding, finding sanctuary spaces, and choosing not to biologically reproduce.

Grounding

Participant 9 and Participant 12 talked about grounding as one of their secondary spiritual practices. Grounding, also known as *earthing*, is the practice of regularly touching our bare skin to natural parts of the land, like dirt, rocks, grass, or other plants. Participant 19 didn't specifically name grounding, but as he talked about his practice of gardening, he said that physically working with the soil on a daily basis has been healing for him. He referenced studies that show that touching earth releases hormones that work like antidepressants,[652] and both his physical and mental health has improved from regularly being in direct contact with the land. Participant 9 said she recently learned

[652] For example, see Chevalier, et. al., "Earthing," 1-8. Several Christian mystics—like St. Margaret, St. Peter, and St. Francis—walked barefoot to show solidarity with the poor, to commune with God through the rocks, flowers, and bees, and to remind them of their place in the world. See Cron, *Chasing Francis*, 77, 152, 224.

grounding from an indigenous colleague, who prompted her to start researching the benefits of letting our skin touch soil. For her, grounding allows her to still her mind and remove the many distractions of daily life so that she is better able to focus on God. “It seems so simple to me, but it really affects and helps me,” she said.

Participant 12 said that, for her, grounding is a flexible meditative practice: “I’m usually really bad at meditation, but for some reason, this has really worked for me and allows me to calm my mind and really listen to God.” She said she grew up in a beach community where being barefoot was common, but she didn’t learn about grounding or intentionally start doing it as a spiritual practice until she was in college. Now, she usually walks barefoot in grass or sand, though she knows of other people who ground by laying on their lawn or touching their palms to the earth. She said grounding has allowed her to slow down and be more aware of the world around her and “how my choices impact that world. … It’s also reinforced my connection to the earth, not just as the place where I happen to live, but as a gift from God worth loving and protecting.” She said the connection she experiences while grounding encourages her “to maintain my current green practices and look for new ones that are feasible for my life.”

Seeking and Cultivating Sanctuary Spaces

Though the specific term, “sanctuary spaces” was only used by Participant 13 as she described her primary green spiritual practice of simplicity, I found it was an apt description for the spaces people seek and create where they can feel close to God through being in nature. Participant 11 said he and his family have made a regular habit of seeking out green spaces, like the garden in their yard or their neighborhood park. As people who live in a city, he said finding pockets of nature is a way to disconnect from

busyness and work and to get away from urban density. He said pocket parks have become a gift for his family, because they are designed in such a way that people can feel surrounded by nature, even when buildings and crowds aren't very far away. While he spent a lot of time outside as a child, it "was always because there was a task to be completed, and now the ability to be outside and just sit and rest in what is here and what is good" has been "life-giving" for him. He added that these spaces have become "sacred."

Participant 17 said surfing is an important spiritual practice for him. When he surfs with others, they have deep conversations together about life and faith, because "you're sitting in the ocean; you're sitting in the midst of God's glory," surrounded by different wildlife like dolphins, whales, and seals. When he surfs alone, he said the quiet allows him to reflect deeply about his own life and faith: "There is something very therapeutic to me; maybe that's why I like it so much, because I keep going back. It's been really good for me … to have a place where I could go to get away from it [all], or maybe get away from it with someone else, and have that time to be together." He said surfing allows him to disconnect from technology, since it's impossible to bring it out there with you, and to connect with God through the ocean. He said surfing has heightened his awareness of how climate change affects the ocean, like acidification, pollution, microplastics, and the endangerment and extinction of marine species: "Seeing something that I love so much, having this immense harm [being done] to it, and the effects that the ocean can have on people [and] on land … is really huge." As a result, he said he is majoring in sustainability in college.

Participant 13 goes one step beyond *seeking* sanctuary spaces; her primary green spiritual practice of simplicity is to create them: "These sanctuary spaces are where human community and animal and plant community can be at peace with each other. … They have space there; they have safety there. It's a harbor for them." She said that after studying biodiversity and gaining experience in ministry, she wanted to create natural spaces in urban environments where people could learn about and experience a diversity of native plants, insects, and animals and how they interact with each other in ecosystems. She began to call them *sanctuary spaces* because she wanted them to remind people of sanctuary cities that provide shelter for refugees and immigrants—those who are otherwise forgotten or neglected. "Who or what needs safety within our city limits?" she asked herself, and she began working on spaces on her church's property that would serve as "warm and welcoming" sanctuaries for all creation.

First, after discovering research on the positive effects of community gardens on emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and academic health, she built a community garden to provide produce to college students and people in need: "The garden is meant to be given away. It's meant for other people to come in and to use it and to experience it." Anyone in the congregation or in the community is welcome to come work in the garden, and she said she is always surprised by the rich conversations that happen while people are working with their hands in the garden. Second, she built a pollinator garden after a local botanical garden offered to donate native plants that feed bees and other pollinators. She chose to renovate a neglected sitting area that, before the garden, was used only by people who are experiencing homelessness:

> How do we tell the unhoused population, "We see where you're sitting, too, and we care about where you are sitting"? "As a church community, we want to make

> your space around you beautiful." And so we put the pollinator garden there. … Our homeless friends still sit there and hang out. … For me that is a win for the pollinator garden: a place that had been neglected, and our homeless population saw it as a valuable place to sit. That taught me a lot about, wow, here in the desert, shade is so valuable. Safety is so valuable. Privacy [is so valuable]. That location had all those things there, but I had never really noticed it, until I started looking. … The pollinator garden values the space. It says, "We see it, too. And we value it as well. And we value those who sit here."

Third and finally, she repurposed an empty dirt parking lot into a desert habitat (the native ecosystem where she lives), complete with a labyrinth, a walking path, and biodiverse plants that engage all five senses and attract various native insects, birds, and wildlife. She said she takes school kids there to let them smell the flowers, (safely) touch the cacti, and listen to the birds: "We actually learn that creation is living."

She said that these spaces she has cultivated are still new and growing, "but it's been cool to see it become a sanctuary, become a safe space for people; to be in a different environment and be far enough away that you can't be easily found, which I think is really important." She said that these spaces have also inspired her to make her home into a sanctuary space, too, a space that is hospitable, peaceful, safe, and fun for guests and for herself. A key part of that is including house plants, she said: "I think [plants are] a way of really creating a community within my home, of all these little plants that are living there, and little seedlings that are being raised so that they can go outside, and sometimes other people's plants [that they ask me to care for]. … So my home is one place where I want to practice this idea [of sanctuary spaces]."

Fostering and Adopting Instead of Reproducing[653]

For Participant 15, choosing not to have biological children is her primary green spiritual practice of simplicity. Instead, she and her spouse foster and adopt children. She said she chose not to reproduce when she met her current spouse, who had two adopted children and one foster child with his previous partner. She said she was already open to parenting children who were not biologically hers instead of reproducing, and then when she met her spouse, "it was part of the package." Since both of them came from a Mennonite background, which values simplicity, they intentionally explored whether they wanted to continue the commitment to not reproduce as an expression of their faith and principles:

> The more we think about it, the more we recognize that it really is the cornerstone to our worldview and our understanding of who we are as individuals and how we parent other individuals who aren't a DNA replica of us. There's a lot of ego that I think is very tempting for biological parents to think of their kids as a project, [which] sometimes can interfere with seeing your child as an individual who has their own spirituality and their own life to live and worldview. I think it's very helpful sometimes to recognize that our adopted children have their own life stories and their own heritage, and we get to share in life together and, hopefully, inform some of the future perspectives and choices that they'll make, but still have a little bit of that separation.

She said that going through the foster system was helpful, because her state prepares parents well to care for kids who have experienced trauma and to understand how parenting foster children differs from "conventional parenting." She said it's not

[653] Family planning is the seventh best practice for lowering emissions in Hawken, *Drawdown*, 78-79, since each person who is born will emit carbon throughout their lifetime. Birthrates are in steady decline in the U.S., like in other industrialized countries, but a survey conducted in 2021 revealed that reasons are diverse, including financial and medical reasons, as well as personal preference. Of the adults surveyed who have no children, 5 percent cited environmental concerns as the primary reason. See Anna Brown, "Growing Share of Childless Adults in U.S. Don't Expect to Ever Have Children," *Pew Research Center* (November 19, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/19/growing-share-of-childless-adults-in-u-s-dont-expect-to-ever-have-children/.

glamorous, but it is eye-opening: They have experienced systemic inequalities firsthand, since their children are Hispanic while she and her spouse are White; they have also experienced the tension "among Christian circles" between wanting the typical American-dream lifestyle—"that middle class, two-and-a-half kids, white picket fence"—and, at the same time, wanting to "live among the poor and be implicated, like Jesus was." Either way, she said, "it's complicated and it's difficult work."

Conclusion

These 23 green spiritual practices of simplicity that the participants described were not only diverse in their logistics and impacts; they also pointed to the wide range of ways that the ordinary, mundane facets of life help the participants integrate their passion for the environment with their devotion to God. These practices also indicate that there does not need to be one correct formula to live an environmentally conscious life that honors God. Life stage, lifestyle, and personality can all influence what practice(s) a person chooses to implement. In the next chapter, I explore in more depth how the participants connected their practices to their faith commitments.

CHAPTER 6: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Spiritual and Missional Themes that Emerged from the Interviews

From these green spiritual practices of simple food, clothing, consumption, movement and presence, the following themes of spiritual formation and missional participation emerged, along with some guiding principles for implementing and observing green spiritual practices of simplicity. Each of the major themes highlighted here was common among multiple practices and at least 25 percent of the 20 participants in this study. I also highlighted a handful of particularly interesting secondary themes as long as they were substantively addressed by at least two participants.

Themes of Spiritual Formation

The following themes emerged from the participants as they reflected on their own spiritual formation through their observance of their green spiritual practices of simplicity. Spiritual formation is the process of being shaped into Christlikeness, in obedience to God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we are empowered to proclaim and embody the kingdom of God in all facets of our lives.[654] As participants discussed how their practices have formed them spiritually, it was revealed that their practices have helped them simplify their concentration, commitments, character, and connections.

[654] See, for example, Bennett, *Practices of Love*, 21.

Simplicity of Concentration: Devoting Our Lives to God

Three-fourths of the participants—15 of them—connected their green spiritual practices of simplicity to an increased sense of devotion and attention to God. When discussing her practice of cultivating "practices of simplicity that draw my focus and attention to God," Participant 3 put it succinctly:

> I am able to say, "I am not going to spend money on this, therefore, I have margin to be able to share with others." Or, "I'm not going to make a decision about this, therefore, I have margin in my brain to pray or connect with God in different ways." … I am interested in simplicity as a way of life, and some of that is so that there is more margin for connection with God.

Participant 9, Participant 13, and Participant 11 talked about how specifically being out in nature—whether that's composting, gardening, or being in green spaces—helps them feel more connected to God, with fewer distractions, and more openness to the subtle movements of the Spirit in creation. Participant 11 elaborated, "I'm not trying to find this tree to speak to me in the hopes that it's God, but I'm watching the birds do this thing that I've never seen them do, and it's incredible—this is God at work. That type of shift is huge."

Nine participants specifically focused on how their practice has increased their mindfulness and intentionality, which emerged as two sides of the same coin: As participants became more mindful and aware of their thoughts and actions in the present, they became more intentional and proactive about their thoughts and actions in the future, and vice versa.[655] For example, Participant 5 said that as she has become more mindful

[655] As Wendell Berry notes, "Mindfulness does not come naturally in American culture." For more on cultural mindfulness, see Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 3. In addition, Jan Johnson argues that intentionality is key for implementing simplicity, rather than simplicity resulting in increased intentionality. See Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 39-40. This suggests that simplicity, intentionality, and mindfulness are more circular in their give and take, rather than linear. For more on intentionality, see Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 41-46.

about food waste, she has become more intentional about the ways she purchases and consumes food: “I think one of the themes of all green spiritual practices is the intentionality that it requires,” she said, “and almost always also a bit more patience or mindfulness in association with it. And that is very countercultural to our current society but also can be really refreshing.” Participant 18 and Participant 10 commented that this mindfulness is not burdensome, but rather, whenever we pay close attention to something, the *meaning* of that thing increases, and it ultimately enriches our lives as a whole. Participant 11 said simplicity was an essential foundation for mindfulness. For him, authentic mindfulness (which he distinguished from “trendy” mindfulness) would not be possible without intentional practices of simplicity.

As participants’ mindfulness and intentionality increased, they said they were better able to bring God into every facet of their thoughts and actions. Participant 14 said that as she concentrates on making clothes, everything else “just melts away” until all that’s left is praise and prayer to God. Participant 11 said that as he becomes mindful of God’s presence, he learns to pay attention to stillness and peace, not to “the most loud thing, the most urgent-*sounding*, … the angriest thing in a space.” Five participants specifically said their practices have expanded their imaginations for how they can interact with God in every facet of life. Our relationship with and reflection of God, for better or worse, can be found in every thought and action, not just in stereotypically “religious” things. In other words, they have learned that the sacred-secular divide is an illusion; God is in all things. This is what three participants said about it:

> Participant 9: [I'm] learning about consumerism—not necessarily everything I buy—but really, whatever I focus on distracts from God, but it also shapes who I am, and in turn, the people you surround yourself with.[656]

> Participant 16: I really hope that Christians as a whole start to see their relationship with God as something to practice every day, in everything that they do, beyond the capacity that we've currently accepted it. When we're like, "We have to love God in everything that we do and see him in everything that we do," we just understand it as, "I just have to be kind. I have to be patient." And that's part of it, but it's so much more.

> Participant 12: Every choice is an impact on the world, and every choice has come back to my relationship with God, but recognizing that it goes both ways. With my choices, I can choose to be nearer to God, and I can choose to remind myself of God, and I feel like I felt God a lot nearer since I've started this. It used to be I would go to church, or I would go home and read my Bible, or I would stop and pray, and those are moments with God. And now every time I get dressed, that is me interacting with God's presence on Earth. Every time I sit down and sew holes—or even *getting holes in my clothes* is now an opportunity to interact with God. Because now I get to make that choice to honor God's creation just through 10 minutes of patching up a hole. [I'm] recognizing that God is with me in all moments, not just the religious moments. … Every choice now is an expression of my faith.[657]

Three participants mentioned that their green spiritual practices of simplicity have shown them the need to slow down in all areas of life. Participant 4 said that choosing to walk to work helps her slow down, notice small details that she would otherwise miss if she was rushing, and appreciate and interact with God's creation regularly. Participant 12 said, for her, "slowing down a lot" is a transformation she has experienced since implementing her simple clothing practices. By stepping off the "hamster wheel" of consumerism, she makes decisions more slowly, which means she is able to think before she acts about "how I honor God and how I honor my fellow human." Participant 2 said,

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[656] For a deeper exploration on the concept of attention that the participant references here, see Yamasaki, *Sacred Pauses*, 87.

