



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 185

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## Segment One

Tsh: [00:02](#) This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

Hey friends! In this episode, we have got another in our series called My Good List, a little something we do every now and then, but on both the blog and podcast. We've got our usual new format here when an Art of Simple contributing writer and I talk about whatever it is we wrote about during the week, and that's still a thing. That's how we roll around here 99% of the time. But I just love our Good List chats so much, I don't want to completely get rid of them. In this one I'm talking to my friend Christie Purifoy. She is a former English professor, turned writer and gardener. If you're like me, 30 seconds into hearing her calming voice, you'll just want to pour yourself something warm, snuggle in with a blanket and just let her words wash over you. She has got a new book out called *Placemaker* and it's all about what it means to actually lean into your soul's desire for beauty and the need to create instead of stuffing or ignoring it.

And then why the cultivation of good and beautiful places isn't a retreat from the "real world," it's a response to it, an answer to it, a leaning in to something even realer. She is just fantastic. I know you'll love her. In this chat, Christie shares with us her good list, which if you remember is a thing, a habit, a work of art and a philosophy. And then in the third segment, Stephanie and I answer another one of your travel questions. Get excited about that. All right, let's get right to it. Here's Christie Purifoy talking about her good list.

Christie, I am really excited to talk to you because I just so admire your take on life. Your perspective, like your Instagram accounts is one of my favorites because of how beautiful your eye is on things. I think your good list here is going to be just exactly what I need in this kind of blah season where it's not quite winter and it's not quite spring. You just seem very spring to me.

Christie: I love that!

Tsh: I don't know why, but you just do. So, no pressure. We start off every good list with a thing. A thing big or small, it can be anything from an actual thing to some kind of digital thing. But what's something in your life right now that's just making you happy?

Christie: I have an actual thing. I love how you introduced it because I chose it for how beautiful it is. My thing is new. I actually gave it to my husband for Christmas. I've only been using it just through the winter and it's my new, pour over coffee set up. The brand is Hario V60, which I think is Japanese. The Japanese just do design so well and make really pretty things. What I love about it is that it's making my coffee every morning, but it's got this wooden stand and then the carafe is glass. It's super simple, but it's real natural materials. Every morning when I come down early to make my first cup of coffee, it's just a joy to use. It has definitely been cheering up these dark winter mornings.

Tsh: You have the wooden one, is that what you're saying?

Christie: [03:17](#) Yeah. Do you know pour over coffee? I don't know if that's what you drink or?

Tsh: I love pour over coffee and I'm actually looking up online right now as we are talking. Which one is it?

Christie: Sometimes those little cones fit in your cup. This one fits right into a wooden stand so we can sit out on your counter all the time. It's right there ready to use then you just slip your little paper filter into it. It's super simple and really pretty. Maybe I actually bought it as a Christmas gift for myself. I just told myself my husband would like it. I feel like that just makes coffee making, it brings it back to its essence but there's no plastic and plastic just makes me sad. I know we need some of it in our lives, but it's just a sad material to me. I love the natural materials of this one.

Tsh: That sounds very cool. One of the things I really love about pour over coffee is that it is a little bit slower. It's honestly not that much slower than just drip coffee or a French press or anything, but it's more like you have to work for your coffee, and I know that sounds like the last thing you want to do pre-coffee, but there's just something really rewarding about it.

Christie: You have to be involved. You have to pay attention as the water seeps through the grounds. You have to notice if it needs a little bit more. You have to open your eyes and pay attention, which, oh my goodness, there's a metaphor in that, right? If I could take the time to do that every morning with my coffee, maybe I'm off to a good start from my day.

Tsh: Right. No, I'm with you there. I think that's really very insightful and astute of you. And I'm not surprised. I think that feels like a very Christie Purifoy thing that's making you happy. Way to be on brand with yourself!

Christie: Yeah, it is on brand and beauty matters and I'm finally, now as I lean into my forties, I am just accepting that, embracing that. Beauty is not this extra thing. It's not the cherry on top. It's not the thing, oh if we have time or if there's space in the day, we could make some room for beauty. I feel like beauty is absolutely essential. I'm a beauty evangelist or something like let's get some more beautiful things in our lives.

Tsh: You and I talked about this before we hit record. I'm holding your new book right now. The thing that stood out to me first, because it came in the mail last night, this is pretty, but I don't mean pretty like, oh nice job designing the cover. But it actually has a feel to it. I love books like that. The texture of the cover, the part that describes the book, the way it's folded in. I should know these things. The way that the paper is and the way it's cut, it's pretty and lovely and it feels good to hold. There's something about the aesthetic of things that we tend to just value more, but we don't realize it until we've got it in our hand. This is a book I went to read carefully. You know what I mean?

