

A family resource from

AWAKENING VOCATIONS

Living in
God's Economy

**A practical guide for
Christ-centered households
in tough economic times**

**Featuring Awakening Vocations'
Find-Choose-Share process,
plus "Writing Your Family Covenant"**

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Introduction

Jesus was really speaking the truth. What good is it, he asked, if you gain the whole world—everything your heart desires, everything your credit card can cover—if you destroy yourself in the process? (see Luke 9:25). What good, indeed?

We live in spiritually dangerous times. As national and world economies crumble—economies that never were built on a bedrock of justice and regard for the dignity of the person, the human community, and the natural world—they take with them jobs, homes, people's sense of self worth and their ability to provide for their families, and the health of our planet. And we are easily and understandably tempted to cave in to anxiety and fear.

But Jesus already has sternly warned us in advance: **“Do not be afraid.”** Why? Because anxiety and fear are great destroyers of the human spirit, ultimately persuading us to believe that, no matter how bad the storm, God is somehow not enough to see us through.

Economically, our world seems to be spinning out of control. Stock markets have plummeted, credit has vaporized for many; jobs, predictable income, and household stability seem to slip sideways and buckle under like tectonic plates. For several generations now, modern American culture has been formed in great part by a relentless “need for more.” It doesn't really matter what the “more” is—more clothes, more cars, more electronic gadgets; more credit cards, more house, more appetite for everything money can buy. We just can't seem to get enough.

Welcome to the *Land of the Upside Down*, a land of distorted values, misplaced priorities, and blindness to a moral vision of the human community and all creation that magnifies the dignity that flows from God. But there was a time, a long time ago, when things were not this way.

Life in the Land of the Upside Down began in Chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis, with our forebears' thirst for more knowledge, more power, more independence. It continues right up to our present generations, with a relentless thirst for, yes, more knowledge, more power, more independence. But in tough economic times, "thirsting for more" can become reduced to "scratching just to get by," scraping together enough to make ends meet.

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How much is enough? That's a good question. As members of Christian households within the larger American secular culture, you and I stand with one foot planted in the Land of the Upside Down, but we also have one foot eager to walk in the *Land of the Rightside Up*. Straddling these two worlds is an exhausting task, mainly because God's economy is built upon a language, a theology, an understanding quite unlike the world's market-driven economy which defines us as consumers and demands our full allegiance. *God's economy is an economy of justice, equity, respect for the human person and the created order*, an economy of delight and dignity and "just enough."

God's economy serves the well-being of humankind and all creation, quite the opposite of the world's economy which demands that people and creation be at the

service of endless economic expansion. The world's economy has become a massive, hungry machine, and human lives have been sacrificed as fuel to keep the beast going. The injustice of this monster economy is written on the unseen faces, hands, and souls of men, women, and children who toil to produce ever cheaper goods for our gnawing appetite for more stuff. Such massive human misery makes God weep.

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The Land of the Rightside Up is the reign of God. Jesus did not come to turn our world upside down. Humankind had accomplished that feat already. Rather, ***Jesus came uniquely and lovingly to restore our world to its original wholeness and dignity and purpose,*** so that all people can share abundantly in God's life and goodness. In the teaching, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost, the foundation has been firmly laid for this new reign of justice, mercy, creativity, and sheer blessing. God's economy is fully available to us.

But we have some tough choices to make, some habits of excess to break, some new attitudes to form around wealth, some new experiences to embrace of community and the common good. Now, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, ***the work of revealing the reign of God and the miracle of God's economy is up to us.*** We are the body of Christ on earth here and now, gifted by God for this awesome and urgent task.

This work of revealing the reign of God through just living and just economic practices is good news for households that are centered in Christ. We can stand against the swift current of excess. It takes courage—no doubt about it—to really listen to, absorb, understand, and act on Jesus' teaching about who the truly blessed ones are, how

they conduct their affairs, and how they relate to their neighbors and to God. In St. Matthew's Gospel we will read the Beatitudes and discover who is blest in the reign of God. St. Matthew's Gospel also tells us, in the Judgment of the Nations, some of Jesus' favorite disguises.

It takes great courage and loving persistence to form your family in the ways of Jesus. Children fall prey at an early age to subtle and sinister marketing schemes; they are surrounded by a culture of excess, a throw-away culture, a culture of trash. No doubt you could write the book on the high cost and sometimes seemingly low rewards of an intentional and consistent effort to form your family into a truly Christ-centered household. Yet that effort is worthy work for a supremely worthy purpose.