[657] For a more thorough resource that explores clothing as a practice of faith, see Lauren F. Winner, *Wearing God: Clothing, Laughter, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 31-62.

for him, slowing down is a "growing edge" that he has noticed: "There's a humility that I do not have that it requires to slow down and recognize that God is working, and others are working." He said that as he becomes more aware that the world does not rely on him alone to keep spinning, he is better able to slow down, and stop completely, to rest in God's presence and power.

Simplicity of Commitments: Resisting the Temptations of the Empire

When people hear *practices of simplicity*, passivity or laziness might come to their minds. However, in reality, as Participant 16 put it, "It's a very rebellious lifestyle. It goes against everything you've ever been taught."[658] As participants honed their devotion to God, nine of them also expressed how their green spiritual practices of simplicity have helped them see and resist the ways of the empire,[659] including temptations like idolatrous preoccupations and egotistical self-indulgence.[660]

Five participants critiqued consumerism as a part of our idolatry of wealth and status, and said that their practices of simplicity have made them more conscientious of their own consumerism so that they can resist it. They said mindfulness and refocusing

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[658] Philip Goodchild notes that, especially in Western communities, it is more passive and lazier to go along with the status quo in order to maintain a privileged position. See Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xv.

[659] Only two participants used the language of " empire" directly, but it is a fitting description for what all nine of these participants had to say about how simplicity helps them resist the things that tempt and distract them. "The empire" is a theological phrase that contrasts the kingdom of God. For an introductory commentary on how the theological idea of "the empire" plays out in the Bible, see Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 8-9.

[660] Norman Wirzba makes this insightful comment about idolatry that connects with that the participants said in this section: "The logic of idolatry is ultimately self- and world-defeating because the idolatrous impulse is born out of ingratitude and anxiety. More specifically, it is born out of a deep distrust in God's power, wisdom, and provision. People embark on an idolatrous path when they believe that God's gifts are not sufficient or God's care misdirected. We begin to think that we must take hold of the world for ourselves. But to do so we must first unmoor others from their life in God so that they can now find their life in us." See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 45.

on God through their practices has really helped them question their own motivations for purchasing something, which has helped them reject consumerism. Consumerism, they said, is rooted in the lie that material things will bring happiness, and it has the detrimental effect of justifying human selfishness and the degradation of the environment for our own convenience and accumulation: "It really does take a certain level of discipline to back up from that [consumerism] and consider what choices we can individually make that will affect people in terms of missionality and justice around the world, so I think any of these [green spiritual] practices can really make an impact that way," Participant 6 said.

Participant 3 lamented that Jesus-followers often fall into the trap of consumerism: "I think that the church looks a lot like the culture when it comes to our consumer practices. We just live in a capitalistic society where the almighty dollar rules and is more important than human beings."[661] Two participants felt discouraged by similar observations they made. Participant 19 said he wonders often about Christian apathy and the church's accommodation to destructive cultural trends, like colonization and industrialization at the expense of vulnerable people and the environment. In reality, he said, "Jesus questioned the exploitative ways of the empire," including consumerism, and the inequity and greed that comes with it: "That's become a very central part of my faith," he added, "is Jesus' call to turn away from empire, to return to more communal, intentional ways of living with our neighbors." Participant 8 wondered, even when the church or church leaders really *want* to worship God by resisting consumerism and caring

[661] For an extensive analysis on how Western communities idolize productivity, consumption, and economic growth—out of a sense of despair, a belief in helplessness, and a fear of scarcity—and how followers of Jesus participate, see Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 116-127. Additionally, for some insight on the "global market empire" in biblical context, see Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 15.

for the environment, “What power does the church actually have in forming people?” Even powerful people, he said, in religion, politics, and business, are “puppets beholden to someone.” He said systemic change can be really difficult in a culture where the “economic system controls all.”

Participant 11 pointed out that even trendy minimalism or performative environmentalism can take the form of consumeristic greenwashing, or convincing people to consume something because it’s supposedly eco-friendly, even if they don’t really need it. He added that the consumerism propagated by the empire is not liberative—even though it sometimes promises to be—but is, rather, violent: “What does it mean for us to worship a God who is deeply resistant to violence? To worship a God who is deeply committed to welcoming people at the table? And not expressing hostility and harm, but instead healing?” he asked. Though these participants presented a lot of challenges that sound discouraging, or even cynical, they emphasized that for them, their green spiritual practices of simplicity are small ways that they step out of these cultural, communal, and systemic problems, commit themselves to the ways of the Lord, and try to reflect Jesus’ posture toward the empire.

Another facet of empire that the participants brought up is egotistical self-indulgence in several forms: busyness, pride, self-importance, and self-absorption. Participant 3 said that practices of simplicity allow her to reduce busyness in her life, which she said is a temptation for her (and many others) because busyness allows her to *appear* spiritual and *project* goodness, based on what she accomplishes, instead of actually being Christlike. Participant 16 said that as she started to learn that our societal dependence on plastic and slave labor is *not*, in reality, an actual inevitability, she began

to question many other things she had assumed to be true as well. One of those things was her pride in being affiliated with the "right" political party: "I started realizing how much of our politics are less asking ourselves: Is it right? Is it wrong? Is it biblical? Is it not? And more: Is it red, or is it blue? … I felt like it got to the point where we justified wrong things. In the same way, I had justified wrong things, because that was just the way it was." To resist that, she has focused her attention on being a good steward of her immediate surroundings, instead of getting distracted by pride and politics.

Participant 15 said that she experiences her spiritual practice—choosing not to have biological children—as a direct and intentional rejection of ego. Whereas some people think of their biological children as an extension of *themselves* in the world, she loves her foster and adopted children as her own children, yet, she believes she has an easier time recognizing their individuality, allowing them to humble her through their own experiences and perspectives, and becoming aware of the interdependence of all things, including her own dependence on others. (She was careful to clarify that she does not think that anyone who has biological children is indulging their ego; she was sharing that she has experienced her spiritual practice as a way she, personally, has resisted her own sense of ego.)

Participant 3 and Participant 16 also talked extensively about how their green spiritual practices of simplicity have helped them reject unrealistic cultural expectations for beauty, especially those placed on women. Participant 3 said that it is "the rotten fruit of patriarchy" that convinces women (and oftentimes, men, too) that their most valuable qualities are their physical attributes. Simplifying her wardrobe to a uniform taught her that everyone is so concerned about themselves, that few people ever really notice what

others look like, which has brought immense freedom to let go of obsessions with clothing, hair, makeup, and beauty products and practices:

> Not having to make decisions about what to wear and lack of caring about what society thinks I should look like has led to some positive other changes in my life, like developing a healthy-at-any-size mentality of body image, like not shaving my legs. I say, "I am not my appearance; my appearance does not matter." That has drawn me closer to God and closer to myself and been really an important practice. … I am stepping out of that game entirely. I do not care about my appearance. It's the least interesting thing about me. … My value lies in being a child of God and being called and loved by God. It has nothing to do with how I dress or how I look. And when I focus on those kinds of things, when I spend money on clothes, when I am obsessed with what I weigh, or buying new makeup or things like that, it gets in the way, not only of loving myself, but then being able to love other people well.

Participant 16 made similar comments. As she committed to being as close to zero-waste as possible, that entailed not buying all of the products for her hair and skin that she thought she needed. She grieved that people, especially women, fall into the cycle of believing they are not beautiful because they see someone prettier, and then deciding to buy whatever that person is selling to make themselves feel complete, only to not feel better about themselves *and* to cause someone else to look at *them* with envy. She said when she was in that cycle, her self-esteem was "absolutely awful" no matter how much she indulged her shopping addiction. Now she realizes that buying new products "was never going to make me happy. And what I was actually addicted to was the thought that it might." When she went zero-waste, and started questioning whether something was really a need, she found that she had internalized narratives about beauty and attractiveness to the point that she had rejected qualities about herself she may have otherwise liked. Eliminating plastic from her life not only shaped her environmental impact; it shaped how she saw herself and the world, too:

> In the same way that I wanted to make these conscious purchases and live a conscious life, I didn't want to ever falsely present myself. And it's so hard. The beauty industry is so hard, psychologically speaking. There are still so many times where I get caught up in [it]. … And I have to stop and be like there's nothing down that road; there's no water down this well, so just, let it go. … You have to learn really quickly [when you go zero-waste] to be okay with yourself.[662]

Simplicity of Character: Growing in Christlikeness

Five themes emerged from 15 of the participants that all shared the same quality: being distinctly valued and embodied by Jesus. As three-quarters of the participants have observed their spiritual practices, they reported that they have become more Christlike by becoming more grateful, gentle and peaceful, self-disciplined and self-sacrificial, creative, and trusting.

Expressing Gratitude

Seven participants said that their attitudes and expression of gratitude have increased because of their green spiritual practices of simplicity. Simplicity leads to more mindfulness of God's presence and provision, which helped the participants become more aware of all of their blessings, material and otherwise. Participant 12 put it this way as she reflected on how her care for the environment and her spiritual practices have helped her express gratitude to God:

> The way I've experienced God's presence in my life through these practices—even if you recognize you're not going to change the world—this is one way that you can honor God through your choices and one way you can say "thank you" for the gifts that God has given you on the earth. I felt this constant presence with God through this practice. Every time I make that choice, I'm connecting with God, and I'm interacting with God in those moments.

[662] For more on how simplicity of appearance can help counteract duplicity, see Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, 136-138.

Participant 20 said that his practice of carpooling helps him not to take his spouse for granted, and he thanks God regularly for where he is in life and who he gets to spend it with. Participant 1, Participant 5, and Participant 18 all said that because they go out of their way to take care of and conserve what they have (clothing, food, and water, respectively), they feel more grateful for those resources:

> Participant 1: The biggest change [I've experienced] could be being grateful for things. When you realize that you don't need so much, then you're happy for what you have. … If I've mended a garment, it's not gonna end up on the floor often. … In that manner, you respect [it] more often. And being thankful for what you have is an outcome of that.
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> Participant 5: I think [preventing food waste] has allowed me to recognize the value in the resources that we have a bit more, because I'm not just viewing food as this infinite source that I can just dispose of as I please and do with it whatever I want. It has perhaps allowed me to appreciate and acknowledge the efforts that go into growing food, and also realizing, furthermore, not everyone has access to these foods, so it has given me more of an appreciation for that, which I do have access to, and perhaps more empathy for those who do not. And more of a desire to try and fill that void. … I think it has just increased my awareness of the problems that exist, and appreciation for what I have and acknowledgement of searching to find what I can do to help it.
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> Participant 18: [My spiritual practice] has opened my eyes to my water usage, and it's also opened my eyes to rain. Ever since starting this [practice], now every time it rains, I race out to my little patio and get all my biggest buckets and try to capture as much rainwater as I can, and that was something I never would have thought of before. I never connected that in my mind that when the rain falls, I can capture that and use it. Why not? So that's been a cool thing, and it makes me certainly appreciative of the rain when we have it—which is increasingly rare [due to climate change], sad to say. … It definitely has made me grateful for what I have waterwise, for sure, to say the least. That is definitely a huge gift I give thanks for. … It makes me definitely feel for [our global neighbor], because I just click a switch, and I have water; I just click a switch, and I have power. It's crazy how easy I have it. I think this definitely makes me appreciate and respect the lengths that a lot of other people have to go through just to get these basic things. It makes me really grateful that there are people out there who are working to address these issues.

Participant 16 said that going zero-waste made her realize: "There's so much peace, and there's so much gratitude." She lamented "throwaway society," because being more

mindful of what and how she consumes has made her more grateful for everything: her taste buds, her skin, her shoes, the gifts family members give to her, and the meals friends cook for her. Ultimately, she said her spiritual practices have prompted her to spend more time outside and simply be grateful for the reality of her existence. She extended this invitation to others: "Appreciate how much God's given us, appreciate how much of it isn't even something you can grab on to or make something [out of]. There are so many gifts in living."

Bearing the Fruits of Peace, Gentleness, and Nonviolence

Five participants reported that their green spiritual practices of simplicity have increased their value and embodiment of peace, gentleness, and nonviolence.[663] Participant 8 said that on a systemic level, he is discouraged; he believes that it would require real or perceived violence to create more sustainable political and economic systems, so instead, he focuses on "creating small pockets of the kingdom" where all creatures and all creation are cared for peacefully. Participant 10 and Participant 2 rooted their commitment to peace in their practice of eating vegetarian. Both said that eating vegetarian has made them more sensitive to and empathetic toward the world around them, because they want to live into the new creation where all creatures live in peace:

> Participant 10: I'm more sensitive to violence; I'm more sensitive to oppression or mistreatment. … I want to be a part of putting down our weapons and putting away our factories and our hormones. I want to be a part of that. … I have become very sensitive to … treatment of animals. … And I don't mean sensitive, like, hurt my feelings. I mean seeing the world around me and feeling *physical aches* when you see things that you *know* are *not* of God. … It has increased my sensitivity to the harsher pieces of the world around me.

[663] For more on the connections between sustainability and nonviolence, see Deane Curtin, "Nonviolence," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 293.

> Participant 2: With eating vegetarian, I think it's made me more gentle—more gentle with life. … the gentleness of feeling so sad about creatures who are in factory farms, who are exposed to absolutely awful conditions. It really just breaks my heart in a way that it didn't when I was eating meat. … I think I've fallen more in love with plants because of it, and not just plants that I'm eating, but plants that I'm experiencing in the world. Maybe it's because when I'm cooking with plants, there's such an intimacy there of understanding, of looking closely at it, and appreciating all of the sensual experiences with it. I also take that out into the world, and when I see a cool tree, I also want to smell it, and taste it, and feel it.

Participant 2 added that "a lot of these practices of simplicity are about opting out of violent systems." One of his other green spiritual practices of simplicity, biking, has made him more aware of his own mortality and precarity, and it has caused him to see the "violence of cars," and the injustice that those who walk or bike are in much greater danger because of cars.

Three participants said that "wanting to have this theology framed around non-violence" (in the words of Participant 11) has caused them to stop killing bugs unnecessarily. Participant 11 said he hates spiders, but now he fights the fear that used to prompt him to smash spiders "because there's a greater sensitivity now to all life that could be harmed or hurt." Participant 16 said she rescues exhausted or drowing bees whenever she can, because of how gentle they are and how important they are to ecosystems.