Christie: That's true. You can hold a book without those things. Or you can read a book electronically on your digital device and not maybe even think about what you're missing. But when you feel the beauty, when you get to touch it and hold it and experience that, you realize this is good. Why am I content without this? Why don't I ask for more of this in my life? I was so happy that the folks at Zondervan really got the message of the book and they wanted to communicate that in every aspect of the design and the cover so pretty apparently. I learned this in the process. They call that that folded flap on the cover either a French fold or a gate fold. Then the pages that are roughed up like that on the edges, those are called deckled pages, which I just love. That sounds like a good word for it to be in a poem.

Tsh: That is a good word. I love it. That's your thing. And the second thing we talked about in our good list is a habit you've adopted. The word habit can be fraught with heaviness or emotion or a response. But we can mean anything from you deciding to go to bed 10 minutes earlier or having your coffee first thing in the morning or whatever it is. Our lives are filled with habits. It's just fun to talk about maybe one that you've recently adopted that's making your life happier. Do you have any habits that you're into right now?

Christie: I do. Here's what I picked up maybe six months ago. Actually, I feel like it was fall, back to school time for my kids. That's usually a time where everything gets reset in the day. It's a morning habit. I started getting up and setting a set time and always in the mornings I would try to have some time for spiritual things. Prayer or something like that. I feel like that's a habit that a lot of faithful people have. But the new aspect to this habit for me is taking at least 15 minutes or so in the morning to read a spiritual classic or spiritual book. It's not a prayer book.

It's not a devotional. I'm not having some sort of quiet time, exactly, but these are the books that have been sitting on my shelf for years and I've always been meaning to get around and read them and somehow I never quite get to them. These are my morning books and it's amazing. I've worked my way through half a dozen or so in the past a few months and it's just been incredible. Then I save the novels and the other kind of reading for the afternoon. This is my new thing and it's working out really well. It's one of those habits where it is such a good fit that I know I'm not going to have to fight to hold onto this one. This is just going to be my rest of my life habit.

Tsh: [09:04](#) That's very cool. What are some recent favorites of yours?

Christie: *The Inner Voice of Love*, by Henry Nowan and *Life of Prayer*. Those have been two really meaningful ones recently. There's a book I just read on centering prayer. I might have to look it up so we can stick it in the show notes. I might have a few more things to say about that during our conversation cause that's also been a great new habit of mine.

Tsh: That's cool. I want to talk about that in a second. We'll add whatever in the show notes so if anyone's listening and thinking I want to know these books, they'll be there. I am curious about this habit, thinking of the people listening, thinking that's great. I have hardly anytime in the morning. How do you carve out this time to start it? Is it after your kids go to school? Is it before anyone wakes up? Like what does that look like for you?

Christie: [09:50](#) It's actually been both. For a while I was really good at getting up before the kids, but that's a habit for me that comes and goes. Sometimes we just need more sleep. For a while, I was getting up at 5:45 and my 15 minutes would happen between 5:45 and 6:00 and my kids aren't up yet and then I could still be there for them for breakfast and heading to school and all of that. But then I got sick this winter and realized I just need a little bit more sleep. Then it became once everybody's on the bus and off to school, I'll sit down and do it then.

But you know what it's tied to? It's tied to that cup of coffee we were talking about earlier. Whether it's the first cup of coffee and it's first thing in the morning before the kids are up or then it's the second cup of coffee. Sometimes that's later in the morning. I almost feel like having it tied to rather than a particular time of day, but having it tied to some rhythm in the day, and for me that just happens to be the second cup of coffee. That's actually working out better than trying to stick to this exact perfect time. Now I share that to as someone who has four kids but my kids are all in school now. That's definitely changed things for me. My youngest started kindergarten this year. Now with all my kids away at school during the day, that second cup of coffee is usually a

quiet time of the day. I know that's not going to be true for everybody listening here.

Tsh: I think that's a good reminder for people that if your life doesn't look like this now, gosh, we talk about this all the time here, the idea of partial solutions, if it doesn't look like literally, a full 30 minutes of what you would love to do, which is read and slowly sip coffee, maybe it looks like five minutes for you or maybe it looks like in the evening or you know what I mean? It doesn't have to be literally your ideal situation. It can be whatever works in this particular season. We all know with kids, it goes by so fast that if you just wait or just work with what you have, before long, it will be a little bit more ideal.