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Christ-centered households quietly take a stand against the current of excess. How? Through *daily* choices for a simpler, gentler, more balanced, more just way of life your family becomes a *prophetic witness* to the redeeming, restorative work of Jesus Christ in the midst of a “me-centered” world. Being a prophetic witness is often unpopular, uncomfortable, or downright inconvenient. But for Christ-centered households this prophetic stance is not optional, or something you might choose when it doesn't cost more. Sadly, even within our Christian communities, families that say “no” to excess and “yes” to a simpler, gentler, more intentionally just way of life can feel like outsiders. Jesus knew how terrible that rejection could feel.



Living in God's Economy clarifies the prophetic role of the Christian household, your “domestic church,” in the world. And it *offers a process* for your family members to move from excess toward a simpler, gentler, more intentional way of living for the sake of the Gospel. *Living in God's Economy* is *partly about living more simply at home, on the earth, and in the world*. More importantly, it addresses *issues of economic and social justice*—topics that have always been dear to God's heart—so that these issues can become dear to our hearts, foremost in our minds, and motivators in the social, economic, and environmental choices we make.

A simpler, Christ-centered way of living is not new. The early Church gave us models of communal life lived simply for the sake of the Gospel. However, putting God's economy into practice in your household can be a challenge. *No one else can do your household's part in building the reign of God here and now*. Each member of your family touches others' lives in a uniquely graced and gifted way which no one else can. As your household does its part to embrace God's economy and love more simply and more justly, hopefully others will be inspired to do the same. You are light, you know, and you are salt. You are the good seed planted in the field, meant to yield a good harvest.

Who Benefits From *Living in God's Economy*

Living simply, with a heart for intentional justice, in an overstimulated, complex, unruly world is a challenge to every Christian household, whether it is a household of one, a household with young children or teens, or the “empty nest” or retired household. So every element of the workbook, including prayers and reflection questions, seeks to offer support, insight, and encouragement for Christian households of every type.

While the tone of each session is designed for adults, teens, and children old enough to participate, the “*Food for Thought*” portion at the start of each session goes a little deeper into the issues covered in the session. These essays can also stand on their own, providing material for parish-based small faith-sharing or social action groups or

personal spiritual enrichment. Further, the “Food for Thought” essays can stimulate ideas for classroom teaching, workshops, retreats, and sermons.

Topics We Will Cover

Living Simply in God’s Economy is divided into four parts. In **Part One**, we will look at **the big picture**—the theological and spiritual framework for **understanding God’s view of economic justice**—as well as provide a **practical context for living more simply** and why that matters in Christian households. In Session 1 we will define terms like “economy,” “God’s economy,” and what it means to “live simply” in God’s economy. In Session 2 we will explore the prophetic role of Christ-centered households.

Then, in **Part Two** we will focus on **life “here at home.”** Session 3 explores “family matters” and offers ways to actually set priorities and define the nonnegotiables in your Christian family life. Session 4 offers practical ways to develop prayerful leadership and active participation in family life.

Next, in **Part Three**, we will explore a **process of family living** based on simplicity and economic justice. Sessions 5, 6, and 7 will walk your household through the **Find-Choose-Share process** to connect just and simple Christian living at home with “Gospel” living in the world and for the good of all creation.

Finally, in **Part Four**, you will give words to **your family’s commitment** to a just and simpler way of family life. Session 8 provides a step-by-step process to create your **Family Covenant** that expresses the unique identity and mission of your domestic church.

In the back of the workbook you will find worksheets for each session plus additional helpful tips and ideas to sustain your family’s process of living in God’s economy. All of the worksheets are yours to photocopy and use as often as you like.



How Each Session Works

Living in God's Economy is designed so that you can go at your own steady pace. The point is not to get through the workbook quickly. Instead, ***allow the process to form your household more purposely into a “domestic church,”*** where just and simple Christ-centered living becomes the focus of everything—from making purchases large and small to planning vacations, to your household's use of natural resources.

Each session will have a ***Session Leader*** and a ***Prayer Leader***. In your household this may be the same person. The Session Leader will prepare and lead family members through each session and guide the follow-up activities. The Prayer Leader will prayerfully review the session in advance, paying particular attention to how the selected Scripture speaks to the session content. And the Prayer Leader will lead family members through the session's opening prayer and closing prayer.

Each session offers a ***variety of activities*** with opportunities for plenty of input from everyone. Allow an hour or more per session. Mid-session breaks and healthy snacks or a fun family activity afterward can make the time fly.