She added that challenging consumerism has also caused her to question the hyper-patriotism she grew up with, and the war and militarism that were justified when she believed it was right to put her own country first at all costs:

> My whole life, I've grown up feeling very proud of my country, and my people, and there's this sense of ownership. And when you have that sense of ownership, it becomes really easy to do things like declare war on other people or get angry at immigrants. But when I start looking at us all as people, and I start asking myself,

> "What would Jesus realistically do?" It got me into this whole thing of: Do I even agree with war at all? … Is killing someone really ever okay? It changed the way I looked at the world; it changed the way I looked at the news.

Practicing Self-Control and Self-Sacrifice

Five participants said that their green spiritual practices of simplicity have heightened their capacity for self-control and have increased their willingness and ability to practice self-sacrifice. Participant 12 said that her practice of not participating in fast-fashion was an easy sacrifice that has prompted her to make more challenging ones: "I can *not buy* this shirt. That one's so easy: When I feel the impulse to buy some fast fashion or anything, I don't even have to *do* anything; I just have to *not* do this right now. Letting that mindset seep into all the areas of my life has been a struggle but, I think, a good one."[664] Similarly, Participant 5, who avoids food waste, said that eating what needs to be eaten, rather than what she feels like eating, has allowed her to practice not "always giving in to immediate urges or desires." Participant 8, who emphasized delayed gratification, connected spiritual practices of simplicity with asceticism, or, as he put it "submission: submitting the desires of the flesh, submitting the lusts of the world" to God. We often fear that going slow and being late will cause us to miss things, but he said, in his experience, the self-control that requires pays off, because it gives ourselves the time to notice and think.

Participant 1 said her spiritual practices have revealed the "compulsion" that blurs the line between want and need, and as she has become more aware of that in herself, she has found that she likes and desires discipline as part of her spiritual life, because it

[664] For a thorough commentary on how frugality helps sharpen Christian virtues like self-control and self-sacrifice, see Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change*, 134-144.

brings her freedom. Participant 16 said something similar about the self-control she has to implement when she buys something. Like Participant 5, she has disciplined herself to use things up, regardless of whether she feels like it, and yet, that boundary she has set for herself has brought freedom.[665]

Getting Creative

Five participants said that because their green spiritual practice of simplicity is not the default way of being in the world, they have had to stretch their creative muscles, which helps them feel more connected to the Creator and all creation. Participant 2 and Participant 5 said that some of the issues that arise because of their practices (biking and not wasting food, respectively) are not inconveniences, but exciting opportunities to be creative with solutions. "There's an aspect of co-creation with these practices that we are living into, like creating the world, creating restoration, and creativity is part of that," Participant 2 said.

Participant 16 said that as an artist and someone who also regularly has to think out-of-the-box in order to maintain her zero-waste lifestyle, she feels deeply connected to the creativity of God, which has shaped the type of art she creates: "the connection that I feel to my lifestyle, to God, to the Earth has increased so much, how can it not come out in my artwork?" Similarly, Participant 13 said that creating sanctuary spaces has allowed her to partner with God in executing the vision God gave her for those spaces: "That vision is so beautiful and so important that I am not to neglect my place as [the] vision

[665] For more on the freedom that comes through boundaries, see Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 97.

holder. … God and I are creating [the vision] together. … It feels like we are brainstorming together."

Participant 4 said that as her practices have made her more attentive to God's creation, she has become amazed by God's creativity: "just seeing how intentionally God has knitted everything together, and the beauty and the majesty that's reflected in creation and through natural revelation, I think leads me to care about it, but then also to encourage other people to care about it as well."

Trusting in God

Six participants said that since they have started observing their green spiritual practice of simplicity, they have experienced God's trustworthiness more vividly, and they find themselves more willing and able to trust God's provision and guidance. Participant 6 and Participant 16 said their practices have taught them to trust in God's provision, even when they don't see or understand how things will work out. Participant 14 said that as she has become more mindful and patient, she has been better able to trust that God is "still here." Even when she is "not happy" about how things may be going, she has learned "to wait, and wait well."

Participant 7 said that in her spiritual journey she has experienced a pendulum swing from "they're blowing [climate change] out of proportion" to "everything is going to burn, and we're all gonna die." Now, she says, she is in the middle: "[God] has led me to not be apathetic but not to fear [either]." Participant 4 similarly said that her environmental journey has given her a "unique hope" that Jesus is not only going to restore the world, but that humans are invited to participate in that work: "Ultimately, this is God's world. And it's not up to me as an individual to solve it. Nothing is ever up to

me as an individual. It's part of God's greater picture and his greater plan. And so we're all called to play a part and to have our own roles."

Participant 10 summed up her sense of trust well when she said: "I can choose to know that all things are in God's hands, and I don't have to work them all out. Now, that doesn't mean I don't want to be an advocate and a participant [in God's kingdom], but I don't let things bother me or affect me or anger me; I can take a deep breath and take a step back and trust that God is working all things out."

Simplicity of Connections: Focusing on What Really Matters

According to 16 of the 20 participants, their green spiritual practices of simplicity enhanced their sense of connection with themselves, others, God, and the Earth.

Connecting with Our Bodies

Five participants, all of whom are vegetarian or vegan as part of their spiritual practices, said that their practice has been positive for their physical health and has helped them embrace being an embodied and material creature. Participant 6, Participant 11, and Participant 19 said that their health has significantly improved since switching to a plant-based diet. Participant 11 said that not only has his physical wellness improved, but he has also begun to heal psychologically and emotionally from using food as a "trauma response" growing up:

> My connection with food, and what has now been this different way of engaging food, has been a direct act of repair. … Repairing my body, repairing a generational trauma that's been on my body, and then repairing my relationship with food, all starts with this conscious decision of the foods that we eat. … Because of the way in which I engaged food growing up, and what it did to my body, my ability to even like, let alone love, my physical being was extremely difficult for me. Growing up, I never liked my body—didn't like the shape of it, the form of it—and much of that was tied to the diet that I had. And the shame I

> held around that led to me eating more food that wasn't good for me. … Switching the way I have eaten has given me a much more increased level of mindfulness to how I eat, the pace in which I eat, the volume in which I eat. And so there's a thankfulness for the food that I have … and I'm thinking of food in the sense of abundance, and not in the sense of comfort. It's a whole different framework, and it's been good.[666]

Participant 19 said that not only food, but also the act of gardening, has helped with his physical health, specifically his lifelong struggle with back pain: "It's not just about what I'm eating," he said, "but also [how I'm] using my body. The Creator intended it to be used, not sitting in chairs all day. Getting out there and being active with my body, I feel so much healthier. … My back pain … really made me miserable through my 20s. I feel much younger now at 35 than I did at 25. I just feel very healthy." He called this a "spiritual practice of taking care of my body."

Participant 2 and Participant 10 called their practices "body stewardship." Participant 2 said eating whole foods and regularly being out in nature reminds him that he is embodied, which encourages him to pray with his *whole* self, what he called "embodied prayer." Participant 10 said that she has learned that our souls are not just "gonna fly away." Instead, we were created to be embodied creatures, and "the physicality of things" will continue in new creation: "What we see is good and was meant to be good and was meant to be cared for, because it's God's. That's a huge concept in

[666] Wendell Berry expands on the idea that healing—connecting and becoming whole with ourselves—requires that we heal and reconnect with our bodies. See Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 103-110: "It is therefore absurd to approach the subject of health piecemeal with a departmentalized band of specialists. A medical doctor uninterested in nutrition, in agriculture, in the wholesomeness of mind and spirit is as absurd as a farmer who is uninterested in health. Our fragmentation of this subject cannot be our cure, because it is our disease. The body cannot be whole alone. Persons cannot be whole alone. It is wrong to think that bodily health is compatible with spiritual confusion or cultural disorder, or with polluted air and Water or impoverished soil. Intellectually, we know that these patterns of interdependence exist; we understand them better now perhaps than we ever have before; yet modern social and cultural patterns contradict them and make it difficult or impossible to honor them in practice" (103).

the tradition I was brought up in, caring for things that God gives you, whether that's money or children or a church building. What makes [our bodies] any different?"

Connecting with Others

Nine participants said their spiritual practice has helped them connect with others in meaningful ways. Five participants said that their spiritual practices have simply helped them connect with others who take similar things seriously. Two of them put it this way:

> Participant 17: Meeting people and going through these things with other people is very significant. Talking with other people, making sustainability an issue that more people know about, and spreading the word as to what's really going on is really beneficial. In school, in our history classes, talking about current events, such as labor laws and children labor laws and relating that to the past and how far we've come, but how bad conditions still are, especially for clothing. We did projects where we did research into different types of [companies], like Nike shoes. Seeing the process of where the materials come from, how it's manufactured, and how people are put in dangerous situations to make these clothes. Doing these things together, we can help each other once we see the issues at hand, and we can nurture others on this path to be more sustainable.

> Participant 12: I really want to drive home the importance of that community-based faith. Me making this choice on my own doesn't actually make that much of an impact. But when I join together with the Body of Christ and make choices that honor God, that is a powerful movement in the world. I wish more Christians would get on board with that, at least in this area. … All of my other friends who are also practicing these green practices all over the country, all over the world, as an expression of love for God, that's an inherent connection. Every time I meet someone, particularly when it's another Christian who's really involved in creation care, that is such a unifying thing between us because it is such a conscious part of our everyday lives. Even if we have nothing else in common, that's something that we bond over. I think it's creating this community of people who—ideally, most Christians share the same values—but seeing someone really implementing those values in a way that resonates with me. I think it really builds a community and a support system around that. It's kind of like a feedback loop. Every time I make these choices, I'm contributing to community, which contributes to these choices. It goes round and round. And when all of that is centered around God, I think it just makes it even more powerful.

Participant 4 added that besides "the side of camaraderie, … that sense of, we're in this together," she said that walking to work has also given her the time and mental space to call friends and family, so she is better about staying in touch with those she loves.

Participant 13 and Participant 16 said that their spiritual practices have helped them better connect with their local communities. Because Participant 16's zero-waste commitments prompt her to buy local more often (like from local farmers or her local Buy Nothing group), she said, "You become a part of your community, instead of just living in your community, both in the church and the actual community, and that's really cool. … There's lots of things like that that have happened because of conversations that got started where I was able to make a relationship with someone where I never would have had that relationship."

In a very different, but still significant, kind of connection, Participant 8 said that he has felt more connected with other followers of Jesus across time and space, especially the Desert Fathers and Mothers, whose ascetic practices and simple lifestyles became his teachers, mentors, and guides. Participant 11 said he also experiences an intergenerational connection, though in a more personal way: "Part of it is I can connect generationally with those [ancestors] who came before me by this practice, and in doing so, honor their legacy, maybe being in a type of connection with them [that] I couldn't have otherwise."

Connecting with God through Creation

Seven participants described how caring for creation through their spiritual practice helps them connect with God directly. The participants put it best:

> Participant 16: I've heard some people say that hell doesn't exist; this [Earth] is hell. I'm like, "If this is hell, you need to walk outside more! This is beautiful; this is amazing; and it has so much opportunity; and there's so much goodness."

Participant 11: I understand God as a Divine Mother. God is suffering; God is suffering in the world with us and is not disconnected from the pain that people are experiencing. I think of God as Mother in the sense of birthing something, and at the same time, is also a midwife and a doula of that same thing being birthed. And we get to participate in that process, *and* we're also the thing that is being birthed.

Participant 12: [My practice] is already putting me in that mindset of opening my eyes and looking around me and seeing God's beauty and recognizing the love that it is. [Creation] is not just this neutral backdrop for my life; this is an expression of God's love for me, and I get to feel that every time I'm outside or every time I look out my window, and it's that constant reminder of God's presence and God's love in my daily life.

Participant 2: It is through these practices and others … that I have come to understand God's imminent presence in creation, the way that God is revealing God's self … experiencing the love of God as it is made manifest, and … in the food that I'm eating, in the beauty that I'm experiencing in my own body, as I'm cycling, and recognizing my own limits and the joys of pushing myself, but also the difficulties and the challenges that come with an embodied existence.

Participant 10: I am awestruck by God's created order and that God gave other things ears and eyes. God's in more things. God's image is in more than just us. … Where do you find God in these other places, in these other things? … I really do connect or see God in living creatures. … It's an increased sensitivity to God's created things, and the complexity of those things, that it's more than just all about their relationship to me, but their relationship to all that God has created.

Participant 4: [I'm] not being pantheistic; I don't believe that God *is* a cardinal, but [the cardinal] is a reminder for me that God is present, and that he's brought me here for a reason, even when I don't see what that reason is every day. But he walks with me in these moments. … [It's] a good reminder of the presence of God that I probably wouldn't get to experience if I wasn't walking to work. … I think about the passage about how God cares for the sparrows, so how much more would he care for us? I think it's just more of a sense of awe and wonder about how beautiful God's creation is, and wanting to share it with people because of that.

Participant 9: God took so much care creating us and creating the earth. Every single thing I learn, some of it seems so simple, like we learned in elementary school, like the earth on its axis and the moon and the oceans and everything, just thinking about it more: the care that God took to create us and the care that he has, and I don't think it was a light bulb that went off, but it's been a gradual process to me understanding, "Holy cow. Everything is precious to him. It's so precious." We're not just humans here, living our life and then we're going to die. … All the

> tiny details, and God holds all of it, and he knows all of it. I'm just in awe all the time, and here I was, just so flippant. And I still am to an extent, but I'm trying to learn.

These participants expressed in different ways that their care for the environment does not increase their sense of shame or guilt, or make them internalize pressure to fix all the world's problems, but rather, they experience the character of God more vividly and are more drawn to praise the Lord because of their practices.

Secondary Theme: Connecting with the Soil

In addition to feeling more connected to God *through* creation, two participants discussed how their spiritual practice, in combination with their faith journey, has helped them feel more connected to creation itself, and more specifically, the physical earth—the soil. Participant 2 said that his spiritual practices have made him realize the importance of healthy soil and respecting the soil, because "soil is so core to life." He referenced a Wendell Berry essay in which Berry "reflects on how topsoil is Christ-like, because as things die into it, they are made new and transformed into the ground of life."[667] He added that this connection to the soil has been lost on many followers of Jesus:

> For most of the church, our theology causes us to look skyward for God, instead of looking down to the earth for God, and that, at best, has given us a cover for being part of the destruction of creation and being wrapped up in the ways that empire has extracted and exploited creation, and, at worst, is the *reason* that creation is being extracted and destroyed. So there is theological work to be done. … That is not sound Christian theology. The theology has been twisted and turned so that it is an extractive theology instead of restorative theology. So there's a lot of work to be done to counter that in our churches. … One big piece that is missing is an understanding of our work as Christians as redemption not just for human creatures, but for all of creation, and the redemption that Christ brings as redeeming not only human life, but the life of all. This vision in Colossians 1, of Christ as the one in whom all was created and through whom all is sustained, and

[667] Wendell Berry, "A Native Hill," *The Hudson Review* 21.4 (Winter 1968-1969). See also Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 9; Fabian, *Holy Vulnerability*, 80-81.