Christie: Yeah. The fun thing I found is that even if I just read a page or two of whatever sort of classic spiritual text I'm working through, that's more than I was doing before. That feels really like a new good thing in my life and it makes me feel really productive. Even if I don't have a full 15 minutes for reading. Just working my way through a page, a page at a time, you're able to move through some books. Partial solutions, I love that.

Tsh: [12:15](#) That's a good point. The listeners know when I talk about books, one thing that I have decided starting this year, I used to think I was supposed to have some book reading goal because that's what people do. I'm going to read x number of books this year. When I realized, wait, wait, wait, I actually love to read and I will always be reading so that's not something I need to turn into a goal. I'm just going to read for the fun of it. I feel like that really releases me from any sort of should like I should read x amount of time or x amount of pages. It's exactly what you said. Two pages of a classic is more than no pages of a classic and that should be enough. If you don't have a goal, you can read maybe one book the entire year and just go through it slowly. That's great. It's more than what you were doing before. I think that's to be applauded and not necessarily chastise or beat yourself up because you would "rather do more."

Christie: [13:04](#) Exactly. I'm the same way. I'm always going to be reading, but I love, there are certain books that are just easier to pick up. What I found is always picking up those books over and over and over again and not getting around to the books that maybe are a little more demanding, that ask a little bit more of us as a reader. Setting aside this time, I feel really good about my reading life lately and this has been a big part of it.

Tsh: [13:28](#) Very cool. You mentioned a few minutes ago that centering prayer is another thing that's going on in your life. Can you tell us a little bit about what that looks like?

Christie: [13:37](#) Yeah. It's been hugely important lately. Things have been busy. I have a lot going on with work. You mentioned the book. The book is coming out and that brings a lot of busy work and computer tasks with it. I think anyone can relate to just the general noise of life and some seasons are so, so noisy. The thing about centering prayer for me, there's this word that often comes up in the Bible, God is often telling his people, return.

Return is just a word I love. What I've been thinking about is when I feel myself disintegrating and falling apart and the noise is overwhelming, that word comes to mind, return. What it means to me is stop, breathe deep and return to, for me, that's love. Love is just at the heart of everything. The love that made me, the love that's holding me, the love that's gotten me right. I think return, it's a centering prayer for me is about sitting still, sitting in silence and really trying to return to the love that's at the heart of everything. I find that the noise recedes. I'm rooted again in that loving presence and then I can get up and go again. There's so many great resources out there about centering prayer. There's so many great books. I feel like I'm hearing more and more people from all kinds of faith backgrounds and religious traditions talking about it. That's what it's been looking like for me. That word triggers it. Return. I just stop and I pull back from the world, pullback from the noise, and take a few moments to try to remember that that love is always with me, that love is always accessible, that love is always near. I just need to take time to remember it and listen for it and pull back from the noise.

Tsh: When you save return, your book is called *Placemaker*. Those two words to me return to a place, feel tangential to me I guess a little bit. I'm curious about your book because I've read some of it but not all of it. Is there a connection to you with placemaking and returning? Is that too broad and poetic and deep? I'm just curious. Does that make any sense?

Christie: You wouldn't know this until you get to the end of the book but I feel like that's a pretty significant theme that I didn't know was going to develop as I wrote the stories. One of the stories I tell in the book...placemakers, are those who are really willing to let themselves love a place, even if they know they're not going to live in that place forever or stay there forever. That can be really painful, right? We lose places, we move on or you're a traveler, you know that maybe you stay in a place for a while and in some small way you even put a few roots down in that place, but then you travel on, you move on. One of the stories I tell in the book is how I lived at home in the city of Chicago for many years and my thoughts about home and place have been sort of complicated by the fact that I will always miss that city.

I will always feel the loss of the home we made in the city. In the book I write about actually literally returning to Chicago and what that was like. What I had

imagined it would be like, was that I would go and I would just be miserable. I would be in the city that I loved, but it would no longer be my home and so I would just feel nostalgia and sorrow and I would feel like the heaviness of those memories. But it wasn't like that at all. It was a real return. I felt like for the first time, my past in the city was now knitted together with my present, which I'm living in Pennsylvania in this old farm house. It's almost like the past was returned to me in some ways and became more integrated with my present day life. I was no longer holding it off, afraid of thinking too much about it or remembering too much and the memories really came flooding back. I feel like the past was returned to me in a way. Oh, my goodness, there's so much we could say about return. We could talk about like what it's like to return home after a trip or travel, what it's like to return home to your childhood home. You may know that I grew up in Texas so I'm from Texas but I haven't lived there in many years. Anytime I'm back, the feelings there in that place are complicated. I just think there's something really beautiful about return and about letting the idea of return work its way through our lives in whatever that looks like for us. It's a big part of I think what it means to be a place maker in the world.