Each session includes the following components:

- **BEFORE THE SESSION**
 - **Food for Thought:** A helpful background essay for the Session Leader and Prayer Leader that will provide context and stimulate ideas;
 - **What We Will Cover:** A quick snapshot of what the session contains;
 - **What You Will Need:** A list of helpful items for the session's activity.
- **DURING THE SESSION**
 - **A Quick Review:** (except in Session 1) To refresh participants' memory of what was covered in the preceding session;
 - **How Did We Do?** (except in Session 1) To get input from participants on how the preceding session's activity went;
 - **A Morsel of Scripture:** To provide a biblical context for the present session, plus conversation questions and a Scripture prayer;

- **Simple Living Lesson:** The core content of the session;
 - **Hands-On Activity:** The “action” part of the session that helps everyone to apply the lesson;
 - **Closing Prayer:** To keep hearts and minds with God;
 - **Next Date, Time, Leaders, and Assignments:** (except in Session 8) To build commitment for the next session.
- **AT THE END OF THE SESSION**
 - *Worksheets for the Hands-On Activity*, which are found in the back of the workbook. You may photocopy these sheets for your family’s use.

And note: You’re not finished with the hands-on activities until you have discussed the results in the next scheduled session! Why? Because *Living in God’s Economy* is not about getting through the workbook, but about *embracing a Christ-centered way of life* that guides every decision and every action within your household.



A Prayer Before We Start

Lord Jesus,
 you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
 Please give us reign-of-God hearts,
 reign-of-God eyes, and a reign-of-God imagination.
 May our whole household serve you with our whole heart,
 by awakening to your abundant goodness in our lives,
 awakening to the needs of others,
 and awakening to the goodness of living simply and justly
 for the good of all people and all creation.
 Make us your generous and loving presence
 in this world which your Father so loves.
 In your name we pray. Amen!

Part One

The Big Picture

[Jesus asked them,] “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.” “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.” Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Mark 8:19-21

In Part One, Session 1 highlights inherent injustices of a broken economic system based on personal independence rather than trust in God’s love and provision. It also explores the role of economic systems in God’s work of redemption, and introduces living on “just dollars.” We will also define some important words and phrases.

Session 2 offers a fresh understanding of the prophetic role of Christ-centered families in the world, especially in tough economic times.

Part Two

Here at Home

If you are unwilling to serve the Lord
choose this day whom you will serve. . . .
As for me and my household,
we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua 24:15

In Part Two, Session 3 explores family matters—how your household sets priorities and defines your “nonnegotiables” for Christian family life. Session 4 offers practical ways for your household to develop leadership and participation in a distinctly Christ-centered way of family life.



Part Three

Living in God's Economy

For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many,
are one body, so it is with Christ. . . .

Indeed the body does not consist of one member but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:12, 14

In Part Three, Sessions 5, 6, and 7 will walk your household through the simple process of actually living in God's economy. You will discover how to ***find*** the excess; ***choose*** a simpler way, and ***share*** with others.



Part Four

Putting It on Paper

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and gave it to them, saying,
“This is my body, which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”
And he did the same with the cup after supper,
saying, “This cup that is poured out for you
is the new covenant in my blood.”

Lk 22:19-20

In Part Four, Session 8 gives you a step-by-step process to create your own Family Covenant that expresses the unique identity and mission of your own domestic church.



If you have enjoyed *Living in God's Economy*, you might also enjoy these other resources from Mary Sharon Moore . . .

- *Touching the Reign of God: Bringing theological reflection to daily life*, a collection of essays that connect the deeper callings of Christian faith with the circumstances of your life. Includes study questions for individual use or small-group discussion (Wipf and Stock, 2009; ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-197-6). Available at www.awakeningvocations.com.
- *Awakening Vocations*, a dynamic one-day workshop on discerning God's calling in your life and why it matters. Includes questions for small-group discussion, plus steps for the discernment process. More information at www.awakeningvocations.com.
- *Spiritual and vocational direction* for individuals and couples, in person and by phone. Brochure at www.awakeningvocations.com.
- *Bread for the Soul* parish-based workshops and retreats to nurture the soul and strengthen commitment to living as a Christian in the world. Brochure at www.awakeningvocations.com.



MARY SHARON MOORE is an active writer, spiritual director, and teacher on topics of mature Christian faith and vocation discernment. She is founding director of Awakening Vocations, a ministry dedicated to making vocation discernment available to everyone.

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