> eschatologically, in him, all will be restored. We've really lost that vision in the church.

Participant 11 articulated a similar understanding of God's work for all creation, saying that human pain and the pain of the earth are deeply intertwined:

> The unfortunate—and, I would say, incorrect—meta-narrative that we hold for the order of the story of the cosmos is: creation, sin, fall. And so creation immediately becomes a challenge, a barrier, broken, and sinful, instead of a good thing that is worth caring for and protecting. … [But] God's interest in salvation is not exclusively for humankind, and God's reigndom is not some sort of far off, distant place. What we have here—what is here now—is good, and God's interest in saving it is to save the whole of the cosmos. … Jesus said, "Even the rocks would cry out," so even those inanimate objects play a role. … Even our environment, the ecology of our world, is part of this journey with us.

However, as a Black man who knows that some of his ancestors were enslaved, he said his connection to the soil is not just cosmological; it is deeply personal, too:

> For the lineage of Black sharecroppers [and] formerly enslaved people that are in my family, there's a unique and particular connection to the soil. It's a different kind of ground, a different kind of soil … where my family is from, than there is here [where I live], and I literally feel different in those places. I think there's something sacred about that: The blood, sweat and tears in a place *matters*. … We take seriously the power that is in the earth, the power that's in the ground. Our blood, sweat, tears, hopes, and dreams are buried in the ground, whether it's a shovel building a new home, whether it's a body put into the soil, whether it's tears sown over our grave—the ground contains so much of who we are, and having practices that could draw us back to those things can help us see the ways in which people have caused harm, … the ways in which people made amends, and everything in between. Those things are often left out of the family history. … Our families cover and hide and protect particular forms of abuse in ways that I don't think the earth is willing to hide, or maybe can't hide. So if we could *uncover* some of those things—I know we can't *repair*—but we *can* acknowledge and testify and witness [to them]. That's also important.

Themes of Missional Participation

The following themes emerged from the participants as they reflected on how their observance of their green spiritual practices of simplicity has shaped how they interact with the world around them. Missional participation refers to the commitments of

God's people—rooted in their ongoing journey of spiritual formation—to partner with God in God's mission of redemption for all creation, which the Lord invites humans to join.[668] As participants discussed how their practices have shaped their interactions and behaviors, it was revealed that their practices have helped them expand their sense of mission toward themselves, their fellow Christians, their local community, young people, our global neighbors, and all creation.

Mission to Ourselves: Living an Integrated and Holistic Faith

Six participants noted that their green spiritual practices of simplicity have functioned as missional for themselves, because they have been able to experience more integration and wholeness in their minds, their lives, and their faith. Four participants framed their practices as acts of faithfulness, as a way of meaningfully incorporating their faith in every facet of their lives, not just at church or work. Three of them said this:

> Participant 8: I feel very grounded in my faith. I can see how all these things interconnect into a consistent worldview. As an enneagram one, it's very nice, because it all lines up, and it makes me feel like a good moral person, making a difference; I'm doing something positive. My spiritual life has been better than before.

> Participant 10: You shouldn't go to church if that's *all* you think being faithful is. [Faith] should be the driving force of everything else. It should impact the way you see and participate in everything. I don't think I knew that or maybe I could have verbalized that: "You're not just a good Christian on this one day, like [what about] Monday through Saturday?" But truly seeing the world and your commitment to caring for what God has given you as an act of faith and participating in a life with God and a life of faith. I think starting that kind of simple practice [of not eating meat] has opened my eyes to more ways of participating in a life with God. … It teaches me a lot about being holistic, because I believe this to my core: This is a way of participating in the world I want to live in.

[668] See, for example, Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City: Ecclesiology for the Global Missional Community*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, Western Voices (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 179.

> Participant 4: I'm not naive to think me walking to work most days when it's a mile and a half is going to do anything, realistically, when it comes to climate change. However, I do think it's important as an act of faithfulness. One of my favorite quotes from Mother Teresa is "God has not called me to be successful. He's called me to be faithful." I think doing something like this is an act of faithfulness. I know environmental activists who are making really good systemic change, and then also do some things in their personal life that are very, very carbon intensive, like beyond the average American. I understand that ultimately they're lowering carbon emissions overall by the systemic changes that they're making. But I also think that, as a Christian, it's really important for me to be, as much as possible, *consistent within my own life*. I could also give you a list of my environmental sins: They're there; I'm so far from perfect. But I do think that being intentional and trying to add more practices gradually over time is an important act of faithfulness, of recognizing that God calls us to do different things, and we can only do as much as we can do, but it's important to lean into that.

Participant 18 and Participant 16 rooted their experience of self-mission in their recognition of cognitive dissonance. Participant 18 said that giving up single-use plastic for Lent "exposed the waste of my lifestyle, of the consumer life that I live and am trying to not live." She said it made her "embarrassed before God" for hypocritically working to protect wildlife as a marine biologist, and yet, "here I am using all this plastic." "Feeling called out has been a big part of this in my spiritual journey," she said, "and realizing I want to … practice more what I preach, so to speak, and feeling convicted by that. Because the choices that I make to buy things, that definitely can say something about what I believe."

Participant 16 said that one day, after being exposed to images that revealed how dental floss and other plastic pollution harms wildlife,[669] she felt sick, and then she got up

[669] Dental floss is made out of nonbiodegradable plastic so that it won't break between teeth. However, that means it won't break if it gets wrapped around an animal, either. See Harry Rabinowitz, "How Traditional Floss Ends Up Being an Eco Nightmare," *Public Goods* (January 28, 2020), https://blog.publicgoods.com/how-traditional-floss-ends-up-being-an-eco-nightmare/.

to throw away some plastic packaging in the trash can. Then the cognitive dissonance registered for her:

> There I am condemning this person who threw out dental floss, and … that just got me on this: Where does this go? It suddenly hit me: Every single house has a garbage can in it, and we're all throwing stuff in it. We put it in our dumpsters, and the garbage man comes and takes it, and we never stop to think about where it goes or how much of it, and it got overwhelming. I was like, "Well, I need to buy dental floss that doesn't do this [to wildlife]." And that was when I came across, in that research, zero-waste. … I realized I had never questioned my life. I go to Walmart; I buy stuff. Why did it never bother me that a bunch of kids died—over what? So I can have a cheap pair of shoes?

The more she continued down the zero-waste rabbit hole, the more she felt like she had "been living with wool over my eyes." This was especially true because she found out about zero-waste at the same time she had a shopping addiction: "The more I had, the more I hated my life, and I hated myself, and once I started realizing people are enslaved in other countries so I could have *this*: Why did I do that? Why did I support them?" As she became more zero-waste and minimalist, she said her actions became more "purposeful" and she began to feel more whole:

> To me, [being zero-waste] is the most conscious, most fulfilling thing I've ever done with my life. Every time I buy something, it's carefully laid out; I feel good; I love who I support; I love feeling like I'm making a difference; I love the people I've met; I love the things I've learned; I've learned so many new skills; I love my garden. … The more I live my life this way, the more I feel like there's no other honest way, as a Christian, to live it. There's no greater satisfaction I could possibly get than feeling like I'm doing everything within my power, with every action, to be as conscious and as supportive and as careful as possible. I really hope that other people start to see it that way. I feel like we tell Jesus where he's allowed to be, and in my experience, I've always found him most in the places where I'm like, "You're not allowed here." … If I told someone that their purchase decisions could be influenced by their walk with Christ, they would look at me like I was crazy. But I really think that that's a big part of it.

Participant 12 said her green spiritual practices of simplicity have helped her heal her relationship with her own faith: She said that compared to her former faith

communities, which were more evangelical and oriented toward a person's personal relationship with Jesus, she now asks herself far more often whether "what I'm doing is actually honoring God and honoring God's will." She said she wanted to be more community-oriented and less individualistic; she wanted transformation rather than the status quo; she wanted freedom rather than anxiety. Whereas before she defaulted to black-and-white "boundary markers" of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, now she feels confident to "push up against the edges," which has allowed her to experience justice and compassion more directly. When she makes a misstep, instead of being paralyzed by shame, she is able to simply "step back and move in a different direction." She said the old model felt more like a trap, whereas her faith now is more work, because it requires "constant change and self-reflection," but she also experiences it as "more freeing."

Mission to Fellow Jesus-Followers: Expanding God's Kingdom

Three-quarters of the participants, or 15 of them, said that their green spiritual practices of simplicity have helped start conversations and relationships with fellow followers of Jesus that have deepened and grown the faith of both parties. Four participants said that their green spiritual practices of simplicity are a witness to fellow followers of Jesus for practicing their faith in creative ways. Seven other participants said they actually know people who have started observing their own versions of practices after finding out about theirs. Participant 3 said she loves when people find out about her uniform and say, "Oh, I didn't realize this was even an option to do." Participant 14 said that her "eccentric" practice of spinning lace catches people's attention so that they might say, "Hey, that's a really cool idea; there's a small thing that I could try." She added that

having a green spiritual practice of simplicity allows her to have "a really cool conversation starter with a lot of different people. And you can just be that weird, wonderful, inspiring person to someone else."

Participant 18 and Participant 5 said their own families have made changes because of their commitments. Participant 5 said:

> It has been fun to see the ways in which me caring about this or talking about this has caused my mother to make changes in her life. She'll text me every so often with some little win she has, or a change that she's made, or a cool company that she found that's more sustainable or more mindful about their environmental impact. So she's adopting a lot of similar things. … Or [my] other friends having similar conversations and being interested in it. … It's cool to think about how other people are making the ties of our Christian responsibilities and how it relates to environmental sustainability.

Three participants said that they see their practices as a kind of evangelism to their fellow followers of Jesus. Participant 6 framed this as "visibility": "It's important to me to be visibly happy and content with my choices and be an open resource to people with questions and be willing to explain fully how I think God has called me to this, and what it could mean for other people to do it. I'm hopeful that that has a snowball effect" in other people's faith, and that, "I can influence those around me to care more about creation." Participant 8 said:

> I think one of the best ways to evangelize is just to be weird, be different. People say, "Hey, you seem like a normal person, but I noticed this weird thing you do—tell me about that." And when there's genuine curiosity, it's much easier to talk about your faith. … [My simple clothing habits are] explaining who I am, what I believe to be important, what I believe to be the ultimate concern, and the way that's outwardly presented to the world [through] the clothes I wear. … Maybe I'm not necessarily evangelizing to other people, non-Christians, but evangelizing to other Christians and saying, "Hey, open your eyes to what the Bible is saying about the poor and the oppressed, creation and these things." So I think anytime I have the opportunity to evangelize is a blessing, and being different from most other Christians is a good way to … have conversations like that, where it's genuine curiosity and me getting to share my excitement and my passion about my faith, without people feeling weird about it.

Participant 16 said that, for her, this evangelism to fellow Jesus-followers often looks like "accidentally guilting people into doing better," even though she firmly believes that guilt is never an impetus for true transformation. She said she prefers when her practices spark another person's imagination so that they can live their faith in a whole new dimension of their lives.

Similarly, Participant 18 said that she focuses on "positive, happy, joyful learning experiences," when she talks about caring for the ocean and for creation. She said she believes that "hospitality," "welcome," and being "more inclusive" increases the likelihood that people take the message home with them and do something about it: "My faith has definitely motivated me to try to connect with people more on a human level with regards to climate change, and bringing more people into that conversation instead of being this high-and-mighty environmentalist who looks down on people."

Participant 10 said that her practice of not eating meat ignites deep theological conversations that help fellow Jesus-followers think about God in new and deeper ways. Because she roots being vegetarian in participating in God's promised new creation, where all creatures live in harmony,

> It has opened up lots of cool conversations about creation, new creation, the curse, the fall: conversations that I don't know how we would have had, had this particular thing not been occurring, … conversations I never would have had otherwise. … It's always fun to … talk to Christians who, for them, [eating vegetarian] could just be a green practice or a health practice, and to be like, you're participating in something so much bigger. I'm doing this because I love God, not because I'm a liberal, not because I believe in global warming—which I do, but that's not why. I'm doing this because I love God and because I want to connect with God.

However, it is important to note that not all Jesus-followers come away from encountering someone who observes a green spiritual practice of simplicity transformed

or inspired. Three participants said that the most common responses they get from other Christians are simply dismissal—"That sounds hard" is the most common response that Participant 2 gets from other Christians—or defensiveness about why "I could never do that," in the words of both Participant 3 and Participant 12.

Unfortunately, sometimes the rejection goes deeper still. According to six participants, political polarization (and in some cases, far-right Christian nationalism specifically) has made a lot of the Christians they know completely resistant to talking about God's love for creation, let alone observing a green spiritual practice of simplicity in reflection of that theological conviction.[670] Participant 18 said that she believes the church is apathetic to—or at least, silent about—our responsibility to creation because climate change has been politicized. Four participants said that it is a political line, and followers of Jesus who have conflated their faith commitments with their party affiliation dismiss anything that is on the other—that is, the wrong—side of the political-ideological divide.[671]

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[670] Katharine Hayhoe confirms the reality of political polarization surrounding topics pertaining to the environment: "Although science denial dominates the headlines, people's rejection of the science on climate change is rarely about the science itself. In a study of fifty-six countries, researchers found people's opinions on climate change to be most strongly correlated not with education or knowledge, but rather with "values, ideologies, worldviews and political orientation." Like coronavirus, vaccines, and more, climate denial is often just one part of a toxic stew of identity issues that share a key factor: fear of change. Societal change is happening faster today than at any time in our lifetimes, and many are afraid they're already being left behind. That fear drives tribalism, emphasizing what divides us rather than what unites us; and the more threatened we feel, the tighter we draw the circles to distinguish between *them* and *us*." See Hayhoe, *Saving Us*, 14. The rise in political polarization has also led to a parallel and connected rise in Christian nationalism, which many scholars connect to science denialism broadly, especially in connection with climate science. See, for example, Labberton, "Introduction," 8.

[671] The conflation of church and politics is especially alienating and disillusioning to emerging adults. See Denton and Flory, *Back-Pocket God*, 46. There are, however, exceptions to the stereotype surrounding American evangelicalism. See Richard R. Bohannon II, "Christianity—Evangelical and Pentecostal," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 58.

