

LIVING IN GOD'S ECONOMY

*A “domestic church” resource for Gospel living*

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## LIVING IN GOD'S ECONOMY

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## Introduction

Much has changed, or maybe not, since 2009, when *Living in God's Economy* was first published. The American economy continued to grind on, even if haltingly, when banks “too big to fail” imploded.

But presumably market logic prevailed. By many metrics, the American economy is pretty much back to “business as usual,” depending on your sources. And “business as usual” is very good for some. But for many households, the economy remains stubbornly, hopelessly grim.

God’s economy, thankfully, operates by a different logic, and measures success by a different metric, the metric of generosity and “just enough” so typical of Beatitude living in the reign of God.

As Pope Francis urges repeatedly in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* (“Care for Our Common Home”), humankind is meant to benefit from structures of economic and social life, rather than be enslaved by them. In the reign of God, the economy exists for the well-being of people, rather than people existing for the well-being of the economy.

“Work,” Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*, “should be the setting for ... rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God” (para. 127).

In his own time, Jesus was really speaking the truth for our time: *What good is it, he asks, if you gain the whole world—everything your heart desires, everything your credit card will cover—if you destroy yourself in the process?* (see Luke 9:25). What good, indeed?

***We live in spiritually dangerous times.*** Some nations' economies continue to crumble, while others continue to grow, though oftentimes at great expense to those with least voice, while reaping huge benefits for those who command great wealth and power.

We live in a world of masterfully crafted 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. Far too often monolithic global corporations deprive individuals, families, communities, and entire regions of jobs, homes, a rightful sense of dignity and worth, and the ability to engage in meaningful work and a worthy livelihood.

As the Psalmist says, “They eat up my people / as though they were eating bread” (Psalm 14).

But Jesus already has sternly warned us: “**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 somehow is not enough to see us through.

***Do our lifestyles contribute to the problem?*** For several generations now, modern American culture has been formed in great part by a relentless “need for more.” It does not really matter what the “more” is—more clothes, more cars, more electronic gadgets; more credit cards, more house, more appetite for everything that money can buy.

Whether we can financially afford it or not, we just cannot seem to get enough.

Tragically, not only do we individually and as a society pay the price for our outsized appetites. Earth's resources—air, water, land—pay the price, too.

Welcome to the *Land of the Upside Down*, a land of distorted values, misplaced priorities, and blindness to a moral vision of human community and all creation that bears a dignity that flows from God.

But there was a time, a long time ago, when things were not this way.

Genesis 1 tells us that life began “*rightside up*.” Everything that God created, including humankind, was good, and exceedingly good.

Life in the Land of the Upside Down began in Genesis 3, with our forebears’ thirst for more knowledge, more power, more independence. This “thirst for more” continues right up to the present generations, a relentless thirst for, yes, more knowledge, more power, more independence.

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In our upside down economy, “thirsting for more” can leave households constantly scraping together enough to pay one more round of credit card bills, mortgage or rent, car loans, medical bills, with hopefully something left over for food.

*How much is enough? That’s a good question.* As members of Christian households within a larger 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 an understanding quite unlike the world's. In a market-driven economy people are defined as consumers, and the market 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."*

What is this word "economy"? The word is rooted in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning "home."

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*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."*

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"Economy" means the prudent management of a household. Economy is the careful management of domestic wealth and resources. Economy means avoiding waste, through careful planning, use, and thrift.

"Ecology," very close in meaning to "economy," refers to the intricate workings of the home of living systems: the delicate and complex relationships between living things and their environment, relationships which depend on a balance which respects the dynamics of the entire system.

*God's economy* serves the well-being of humankind and all creation. And *God's ecology* defends the beauty and unique good of all living things as part of a dynamic whole—the universe, "our common home."

God's economy is quite the opposite of the world's economy, which demands that people and natural resources be at the service of endless economic expansion. The world's economy has become a massive, hungry machine, and human lives are sacrificed daily 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. They constitute the "throwaway societies" of which Pope Francis passionately speaks, and which we would rather not have to notice.

Such massive human misery makes God weep.

*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 life and teaching, the death and 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, and around blessed simplicity. And we have some new attitudes to form around community as Jesus imagines it, and the common good as God intends.

Now, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, *the work of revealing the reign of God and the lavish generosity 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 simpler living and just economic practices, is good news for households that are centered in Christ. We *can* stand against the swift current of excess. But 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 *Living in God's Economy* your household will discover, in the Beatitudes, who is blest in the reign of God. And you will discover, in the parable of the Judgment of the Nations, some of Jesus’ preferred disguises.

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*This work of revealing the reign of God, through simpler living and just economic practices, is good news for households that are centered in Christ.*

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***It takes great courage and loving persistence to form your household 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 built-in obsolescence.

No doubt you could write the book on the high cost and sometimes seemingly low returns on trying to form your family into a truly Christ-centered household. Yet that effort is worthy work for a supremely worthy purpose.

Christ-centered households quietly take a stand against the torrents of excess. How do they do this?

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 Christ Jesus in the midst of a “me-centered” world.

Being a prophetic witness is often unpopular, uncomfortable, and downright inconvenient. But for Christ-centered households this prophetic stance is not optional. Gospel living requires a certain holy “grit,” a persistent holy courage to blaze a simpler and more generous path.



*Living in God's Economy* not only clarifies *the prophetic role* of your “domestic church.” It also offers *a process* to move your household 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, with our sister, Mother Earth, and living more simply in the world.* More importantly, *Living in God's Economy* addresses *concerns of economic and social justice*—concerns that have always been dear to God's heart—so that they 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 community which lived simply for the sake of the Gospel. However, putting God's economy into practice in your own 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 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, Jesus says, and you are salt. Every member of your household is 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, and 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 provides a deeper context for 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 Christ-centered 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 living 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 this 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 for your household’s use.



### **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 might 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 of creation.  
 Make us your generous and loving presence  
 in this world which your Father so loves.  
 In your holy name we pray. Amen!

If you have enjoyed *Living in God's Economy*, you can read sample pages and order these other resources on the Store page of Mary Sharon's website (marysharonmoore.com) ...

- *Anointed for a Purpose: Confirmed for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (2012)
- *Conformed to Christ: Discoveries in the Christ-centered life* (2016)
- *Moving in God's Direction: Essentials of Christ-centered spiritual and vocational Direction* (2012)
- *Seven Last Words and Eight Words of Easter* (2013)
- *Touching the Reign of God: Bringing theological reflection to daily life* (2009)

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Mary Sharon welcomes your comments on how *Living in God's Economy* has helped your household. You may e-mail her your thoughts at [marysharonmoore@gmail.com](mailto:marysharonmoore@gmail.com).

For more information, or to schedule Mary Sharon for a *Living in God's Economy* workshop for your church or organization, please contact:

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*Honest talk on the nature of God's calling.*