Participant 4, who often speaks to conservative churches about sustainability said that she oscillates between hope and disappointment. Sometimes, people in these churches will come up to her and say, "I really care about this, too. I didn't know we could talk about it in church." Other times, people shut down when they find out she works in "the environmental field," as if that means she is "dancing with the devil." However, she said the myriad of reactions also motivate her to keep going back: "[I want to help] people realize how much of a witness opportunity this is. … It starts breaking down some of those boxes of: What does it mean to be Christian? What do you actually think about things? So it allows me to have those conversations instead of Christians being in this confusing politicized box."[672]

Mission to the Local Community: Putting Our Faith into Action

Eight participants discussed how their green spiritual practices have been missional to their local communities where they live; their practices have helped them be a witness to people and to live the good news for their nearest neighbors. Participant 8 grounded this local mission in watershed discipleship:[673] "This is the watershed. It grounds the church within nature. This is the watershed that we're a part of, and this is

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[672] Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw encourage Jesus-followers away from these political boxes: "It's easy to have political views—that's what politicians do. But it's much harder to embody a political alternative—that's what saints do. The greater challenge is right living, not merely right thinking. In Jesus we meet not a presentation of ideas or a new political platform but an invitation to join up, to become part of a movement, of a people that embodies good news. Political embodiment means that we become the change that we want in the world, not just lobby politicians to change things for us. It means that we must take the responsibility that our political views demand of us. Not many of us have seen people, much less a political party, who are ready to enact the change they want in the world." See Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 235.

[673] For a refresher on the significance of the watershed, see the section titled "Watershed Discipleship" in chapter 2. Another way to think about mission to the local community is through the concept of *place*. See Randolph Haluza-DeLay, "Place," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 305.

our place in the grand scheme of creation. You think of watershed as being this interconnected web, and there's lots of theological implication when you think of all of us flowing together into one unified stream of the universal church."

With specificity toward her own context, Participant 14 said fast fashion has "killed" the local culture and industry where she lives. Making her own clothes, she said, is not only an art; it is also a way for her to protest the exportation of the industries that built up her community, and for her to participate in local historical traditions, since the skills and techniques required for the fiber arts have not changed in centuries.

Participant 11 lamented that most churches in big cities are detached from their local communities, since "their attendees don't live in the neighborhood, so you're likely driving to your place of worship. And so the context that you live in and do the rest of your week in is not connected." He urged Jesus-followers and churches to consider: "Who is it that we serve in the neighborhood that we exist in? But also, where are people coming from [to attend church here]? [People] are driving all the way from the suburbs to come, for what?" Participant 2 also urged Jesus-followers to ask themselves questions about their specific contexts so that they can be maximally helpful to their immediate neighborhoods and communities:[674]

> I think it's really important, when we're thinking about local churches, is the "small-c" church to become attuned to local environmental problems—the ways that climate change is showing itself at a local level—and being a source of restoration, a source of refuge in those places. … How is the place where we meet also welcoming people who are displaced by climate disasters? How are we getting our energy from sources that are not destroying the world with our land? How are we creating space for the thriving of God's creatures, for native plants and animals, particularly those who are being impacted by climate change? In a spiritual sense, how are we providing spiritual resilience, creating space for grief

[674] For more on the importance of local Jesus-followers serving their local communities in light of environmental injustices, see Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 181-182.

> and for lament for those who are experiencing that, from environmental destruction and from climate change, making meaning in the midst of that? Thinking through how our rituals, as they are now, but also thinking through how they can be renewed and transformed so that they are apt and more related to the ecological devastation that we're experiencing. … [How are we] advocating for local solutions to that, advocating for national solutions, supporting local leaders who are organizing all of that?[675]

Participant 13 also asked similar contextualized questions: "Who is in your community? Who walks by your location? … What would be the most helpful thing that we could put our energy towards? What grows native in your area? When you're looking around, what do you *not* see?"

She added that it can be valuable to join in what others in the community are already doing, instead of starting a program or a green spiritual practice from scratch, independently. She also said she is ultimately hopeful that Christian practices can have a significant impact in their communities: "I think that churches are powerhouses for community space. There's so much opportunity for churches to help make their community more resilient—and more resilient to things like climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as community loss and relationship loss between humans." Participant 16 articulated a similar hope for the local church:

> In my mind, Christians should be the ones out front, cleaning up. The interest that we generated when my church started doing cleanups, it was amazing. People were shocked. They came up to us. They asked us who we were. They thanked us. They wrote us notes. It was so nice. And it was it was just a stupid thing of: "We're just going to go through these backwoods and pick up all the trash." But that's what we should be doing. That's what's going to mark us as different. That's what starts the conversations; it's the practical application. People care about that. And they want to see that you practice what you preach, and more than just how you treat people, how you treat animals and how you treat the world and the earth.

[675] Cherice Bock, a leading scholar on watershed discipleship, argues that faith communities are essential for climate resilience. For more, see Cherice Bock, "Faith Communities as Hubs for Climate Resilience," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Futures*, ed. Robert Brears (Avonhead: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 1-7.

Secondary Theme: Practicing Hospitality

Three participants focused on one specific aspect of being missional to the local community: practicing hospitality through their green spiritual practices of simplicity. Participant 13 said that as she has built sanctuary spaces, a core characteristic is creating spaces with an "open door," so that people don't feel like they have to commit to a specific belief or worldview to be included, but rather, "they can bring their convictions in and we can engage in intelligent conversation that assumes the best about each other." Since these spaces tap into the natural world through gardening or native plants, she said she thinks of her hospitality as an expression of "the hospitality of God. He creates a world that is hospitable to his creation, and these are environments that are hospitable. Different leaves, different flower types are all hospitable to different types of creatures. So that's one of the intentions of the spaces: to be hospitable to humans, and help live in those [local] communities."

Participant 2 said his eating practices help him embody hospitality by sharing food with others, by "building community around the table," which he called "eucharistic eating." Participant 8 also mentioned "table hospitality." He said his practices similarly help his family to be hospitable: "We love to have people over and have a good time; make good food for them. I love being able to host people and do it as sustainably as possible, … to create a space that is special and important to people," but is also a holistically hospitable ecosystem, including native plants and local pollinators, too. He added that he would love to see this same principle of hospitable communities to become increasingly a part of the culture of the church:

> I think the local church has tremendous power and responsibility to build local, resilient communities that are sustainable and integrated with both creation and [with] all the other work of the church: sacraments, helping the poor, proclaiming the word, worship, all those great things, because there's very little opportunity in our society to build that kind of community. Most of our civic institutions are gone; most people don't really know their neighbors, [and] if they do, it's very shallowly. We live far away from our best friends. We don't have that ability to care for one another that you can in a close, tight-knit community. The church is an example for other institutions of: "This is how you can do things differently."

Mission to Young People: Inviting Emerging Adults into the Body of Christ

According to seven participants, green spiritual practices of simplicity are missional specifically to youth and young adults, because they demonstrate a commitment to justice and to expressing our faith commitments in tangible ways. Participant 17, the youngest person to participate in the study, said that for him and his peers, "climate change is a really big deal," because they experience "these personal, close-to-my-face realities of climate change."

Participant 12 said all of her non-Christian friends in their early 20s "outpace" her in terms of environmental activism. Similarly, Participant 6, who is in graduate school for faith-related studies, said that young people, especially those who do not identify as Christian, are disillusioned by the individualism and consumerism that they see in faith communities:

> Creation care … would be such a powerful witness for justice and for missionality and for our personal faith, if the American church was the institution that really spearheaded the movement to be more green and to take care of our planet. That'd be such an incredible witness that I think would honestly do a lot for culture to allow young people to see us truly aligning our actions with our beliefs. If we say we care about justice for oppressed people around the world, maybe we should have our actions here and now contribute positively to that. If we say we care about being missional, our actions now should contribute to that positively. Creation care is one huge and really good way that we can make all those things visible.

Four participants work directly with young people professionally, and they strongly believe that creation care is key to helping emerging adults feel connected to God and to the church; without environmental justice, it is difficult for young people to understand how the Christian faith is relevant to the world, let alone to their lives. Furthermore, according to these participants, young people who care about the environment are often even more open to ideas and conversations about meaning, purpose, identity, and connection—essential topics of faith. This is what these participants had to say about their work with young people in light of their environmental and faith commitments:

> Participant 10: What's sad is that [to college students], it's often shocking that a Christian would care about these things. Maybe a Christian would not eat meat because of the Genesis Diet or new creation, but that you would care for the environment or care for animals or care for others is often shocking, which is sad. … Looking at college students, I just want to shout it from the rooftops: Spiritual formation happens *here*. It happens in these moments between you and I. You have to have each other. Spirituality is … what life looks like for us together and *in this world* that we've created.

> Participant 13: College students [at the local state school] have a big focus on sustainability. … Sometimes they ask me, "How can you be a Christian and love the environment or love creation?" So it is interesting talking to them and having this conversation, "No, it's actually my love for God and my love for humans that makes me interested in this, that inspired me to even start asking the questions around this," which is very different than how most people get into environmental care. … I feel like I get to stand in the middle, between these two worlds. I have the credentials of the sustainability world, and I have the faith and the language and the culture of the Christian world.

> Participant 2: With young people, it's certainly not helping that the church isn't taking action on climate, isn't connected with creation. I think the trends with young people, and with my generation as well, is not a loss of spirituality and not a loss of community, but a displacement from the church to elsewhere. I think my hot take on that is: Maybe that's not a bad thing. Maybe the church needs a course-correction. And if what that takes is people leaving the church because it's not responding to the needs of the world—which it should be—then the church needs to be course-corrected. When I talk with denominational leaders and with regional leaders about this, that's part of the case that I make: If you want young people coming to your church, you better start talking about climate change, and

> then maybe they'll think about coming. I don't know if it means they *will* come; I think there's a lot of other issues. But it's certainly not helping.
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> Participant 4: I find that a lot of students [at the secular college where I work] who are interested in the environment are, I would say, deeply spiritual, if not religious. And I think that there's a lot of deep yearning for a greater purpose in the world and a greater connection. … I think a lot of my students often feel overwhelmed, because they feel like they need to fix it, and that it's up to them. … So I think being Christian just gives a unique hope and perspective, that we can partner with God in this work and not have to do it alone. … [But] we've watered down and politicized the Bible to a point where young people don't want it. We want to Christianize it; we want to make it safe, and we want to make it fit within our idea of country and our idea of self. And we try to do all these contortions to make it interesting to young people again, but the reality is: The Bible is enticing in and of itself. And if you truly present the whole gospel, it is radical. … The more the church starts to acknowledge how the Bible intersects with real issues *today*, issues that young people care about, that will be more attractive to students. If we're actually loving our neighbors, if we're actually acting on climate, these things will attract more people to the faith, because they'll realize this faith is relevant to what I see.

Mission to Our Global Neighbors: Recognizing the Love of God for All People

According to 16 participants, green spiritual practices of simplicity are a small but practical way to show love to not just our local neighbors, but to our global neighbors, too, namely those who are affected by environmental degradation and inequitable corporate practices. Participant 2 identified the need for "rightly sharing" and creating an "equitable arrangement" as a reflection of "God's economy of abundance," where "there is enough for everyone." Participant 1 framed this mission as the need to "be cognizant of how we treat other people" and to ask ourselves if we would behave differently if the people being affected by our choices "were here, and we could see them" instead of "being in another country halfway across the world."

Participant 18 noted that a big shift in her environmental journey and her faith journey was when she discovered that climate change is a "social justice issue" and a

"threat multiplier" that "makes so many social justice issues worse." Participant 5 pointed out that those with privilege have a responsibility to love our current neighbors around the globe, but also the future inhabitants of the earth: "They're still our neighbor; just distant and many-years-off neighbor," she said. She identified her spiritual practice—reducing food waste—as a way to "not be so focused on ourselves," but rather as a way to pay attention to how "our choices impact others." Participant 4 emphasized that "we have a moral obligation as Christians to care" that unsustainable use of resources "impacts the poor and the most vulnerable first and hardest." While people in wealthy countries like the U.S. may experience some hotter days, climate change will not affect Americans the way it is affecting people in poorer countries:

> So realizing that there's a lot of inequity and injustice in the fact that this is happening and who it is impacting. … Climate change harms my neighbors. It hurts the least of these. The people that we're called specifically by the Bible to love and to protect, climate change directly impacts. … Caring for the environment is both biblically sound *inherently*, coming from calls in Scripture to care for God's creation directly, but also indirectly in the sense that when we care for the earth, we care for the people, particularly the most vulnerable.

However, she also noted that while green spiritual practices of simplicity are a start on the individual level, it is important to also advocate politically and systemically for change so that those practices are accessible for more people: "It's a witness opportunity [to the world] that people don't realize." Participant 3 echoed similar reasoning for caring for the environment:

> Some of our practices of *not* taking care of the earth, harm not only the earth, but they harm other people. When we harm the earth, the people that are most vulnerable are the ones that are impacted by that more than others. And when you think about the cotton industry and the kinds of things that they're spraying on all those fields so that they can produce that cheap cotton to send to Old Navy so that they can make new clothes every six weeks, then the people that are drinking the water that that is going into are not the wealthy. They are people who are already

> in poverty and already do not have much of a voice and are already struggling, and they're the ones that are reaping the repercussions of some of these things.

She said she wears a uniform to "protest" the reality that Western clothing practices are "so harmful," both in the production and disposal process. Similarly, as a vegan, Participant 6 said that her green spiritual practice of simplicity is a way for her to step out of the "food systems in the world" that are "a major contributor to climate change," because the people who are most affected by climate change "are those who are around the world from us who I will never meet. People in small, usually indigenous island communities whose entire livelihood is sinking."

Participant 8 also said that his clothing choices are a way to reject unjust corporations. He was less hopeful that his green spiritual practices are meaningful acts of love toward "our neighbors in the Global South," but he said his practices have opened his eyes to the need for Jesus-followers to be ready to welcome climate refugees into our communities and churches. Unlike Participant 8, Participant 10 said Covid was helpful in teaching her how even one person's small actions impact "the disenfranchised": "We will live and die at the hands of one another," she said "You can run from it; you can deny it, … but we're stewards of each other. You can't really escape that. … So let's do it well. Let's do it with care for one another, and let's do it with care for creation."

Participant 11 and Participant 15 addressed the important reality of environmental racism. Participant 11 said environmental racism is directly relevant to his community and to the communities and places that his local neighbors care about around the world, "so when we start talking about the justice of God, making things right, repairing,

bringing God's kin-dom into fruition, it has to include the environment."[676] Participant 15 said that her adopted children are Hispanic, which has opened her eyes, as a White woman, to "these systems that make it difficult for families to take care of their own children and that separate children from parents. What is our role in that? [I want] to be not-super comfortable and content with our privileged position."

Secondary Theme: Showing Solidarity

Two of the participants expanded the mission to our global neighbors beyond showing love and care *for* them, and said that it is also a way to stand in *solidarity with* those who suffer around the world.[677] Participant 11 said that his spiritual practices of simplicity help him feel solidarity with "the previous four generations of my family" and "the simple lives that my family's had for so long," not by choice but because of their circumstances. He also experiences his green spiritual practices of simplicity as a way to stand in solidarity with Jesus in the same way that Jesus stood in solidarity with the poor:

> I look at the narrative of Jesus and the folks that were following him, walking with him, and they were folks who were not wealthy, not economically well-off. Even when you read folks like Paul, some of the biggest challenges they had were folks-with-a-lot not knowing how to be in relationship with folks-with-not-a-lot.

[676] *Kin-dom*, or as it is sometimes formatted, *kindom*, is an alternative to *kingdom* that some theologians use to highlight how different God's reign is from the reign of human rulers. Instead of being characterized by dominance, hierarchy, and power struggles, God's kin-dom is about peace, mutuality, gentleness, love, and self-sacrifice. The term seems to have originated with Cuban-American theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz, inspired by her friend, Franciscan nun Georgene Wilson. See, for example, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha / In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 53; Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 103, 125, 166. Nicola Slee, *Abba Amma: Improvisations on the Lord's Prayer* (London: Canterbury Press, 2022), 10 offers an example of using the term in poetry and prayer.

[677] In the Bible, the most vulnerable groups are "the quartet of the vulnerable": the poor, the foreigner residing within your borders, the orphan, and the widow. The quartet is mentioned in portions throughout the Hebrew Bible, but Zechariah 7:9-10a gives the quartet in whole: "This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor.'" See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 79-80. When being missional to our global neighbors and showing solidarity with those who suffer, the most vulnerable on the planet is what these participants had in mind.

> And the secret sauce of those communities that were thriving were the ones who figured that out; most times, they didn't, or they couldn't. And so, for me, I'm convinced that we don't get progress in our world if it is not folks who are disenfranchised and marginalized and oppressed by poverty being at the center of what we're building and what we're doing. … There's a scholar, Joy James, that I really appreciate. She has this phrase that "if we don't share in material precarity with those in the working class, we can never be in any sort of solidarity."[678] And so for us, simplicity is a way in which you can remain attentive; it does not get us to material precarity or material solidarity with our neighbors who are economically disadvantaged, but it helps us attend to those things that are creating that distance. It's a practice that draws us to that awareness, and to realize that the act of donating and giving away doesn't bring us closer in relationship. It's a good thing to do, and we ought to do it, but authentic solidarity is not built off of giving stuff away; there's some active steps we have to take to live a particular way that puts us in solidarity, proximity, and not just like, "I'm going to inconvenience myself by living in this neighborhood, and then making these other choices to create distance."[679]

As alluded to at the end of that block quote, he acknowledged that while it is a Christian necessity to connect with the poor and the vulnerable, there is a fine line between creating solidarity and being patronizing. He said one way to show solidarity in a positive way is to use shared, public spaces, like parks.

Participant 2 said his practices of simplicity help him better advocate for and be in solidarity with: our "global neighbors who are on the frontlines of climate change"; our neighbors in the southeastern region of the United States, who are also on the frontlines of combating climate change; and nonhuman creatures, as well: "[I recognize] how nonhuman creatures are also impacted by all of the modes of violence that come through [the climate crisis]. … In the same sense that I feel solidarity with global neighbors, I feel solidarity with non-human creatures."

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[678] I was unable to verify this quote.

[679] For more on solidarity in liberationist theology, see Sarah Azaransky, "Liberationist Thought," in *The Spirit of Sustainability*, vol. 1, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, eds. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 269.

Mission to Creation: Testifying That the Good News Is Good for *All*

Including all creation in the mission of God to bring redemption and restoration of all things is an important facet of green spiritual practices of simplicity, according to 13 participants.[680] Participant 20 succinctly rooted it in the reality of God as the Creator of all things: "He created creation; he created us; he put Adam and Eve to tend the garden. We need to take care of creation." Participant 2 added that seeing and experiencing the world *as creation* is "actually really countercultural," because it intertwines humans with the world and recognizes "that justice for the non-human world is inextricably connected with justice for humanity." Thus, he identified humanity's vocation as an extension of God's mission to protect and restore creation:

> We are protecting that which we revere in God's creation; we are protecting the beautiful pieces of creation that God has created, that sustain life, and through which we see God, and [we are] trusting that these are treasures, these are gifts that are worth protecting. … We are working to restore: to create heaven on earth, as it were, and working and hoping that by God's grace, *all* will be restored, and that this planet is good, and that God's home is among mortals, and that this will be restored and will come to reside in the goodness of God.

Participant 12 added that when we view the Earth "as an intentional gift from God and something that God made for us out of love," then it is impossible to disrespect it without disrespecting God. In the same way that God is missional to us *through* creation, we are called to be missional to creation in turn: "This life is important, too, and it's not a hurdle I have to jump over to get to heaven," she said. "God wants me to experience love and joy and beauty here, and Earth is part of that."

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[680] For more on the inclusion of the world in missionality, see Claiborne and Campolo, *Red-Letter Revolution*, 97-99.

Ten of the participants framed their understanding of the mission to creation as stewardship. Participant 10 and Participant 11 said that we need to reject the abusive framework of dominion as hierarchy and instead treat the call to stewardship as an invitation to show compassion. Six participants said that their spiritual practices of simplicity are a way to steward their resources well, as a sign of respect to God as the Creator and Provider of all things. Participant 14 added that we need to not just be good stewards, but also to teach others how to be good stewards:

> [Education about where things come from] is important because what we're actually doing is we're teaching everyone to be good stewards. That is the linchpin. What you take off the supermarket shelf today has to have gone through a whole bunch of processes, and the blood, the sweat, the tears that go into that final product. … If I don't actually understand the time that goes into something, I won't cherish it; I will take advantage of it. By teaching us those important things, those life skills of knowing that you have to wait for the seed to sprout; you have to wait for the cow to be a certain age; you have to wait for all of these other things. It's teaching us patience. And it's teaching us those life skills of knowing where it actually comes from. Because then that gives us kindness. It gives us that accountability to understand that's why it's important.

Participant 8 expanded the notion of stewardship beyond caring for things and added that an element of stewardship is the call to co-create spaces with God where even more life can flourish, which he believes brings together the end goal of the good news for all creation:

> God planted a *garden*, and then after Cain kills Abel, [Cain] builds the first *city* and the tower of Babel. So cities are this thing that *humans* create; the garden is this thing that *God* creates. But then you have the New Jerusalem, and it's this *garden city*. It's a city, but there's the trees and the river flowing through it, and it's this co-creation of [humanity] with God, nature and human going together. … So creating a pocket of that on *my* soil is pretty freakin' cool.

Coming Full Circle to Human Oneness with Creation

However, as nine participants noted, being missional toward creation is not to be missional to something apart from us; humans are creatures, too, and inseparable from creation. Missionality to creation is also missionality to ourselves and our neighbors; all of it is connected. Participant 4, Participant 8, and Participant 13 rooted human interconnectedness with creation in the Christian belief that the *adam*, the first human, was created from the *adamah*, the humus (the soil).[681] Participant 13 said that her green spiritual practices of simplicity have helped her notice and experience this interconnectedness with creation:

> Humans are creation. We are a part of creation. … Nature is occurring and there are micro-ecosystems all around us: on our skin, on our computers, and then bigger things, like the tree that's on the side of the highway. Especially in our cities, and especially in this day and age, it's really tempting to believe that we are apart from nature and that we have to go find nature, but it is actually really impactful for me to stop and remember where I am: This is the land I am a part of. This is this ecosystem I am a part of, and I'm going to be more conscious of life existing around me, and myself actually being a part of life existing. … Another piece has been relating to the plants and the wildlife: I am of you; you and I are made from the same Creator; we were both told to flourish and multiply. … And when I flourish, you flourish, and when you flourish, I flourish. There's an interconnection here. Everything is integrated; you cannot remove humans from their environments, and humans still flourish. … It's when we reject our humanity that we break our relationship with creation and each other and God.

Participant 6, Participant 12, and Participant 10 said that their green spiritual practices of simplicity have helped them embrace their shared physicality and communion with the rest of creation. For Participant 6, she has moved away from an individualistic faith in which "God loves *me*" most importantly, to a faith that sees God's love for all people and for "everything," from the birds to the worms to the dirt. Participant 12 and Participant 10

[681] For more on humans' relationship with the soil, see Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 314, and Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 21.

said that they used to believe that the whole Earth would vanish and human souls would live in eternity with God in a disembodied heaven, but their green spiritual practices of simplicity—as one part of their spiritual maturation—have taught them to see, in the words of Participant 10, "God in the physical things," including the "created order," humans, and all that humans have made.

Principles for Green Spiritual Practices of Simplicity

The following five principles inadvertently arose from the interviews as practical tips for people who are interested in green spiritual practices of simplicity. These principles came up organically among all 20 of the participants as they talked about the practices they are passionate about. I have synthesized these five principles as: (1) talk about it; (2) embrace conviction, not shame; (3) trust it matters; (4) go it together; and (5) prepare to continue the journey. These principles will be helpful as we consider the relevance of green spiritual practices of simplicity for followers of Jesus, for emerging adults, and for the churches that want to be more accessible to emerging adults and to help people connect their spiritual and environmental commitments.

1) Talk about It

A quarter, or five, of the participants said that despite hesitations they may experience, it is valuable to talk about green spiritual practices of simplicity, because more often than not, it will be a blessing to someone else, not an imposition. Participant 9 and Participant 10 said that they would not have implemented green spiritual practices of simplicity if it was not for others talking about creation care and how they respect the environment with their practices. Participant 10 said that hearing about other people

"taking their own paths" and "sharing their knowledge" makes her "eager" to share her own practices that help her "experience and know and love the idea that Jesus is returning here, and God is making things perfect here, and what that will be like." She added that in the midst of her practices, she is careful to avoid legalism.

Similarly, Participant 4 said she values sharing her practices, but is careful to avoid judgment. Instead, she focuses on how she experiences these practices as "really life-giving," since a lot of people wrongly assume that green practices or simplicity practices "take [things] away from you." She added that another reason it is valuable to share green spiritual practices of simplicity is because it can help others—who might feel isolated in churches that are silent about or hostile toward environmentalism—to feel less alone:

> Something that's fairly common that I hear is, "I thought I was the only one [who cared about the environment]," particularly for students who've grown up in conservative churches, thinking that this isn't something that they can talk about; it's not something that the older people at church care about. That's not often not true; there often *are* older people at church who care about it. But because so many people feel like they're the only one, [I want to] open up the conversation within the church.

To accomplish that task, she referenced tips from Katharine Hayhoe, who helps conservative Christians care about climate change and environmental degradation: "What are your shared values? And how can you talk about those, and what the issue is, but also what the solutions are?"[682]

[682] For more tips on how to talk about climate change and what followers of Jesus can and should do about it, see Hayhoe, *Saving Us*, 77-83, 133-136, 189-197.

2) Embrace Conviction, Not Shame

Eight participants said that as they implement, expand, and talk about their green spiritual practices of simplicity, it is important to be rooted in their *convictions* and to dispel any hints of *shame* at two levels: (1) in the way we live our own practices, and (2) in the way we invite others into green spiritual practices.[683] Participant 7 said that since she has been on both sides of environmental extremism (denial and obsession), she recognizes that she is only human, which keeps her accountable not to judge herself or others harshly. Participant 12 said she went through a phase at the beginning of her environmental journey when she was ashamed about *everything*—"you can't do this; you can't do that; you have to do this"—but she learned to be forgiving and patient with herself, and even to make exceptions to her own boundaries when necessary. Now, her new mantra is: "The best you can do is your best."

Participant 3 recognized that she and every other individual are "a product of the culture," which means there are plenty of things to distract us from our convictions. Furthermore:

> We are set up to fail in everything that we do, from the thousands of advertisements we see on a daily basis that are targeted directly at who we are and what we want, to all the cultural messages that we're getting about, well, you have to look this way in order to get ahead or to be taken seriously or whatever. That's a lot to overcome. For myself, I try to hold that with open hands and be aware of those things but not beat myself up about those things.

[683] This is a definition of shame from the shame expert, Brené Brown: "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." See Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Avery, 2015), 69. If we use shame to get people to care about creation, they will only feel less worthy and more distant from the land. Instead of being the impetus for change, shame further separates us from God's creation and entrenches us in beliefs and practices that continue to harm the Earth and humanity. See Hayhoe, *Saving Us*, 80-82. For more on the effects of shame on spirituality broadly, see Fabian, *Holy Vulnerability*, 24, 37-38.

Knowing that making truly eco-conscious choices is an uphill battle also makes her sensitive to not shame others. She said she never wants to come across as prideful or prescriptive, since different practices might fit different personalities and lifestyles.

Participant 16 similarly said that she never wants her passion for green spirituality to turn into a "superiority complex" in the way she treats others. Participant 15 and Participant 4 said that, sometimes, other people receive their own practices as shaming others, even when they don't intend it. Participant 4 put it this way:

> Sometimes these practices, I think, unintentionally make people feel guilty, which I never want to be the case. Someone will get something with a plastic straw and be like, "I'm so sorry." I'm like, "You are not the one killing the turtles; I promise you." It's important that we all do our piece, but also, you can't feel guilty about everything, or else we'll all implode. That's my simplistic way of saying it with my students who talk about systems, and how we change systems, so that it's easier to be a good environmental player within that system, instead of having to fight against the current.

Participant 11 said that, with both their children and themselves, he and his spouse try to focus on the *joy* of their convictions rather than on shame, fear, or legalism.

> My hope is that we can have a type of spirituality that is vibrant, exciting, inviting. … Our kids are going to grow up in a context where they're likely going to be the only people not eating meat. And we have to be prepared for the day that our daughter comes home and says, "I had some ribs today." I don't want to hold that spiritual commitment with such rigidness to where they feel like they have failed us or they've let us down. But [instead] there's flexibility there, and there's agency there. … I want there to be enough grace for my lack of continuity of my own spiritual commitments to be present for that, because there are so many ways in which I am not yet fully embodying the truths that *I* believe in. … So I want there to be grace for [my kids], the same way that I hope and aspire for grace for me.

3) Trust It Matters

It can often feel like a small and simple act does not or will not matter, but 75 percent of the participants, 15 of them, insisted that it does—in more and deeper ways

than we can often see on the surface.[684] Based on the number of participants who noted this principle and how it informed their own practices, it is the most important principle for implementing and observing green spiritual practices of simplicity, and the focal point for all the other principles.[685]

Nine participants said that every small choice adds up to a very large contribution, like how a large body of water is made up of countless drops. Though they recognized the need for systemic change, they said the actions of individuals and households matter, too, and that is a major motivator for their green spiritual practices of simplicity. Participant 19 noted that it is easy to be disillusioned that our choices *don't* matter, because our economic system was designed to keep us from seeing the consequences of our own actions:

> It's hard to see the effects of me eating something I grew rather than something that somebody who was exploited grew for me. … Sometimes, it's easy to maybe want to give up, but I always try to be mindful of those workers, and going to the grocery store, mindful of every item I pick: Who grew this? Were they paid fairly? How much pesticides were sprayed? Was the earth cared for? And trying as best I can to make sustainable choices. But it's all invisible. That's the magic of capitalism. They don't want you to see the effects of your choices. And so I

[684] For a detailed exploration of why green practices matter, see Michael Pollan, "Why Bother?" in *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*, ed. Paul Hawken (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 52-53. Richard Foster in *Freedom of Simplicity*, also has a section called "How Can I Help?" in which he encourages followers of Jesus to trust that even our small actions matter. See Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 182. See also Dhiman, "The Case for Eco-Spirituality," 3-5 for an exploration of the importance and impact of profound spiritual transformation within individuals and local communities.

[685] Hayhoe and Farley insist that small, individual choices matter to the climate crisis: using less of everything matters; changing a few lightbulbs to be more energy efficient matters; researching before making major purchases matters; how we eat and shop matters. See Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 142-148. No earnest Jesus-follower would say, "Why bother being kind to this stranger? Plenty of other people will be cruel to them in their life; I may as well be cruel, too." Nor would any earnest Jesus-follower say, "Why not indulge in this one sin one time? It doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things." Indeed, plenty of plastic bottles will end up in the ocean—but *this one* won't, and over the course of a long life, *many won't*. Our spiritual formation matters.

> don't see the effects necessarily of my *better* choices. So I need to keep reminding myself of the people behind the food.[686]

These participants also believed that observing their practices also serve as a witness and teachable moment for others, so that hopefully the practices can add up to create change. Participant 6 put it most succinctly:

> I'm hopeful that my tiny, small contribution helps in some way. But it's very easy to get pulled into skepticism about that, and be like, "Well, I'm one person. How much change does it really make?" That's where I bring faith back into it again, that even if my decisions as one person don't change the world and don't fix everything for everyone, I'd still rather be making what I view as the right decision. And hopefully, if I can live a faithful example, more and more people will make a decision—not necessarily my same decision, but will make greener and greener decisions. And then hopefully all that stacks together will make an impact on those people we never meet.

Participant 8 said that he is "black-pilled on the climate question," meaning he doesn't believe governments, corporations, or individuals will make meaningful changes until it's too late and the climate crisis forces their hand, but he said his practices still matter simply because they are the right and moral thing to do: "Christ says in one of the Gospels about giving a cold cup of water to the least of these; just a simple action like that matters. … It's just something I do that I think other people should do, but I don't think most people will." He recognized that some people are more hopeful than he is about the climate crisis, and that his attitude may even be counterproductive.

Five participants said that their green spiritual practices of simplicity are less about how their practices will *practically* contribute to restoring the health of the Earth, and more about how their practices form and transform *themselves*. Participant 16 said that she thinks individual choices matter, but that's not her main motivation for her

[686] See Claiborne and Campolo, *Red-Letter Revolution*, 104, for a comparison of the impact of gardening to Jesus' parable of the mustard seed.

practices. While she doesn't necessarily believe that every piece of plastic will make a difference, she thinks that *the mindset* that a piece of plastic doesn't matter *does* make a difference:

> At the end of my life, God's not going to … sit there and be like, "How many plastic bottles did you save?" but he *will* be like, "I gave you a job. Did you do it to the best of your ability?" And I need to be able to say, "Yes." So at the end of the day, I want the impact, but the impact to me is less important than: Did I do my job to the best of my ability? Did I honor what I was supposed to? And was I a good example to my nieces?

Participant 10 said she thinks it is defeatist and unfaithful when people say things like, "I can't solve [all of] it, so I'm not gonna do *anything*." Indeed, she said she is always pleasantly surprised when she measures her carbon footprint using online tools and finds that not eating meat and living in a small apartment makes a small but "kind of remarkable" difference. However, for her, she observes her practices not because she thinks it will change the world, but "with a heart for something else": her conviction that she is a citizen of the kingdom of God.

Participant 3 said her practices are "like prayer," because by making intentional green and simple choices, she is "holding in my heart" the suffering and brokenness in creation. However, she said there is another layer in which her practices are like prayer:

> I have come to a place in my faith where I'm not sure what prayer does. … I do believe in a God that wants to hear from us, but I think that prayer, even if it never helps the person that I'm praying for, it's helping *me*; it's shaping me; it's doing something in me, helping me become the person that I want to be in relationship with God. It's helping me be more honest with myself. It's making me more aware of other people and helping me empathize with other people. It's allowing me to lament to God and draw near to God in moments of crisis. And I think this is the same thing. I'm not going to give up this practice because it's not hardly a drop in the bucket, but because it is shaping and forming me.

Participant 2 said that his practices are a way of "rendering my heart":

> I think that's something that people of faith bring to climate advocacy, actually, is a recognition that what we do personally matters, even if we can't account for it in a quantitative sense: When we are personally transformed then we can also be agents of transformation in the world. … I think one response [from people] is: Why waste your time engaging in individual action? I think there's a validity there, because fossil fuel industries have intentionally tried to narrate climate change as an individual problem. So I think fighting against that narrative is important. But what's lost is the ways that we can be personally transformed and rooted for the work of social transformation and ecological restoration that we need. … We need action at the international and governmental scale, and we need a transformation of the heart.[687]

4) Go It Together

Like with all expressions of faith, six participants said, it is difficult to sustain green spiritual practices of simplicity when we are isolated, and it is more joyful and enriching when we observe practices in community. Participant 1 and Participant 14 said they know this is true, specifically because they do *not* have a community of support. Participant 1 said that causes her to feel "alienated," because she knows there are "deeper relationships to be had, when you're not so focused on societal norms on consuming." Participant 14 said, where she lives, there is a "stigma" around environmentally conscious practices, and many people still consider them "hippy," which is not only lonely, but practically makes it more difficult to observe sustainable practices because the infrastructure is not as readily available.

Participant 9 and Participant 20 said that their move from more individualistic communities to more communal communities has helped them lean into both their faith commitments and their environmental commitments. Participant 10 said her family and friends who practice her specific practice with her are especially important for keeping

[687] For more on the connection between individuals, households, communities, and societies, see Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 183.

her accountable: “It makes life easier; it makes the practice easier. It’s a good little metaphor for faith in community, just having those safe spots where you’re encouraged, reminded, and where it just happens more naturally,” she said. Participant 19 added that, while he is in a supportive neighborhood and congregation for his practices, he aspires to join an “intentional community” of some kind some day:[688]

> I think so many things in my life are calling me more and more in that direction. … This small family-farm model that we’ve lived with, basically since feudalism fell apart in medieval times, is just really unsustainable, and it’s always been unsustainable. It’s always depended on taking land from other people and going into debt, and then you get these farms led by one person, who doesn’t have all the skills needed for farming. [An intentional community would be] these big, team, collaborative farms, where it’s many people involved, and not one person owns the whole thing. Everyone can buy in, and everyone has different skills that they contribute to the farm, and all the many skills that are needed to run a farm well. … Until recently, [parenting] did not take place within just a nuclear family. It always took place within extended family networks, within village networks. Kids are meant to be raised by more than just their parents. All the different simplicity practices could be *so much easier* if we lived in communities. … I think it just makes living simply in the world so much easier. I also have come to believe that that’s also a central part of Jesus’ message [of what] he envisioned for his followers: living in small, intentional community with one another, like they described in the book of Acts. And I think that’s what Jesus also meant by the verse about giving up land and fields, and in exchange, you'll get 100 times land and fields, and I think Jesus was literal about that, that you’ll give up your small, individual possessions and join into this greater community of shared goods and care for one another.

5) Prepare to Continue the Journey

Six participants said that as their green spiritual practices of simplicity have blessed their lives, it has made them want to seek out and implement more practices. Four participants said that the practical benefits, primarily, have encouraged them to discover

[688] For more details about intentional communities and their connections to simplicity, see A. Whitney Sanford, *Living Sustainably: What Intentional Communities Can Teach Us about Democracy, Simplicity, and Nonviolence* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 1-11, 21-30, 92-112, 131-132, 162-177)

how they can do more. Participant 6 says her practice of being vegan has made her more adventurous and flexible, because, "Having already jumped off the cliff, so to speak, into something that people think is really difficult, [it] sets me up to take on other things, or at least try them out." Participant 14 said that her practices, in the long run, have saved her a lot of money, which helps keep her on track and motivates her to seek out new green spiritual practices of simplicity. Participant 20 said that he values efficiency, and as green choices continue to become more convenient, accessible, and affordable, he is hopeful that he—and many others—will be motivated to continue pursuing an integration of their faith and environmental commitments.

Two participants said they were encouraged to keep going because of the growth and transformation they have experienced. Participant 7 said that the "snowball effect" prompts her and others to continue implementing more green practices as they experience God transforming them through their practices.[689] Participant 12 said that she aspires to continue implementing green practices. She said that as "intentionality has seeped into all other areas of my life," then she can "expend more energy in other areas. Or maybe God reveals another area to me that is something I can do."[690]

[689] See Hayhoe, *Saving Us*, 229-231 for an exploration of how starting and continuing the environmental journey is rooted in the reality of Christian hope.

[690] For an exploration of how our "conscious-raising," in individuals and among communities, further expands our consciousness and leads us into greater flourishing as a byproduct of sustainability, see Dennis Heaton, "Higher Consciousness for Sustainability-as-Flourishing," *Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches*, eds. Joan Marques and Satinder Dhiman (New York City: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 122-123, 129, 136-137.

Conclusion

As the thematic analysis of the interviews with the 20 participants, this chapter is the heart of this project's study. These themes of spiritual formation and missional participation, as well as the five principles that the participants offered to those who may be contemplating or beginning the journey of incorporating green spiritual practices of simplicity, are at the core of this project's relevance and importance. In the next chapter, I review some of the major practical takeaways and implications from this study based on this thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Interpretation of Results and Conclusions

In this study, I sought to answer the question: How do green spiritual practices of simplicity provide opportunities for spiritual formation and missional participation, especially for emerging adults? First, I wanted to discover green spiritual practices of simplicity that emerging adults practice or that would be accessible to emerging adults. From the 20 interviews, five umbrella categories emerged, with 23 major practices, and several more specific ideas for implementation within some of those practices. These practices are detailed in Chapter 5.[691]

Nearly all of the practices could be adapted to any life stage or living circumstance. The beauty of compiling such a diversity of green spiritual practices of simplicity is that there is something for everyone. Of course, no one is able to do everything, so instead of hindering someone with guilt, the breadth of practices should encourage us that there is something small each of us can do as an act of worship to God and care for ourselves, others, and the earth. For example, someone who is not particularly interested in fashion may realize that they have the option to limit their wardrobe and dramatically reduce the time they spend shopping. However, someone who finds it life-giving to express themselves through clothing may find it particularly reasonable to cut back on food waste or reduce their plastic consumption.

Besides introducing new practices to individuals, these practices can also help us reframe what we might already be doing as an act of worship. For example, a college

[691] As I explore how these practices apply to emerging adults, I draw from the research on emerging adulthood that I synthesized at the beginning of Chapter 3.

student who lives in an on-campus dorm might find a new level of spiritual meaning in the reality that they get to walk to class each day instead of needing to commute by car. Alternatively, someone who is vegetarian because of health reasons or a dietary restriction can expand their attitude to experience their eating habits as a form of prayer and praise.

There may also be the opportunity for emerging adults to see what kinds of options are out there that they might want to plan to implement in the future. Statistically, it is normal for many emerging adults to not yet have kids, own a home, or feel settled in a long-term job. Some of the practices here can prompt questions for the future for them, such as: Do I want to have biological children or are there compelling spiritual and environmental reasons to opt not to reproduce? How can I prioritize a living situation where I can cultivate a garden or bike for errands? What would it look like to work somewhere with a culture that does not incentivize me to demonstrate success with material belongings? Rather than being intimidating, these kinds of questions can offer direction and guidance during a stage of life when emerging adults are exploring and revising their identities.

In all, all 23 of these practices are immediately accessible to emerging adults, can help emerging adults experience what they are already doing with more spiritual depth and richness, and/or could plant seeds of ideas for what an individual may want to prioritize as they make significant life decisions during and after emerging adulthood.

Through this study of the research question, I also wanted to explore how these green spiritual practices of simplicity shape the experiences and expressions of faith for those who observe them, especially as it relates to emerging adulthood. The thematic

analysis in Chapter 6 offers a robust overview of the many ways in which these practices form and transform participants. Ultimately, the participants revealed that their practices are meaningful to their spiritual formation *and* to the way they missionally participate in God's work in the world.

While the specific connection to emerging adults was only one theme among many in Chapter 6, many of the other themes are relevant to the lives of emerging adults. For example, there are many appropriate opportunities to be self-focused through green spiritual practices of simplicity—consider, for example, grounding or decluttering—which can help emerging adults experience a sense of peace in the midst of the instability that characterizes their stage of life. By simplifying our attention on God alone (as Jesus affirmed in the Sermon on the Mount), we can contribute to the lessening of anxiety that we know is prevalent among emerging adults and adolescents. The participants also reported that green spiritual practices of simplicity help them experience more integration within themselves, including a greater connection with their own bodies, tangible ways to live out their values and commitments, and more Christlike attitudes and behaviors. All of these are meaningful to people of faith of all ages, but considering the transitional nature of emerging adulthood, these themes are particularly relevant for cultivating a more solid sense of identity and calling.

Green spiritual practices of simplicity can also move us beyond self-focus and bring about a greater awareness to others. Emerging adults care deeply about justice. They generally recognize the significant challenges that their generation and future generations will face regarding climate change. However, the problems that need to be fixed can often feel overwhelming. Emerging adults do not necessarily need to be

convinced to care, but they do need practical tools to engage in ways that make sense in their life stage. Green spiritual practices of simplicity can give emerging adults a tangible way to participate in solutions in their ordinary, daily lives, while also helping them maintain a regular awareness for the global and local problems that need to be addressed and the vulnerable people of the world who could benefit, in particular, from neighborliness.

Furthermore, spirituality can add an important layer of depth and meaning to the justice concerns of emerging adults. Many emerging adults feel optimistic for the future, and doomsday messaging about the climate crisis can feel confusing, even when they are convinced of how pressing the problem is on a global scale. The hopefulness, transformation, and trust in God that are cultivated through green spiritual practices of simplicity can help emerging adults tap into a more positive—while still active and solutions-oriented—narrative around the climate crisis. Christian spirituality and theology, as explored in Chapter 2, has rich ethical and moral resources that can help root environmental concerns in a greater story and a larger community. This longevity and sustainability adds much-needed solidity in a transitional season of life.

Limitations

The interviews with the participants, in some ways, revealed far more depth in these green simple practices than I anticipated. One connection I was anticipating to be more explicit and robust, however, was how these practices could impact the spiritual and social experiences of emerging adults. The analysis above is a composite of what research tells us about emerging adults and the themes that emerged from the participants; it is not observations or conclusions that the participants made themselves.

One reason for this may have been a weakness in the questions I prepared and asked. Another reason may have been that I extended the age range too high; a quarter of the participants were 30 or older. If I had concentrated exclusively on those who are currently experiencing emerging adulthood, the data may have been more helpful, since the most meaningful content that emerged on that particular subject came from the younger participants, especially from the six participants in the 18-25 age range.

Another limitation of this study was the challenge of coherently bringing together a theological idea (creation care), a religious tradition (simplicity), and a sociological phenomenon (emerging adulthood). The study may have been stronger if I had not tried to apply green spiritual practices of simplicity specifically to emerging adults, but rather, left the participant range and the ministry implications broader. However, I was—and still am—interested in the specific application of these practices to the distinct phase of life of emerging adulthood, and I believe the challenge was worth it, especially considering my ministry career and current context.

Implications for Ministry

At the beginning of this study, I hypothesized that green spiritual practices of simplicity will help make individuals and communities more conscientious of their relationships to God, themselves, other people, and creation. Both in terms of spiritual formation and missional participation, all four of these relationships came up with both breadth and depth in the interviews. The participants indicated that their green spiritual practices of simplicity helped them experience a richer, fuller, healthier relationship with God, themselves, others, and the earth.

I also hypothesized that green spiritual practices of simplicity have the potential to be accessible and meaningful for: (1) followers of Jesus who want to include creation in their faith, regardless of their age or spiritual journey; (2) churches who want to model the centrality of God's redeeming love for all creation; and (3) faith communities who want to be hospitable and relevant to young people who are transitioning into adulthood.

The diverse denominational traditions, geographical regions, career fields, religious backgrounds, and life stages (within the 18-35 limit) represented by the participants demonstrated the potential for green spiritual practices of simplicity to be both accessible and meaningful for people of faith of all ages and in all phases of their spiritual journey. As noted above, there is at least one practice for everyone, and there is plenty of room for creativity. Green spiritual practices of simplicity are mutually enriching in the sense that a new practice can add a new dimension to one's spiritual life, and increased awareness of the spirituality inherent in ordinary practices can add a new dimension of meaning to practices that a Christian might already observe.

The practices that emerged, especially in combination with the biblical and theological foundations for simplicity and creation care presented in Chapter 2, could serve as a great resource for churches. While I examined practices done by individuals, the participants agreed that practices are both easier and more meaningful when practiced in a community, and many of them can be adjusted for communal life. A church could potentially use this project as a basis for a Bible class or small group study in which participants learn about how to meaningfully integrate their faith convictions, spiritual formation, and care for the environment through green spiritual practices of simplicity. Not only would this be spiritually enriching for congregants, but it would also be a small

step toward modeling the conviction that God cares for creation and that disciples of Jesus are likewise called to practice environmental justice. Hopefully, implementing or encouraging green spiritual practices of simplicity, either as a church community or among individuals, would be a first step—not a last step—in a church investing in finding sustainable solutions to the climate crises facing their local regions. Perhaps, however, simple green practices like these can help us reverse the toxic and, unfortunately, often-accurate narratives that surround Christians' care—or lack thereof—for God's creation.

Churches and other faith-affiliated organizations, like Christian colleges, may also be able to use this project specifically to be hospitable and relevant to emerging adults. We know that young people care about the climate crisis; we know that young people are experiencing transition and instability; we know that Christian ascetic traditions and practices of mindfulness and simplicity are interconnected resources for emotional intelligence, mental health, and spiritual resilience. These green spiritual practices of simplicity are one small entry point, not only for demonstrating care for emerging adults' holistic wellbeing, but also for embodying some of their most pressing concerns for the world they are inheriting. The five principles outlined at the end of Chapter 6 specifically can serve as a practical resource for individuals, churches, and other faith communities as they seek to try out or expand on green spiritual practices of simplicity.

Implications for Future Research

This study offers a solid foundation for understanding green spiritual practices of simplicity: these daily disciplines, which emerge from a commitment to the ways and teachings of Jesus, that help us focus our thoughts, attentions, and desires on God alone

so that we can experience oneness with ourselves, others, and creation holistically. However, there are many more facets of green spiritual practices of simplicity to explore. Following are a small handful of sample research questions along with suggestions for how to potentially approach them.

How does the consistent observation of a green spiritual practice of simplicity impact an emerging adult?[692] It would be interesting to gather a small cohort of emerging adults—perhaps a small group of random college students—and do long-term observation and data collection on how they experience transformation through observing a green spiritual practice of simplicity. There could be a pre-survey with the small group asking about creation care, environmental justice, simplicity, spiritual well-being, and maybe even mental health. Then, the researcher could introduce green spiritual practices from which the participants in the group can choose. Each person would choose one practice to implement for a set amount of time, like six or eight weeks. There would be weekly or biweekly check-ins with the researcher and the rest of the group, during which the participants would continue to learn about creation care, the climate crisis, Christian simplicity, and ascetic traditions—essentially the content covered in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this project, with some additional context for the climate crisis, instead of presuming knowledge. Each of these regular check-ins would serve as additional focus-group data, along with a post-survey immediately at the end of the series. The researcher could also do another survey 1-6 months after the end of the series for additional data.

[692] This research question could also be adapted to explore the impact on adolescents, immigrants, suburbanites—any demographic, not just those experiences pertaining to age or stage of life.

How does the communal observation of green spiritual practices of simplicity impact a church community? This study could look much like the one described in the preceding paragraph. This one, however, would be intentionally intergenerational with a group of people who attend church together, so they have been and will continue to be in community with each other before and after the study. The focus of this project would be less individualistic and more explicitly communal. It would be interesting to discover how, if at all, a community felt more unified by observing spiritual practices together, and how it helped the church better implement creation care into its congregational life. Along with a pre-survey, regular check-ins, and two post-surveys, this project could also do a broader post-survey 1-6 months after the series—with others in the congregation that were not a part of the small group study—to see whether the group's transformation extended beyond the immediate participants.

How do green spiritual practices of simplicity resonate with emerging adults compared to older folks? While generational categories are limited in their descriptive capacities, it would be interesting to do a comparative analysis between, say, Gen Z and Boomers as they experience and implement green spiritual practices of simplicity. This kind of project could be longitudinal, like the two described above, with two separate groups of people. Alternatively, a researcher could do a thematic analysis based on interviews with Gen Z participants and Boomer participants more like the methodology of this project. The goal would be to see how themes compare and contrast between the two groups, including their reasons for implementing green spiritual practices of simplicity, and the outcomes the two groups have seen emerge through their practices.

There are many more questions that could be explored, but these three questions are the ones that emerged as most interesting to me as I completed this project.

Conclusion

The process of developing, researching, and writing this project has made me a better scholar, a better person, and a better disciple of Jesus. I owe the most to the powerful, vulnerable stories of the 20 participants who offered their time and energy for this research. I came away from each interview floored by the thoughtfulness of each participant and filled with gratitude that people like them walk this earth as representatives of God's kingdom. Certainly, this project convicted me: I have already added some of their green spiritual practices of simplicity to the ones with which I started this project, and I have a rich list of ideas for future seasons of life.

Most of all, I conclude this Doctor of Ministry program full of hope. About halfway through working on this project, I became pregnant with our first child. I want to pass on a more equitable, flourishing world to this Little One. How much more does God love this child—and the rest of humanity? The Spirit of God creates, sustains, and adores this creation, and as the Spirit fills God's people with power and conviction, I am hopeful that healing will come. Restoration will ultimately prevail. *Shalom* is the end.

I am glad for the chance to be a tiny part of it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Text for Invitations to Participate in the Study

I am a Doctor of Ministry student looking for people to participate in my research about spiritual practices of simplicity that help us care for the earth. I am looking for individuals who: (a) identify as Gen Z or younger millennial (must be 18 or older), (b) live in the U.S., (c) identify as Protestant Christian with an active faith, and (d) have instituted at least one green practice of simplicity in their life. Some examples of these practices might include buying clothes exclusively secondhand, using only a dumbphone, eliminating the use of plastics, or practicing veganism, vegetarianism, or flexitarianism. However, if you practice something similar to any of these, I would love to hear about that, too! If you meet these criteria, and if you might be interested in sharing your experience with your green spiritual practice of simplicity, please reach out to the researcher, Falon Barton, at fabarton@mail.lipscomb.edu.

I am working on my Doctor of Ministry, and for my final dissertation project, I am looking for Christians who love God's creation and have discovered small practices for daily life that help them become aware of our responsibility and connection to the earth. I would love to interview people who have a regular habit of caring for creation—what I am calling a green practice of simplicity. Some examples of these practices might include buying clothes exclusively secondhand, using only a dumbphone, eliminating the use of plastics, or practicing veganism, vegetarianism, or flexitarianism. However, if another practice comes to your mind, I would love to hear about it! I am hoping to find committed Christians who have found creative ways to simplify their life, resist consumerism, and care for the earth in small but practical and meaningful ways. If this sparks your interest, or if you have a practice that you think might be relevant to my research, please reach out to me at fabarton@mail.lipscomb.edu.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

NEW EMBODIMENTS OF ANCIENT WISDOM: HOW GREEN PRACTICES OF SIMPLICITY CAN ENGAGE EMERGING ADULTS IN COMMUNAL FAITH AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating how green practices of simplicity (1) help Christians connect more deeply with God and (2) help Christians practice environmental justice. I, Falon Barton, a graduate student in the Hazelip School of Theology at Lipscomb University, am conducting this study under the supervision of Walter Surdacki, a faculty member in the College of Bible. I selected you as a possible participant in this research because you (a) are between the ages of 18 and 35, (b) identify as Protestant Christian with an active faith, and (c) have at least one green practice of simplicity. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to discover how green practices of simplicity (1) help Christians connect with God and (2) help Christians practice environmental justice. Approximately 10 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate, I will invite you to do a one-on-one interview with me over Zoom. During this interview, I will ask you about: (1) why you have a green practice of simplicity, (2) how you have been spiritually formed through the practice, and (3) how the practice has changed your engagement with creation and other people. This study will take approximately 90 minutes of your time.

Risks and Benefits:
The study has minimal risks. The primary possible discomfort is if a question reminds you of a challenging or traumatic experience in your life. This is unlikely to happen, and you may decline to answer any question or fully withdraw from the interview at any time.
The benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to reflect deeply about a meaningful part of your life, and as a result, others may implement your practice in their own lives.

Confidentiality:
I will keep all of your responses completely confidential. I will disclose any of your information that can be associated with you only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, I will not identify any participant, and only group data will be presented. The final project will code all of the names of participants, and I will share demographic information only as needed, detached from any identifiers that connect the participant to the description.
I will keep the research results on an encrypted cloud, and only my advisor and I will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by April 2023. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time; refusal to participate involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Lipscomb University in any way. I, as the researcher, also have the right to withdraw a participant from the study at any time.

New Information:
If during the course of this research study I learn about new findings that might influence your willingness to continue participating in the study, I will inform you of these findings.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Falon Barton, at 951-897-9201 or fabarton@mail.lipscomb.edu. You may ask me questions now or later. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may contact: (1) my faculty advisor, Walter Surdacki at 615-966-5787 or walter.surdacki@lipscomb.edu; (2) the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board at irb@lipscomb.edu; or (3) Dr. Justin Briggs, Chair of the Lipscomb IRB at justin.briggs@lipscomb.edu.
You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.
By signing this form, you agree to the following:
I consent to participate in this research study. I have read this form and understand what it means to participate in this study. I agree to be video and audio recorded for the purposes of interview transcription by the researcher.

Signature of Participant	Date
Signature of Researcher	Date

Appendix C: Multimedia Release Form

IRB RESEARCH STUDY MULTIMEDIA RELEASE

To be completed by the researcher	
Principal Investigator:	Falon Barton
Research Study:	New Embodiments of Ancient Wisdom: How Green Practices of Simplicity Can Engage Emerging Adults in Communal Faith and Environmental Justice
Type of Release (check all that apply):	☑ Audio ☐ Video ☐ Photo

To be completed by the research participant

Name of Participant: _____

In consideration for participating in the research study referenced above, I hereby grant to Lipscomb University ("Lipscomb"), and those acting pursuant to its authority, a non-exclusive, perpetual, worldwide, irrevocable license to record, use, reproduce, exhibit and distribute my presentation, likeness, voice, name and/or identity on a video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic, Internet or other medium without restrictions or limitations (the "Recordings") for the following purposes and uses (*please initial and check all of the following that apply*):

	Initials	☑	Recording Purpose
1.	_____	☐	The Recordings can be used for educational purposes, which means the researcher can use the Recordings to transcribe the interview for the purposes of their research.

I hereby agree to defend, hold harmless, indemnify, release and forever discharge Lipscomb and its trustees, officers, agents, representatives and employees from and against any and all liability, claims, actions, causes of actions and damages (including reasonable attorneys' fees) of any kind whatsoever in law and in equity, both past and present and whether known or unknown, arising out of or related to (a) the use of my name, likeness, identity, voice, photographic image, video graphic image and voice, and the Recordings, and (b) any personal, intellectual property (including copyright), proprietary or other rights that I may have in connection with any use of the Recordings. To the extent required, I hereby grant and assign to Lipscomb all copyright in the Recordings and any video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic or other medium utilized in connection therewith. I hereby acknowledge and agree that Lipscomb shall have exclusive ownership of the copyright and other proprietary and property rights in the Recordings. **I acknowledge and understand that my name will not be used in any publication.**

I have read and understood this Multimedia Release, am at least eighteen (18) years of age and fully competent, and execute the same as my own free will.

Signature: _____ Date: _____