Tsh: You know you are speaking my language because of how much I resonate with literally everything you've said and so much of what I talk about as well as this idea of being fully where you are, even if you know it's going to hurt later or you know that it's going to be something that you'll have to carry with you and deal with, that it's worth that because then we're more fully alive and we can more fully not only be present with where we are, but the place where we are can be a gift to us. We can let Chicago teach us or let your homestead teach you about life. If you're just always thinking, I need to tread lightly because I don't want to get hurt lately, we miss out on the opportunity of what we can learn from the land.

Christie: That's exactly it. I thought going into writing this book and telling these stories, I thought placemaking was about all the changes I made to a place or all the ways I would tend to place or care for a place. The big lesson, the big discovery for me really in writing out these stories was that it's so much more about letting a place take care of us and nourish us and transform us while we go about taking care of it. I think that's something that actually travelers, really good travelers maybe know instinctively. They know it can be an ugly way, they can go with a consumerist mindset, what can I get out of this place? But I think those who have wisdom go into it knowing, okay, I'm going to be in this place for a while. What can I receive from this place? What gifts does this place have for me? I think that's something that those of us who are a little more rooted, who maybe don't travel quite as much, can learn from the travelers what it means to let a place give something to us.

Tsh: That is just about the most perfect way I've ever heard that put because you're giving language to the thing that I've known has been true this whole time and I absolutely love that. That is such a great way to frame the beauty of travel and the beauty of home and the beautiful intersection between them. Thank you for that. That's so good.

Christie: Absolutely.

## Segment Two

Tsh: [23:34](#) Moving on to number three of our list, is a work of art. This tends to be one of my favorite ones because I love talking music or movies or books or poetry or whatever. It can be big or small. What's a work of art in your life right now that's making you happy?

Christie: This is such a great question. I had to think about it for a long time, but there's been one poem in particular, although I'm going to say this answer for me, it's complicated. I have complicated feelings about this poem. Mostly just because, before I tell you what it is, I feel like it is one of the most misquoted and misused and abused poems. It's that way because it's so familiar. So many people know it. It's everywhere these days. And I think if for those who haven't taken time to really read and study the whole poem, most of us are just getting it wrong. The poem is, I'm sure you know it, "*The Summer Day*" by Mary Oliver. I'm just going to say the last lines because then everyone listening will say oh, I know exactly that poem.

The last lines are so memorable. She writes, "Tell me what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" We're reading that everywhere, right? People have it tattooed on their arms. It's on tote bags and tee shirts and it's everywhere on Pinterest. Of course because it's beautiful and it's very compelling. But the problem is when we just focus on those last two lines, it sounds like it's a poem about don't waste your life, seize the day. Oh my goodness, you're running out of time. Get going. Right? What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? But weirdly, the poem itself is actually about wasting time. Lingering is noticing and not being super productive in the whole poem. She's focused on this grasshopper. She's studying in the grass.

Really by the time you get to those lines at the end she's saying, well, hey, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? This is what I'm doing. I'm noticing the grasshopper. I'm just paying attention to the wild things out there. What are you going to do that's so important? I just think that is not at all the same thing as don't waste one life, get out there. It's much more about just seeing and paying attention. The poem I love, but it's also a poem and I sometimes cringe when I see it out there in the world, just that last little bit of it

quoted. It's not the truth of what she was really writing about. Here in late winter, I'm thinking about this poem "*The Summer Day*".

Tsh: [26:16](#) This is a fantastic poem for this time of year. I'm looking at the lines, just a few ones up and it says "...how to be idle and blessed how to stroll through the fields, which is what I've been doing all day." That is so ideal. I love that so much. What a great poem. It's been several years since I've pulled it up and read the whole thing and it's not long. Those of you listening and thinking, poetry, that sounds hard. It's not at all. Plus, Mary Oliver is about the most accessible poet there is especially of recent years, since she just only recently passed away. She's very accessible.

Christie: She's a poet for everyone. A poet that even if you think poetry is not for you, she's a great one to start with because you're right, she's so accessible but she's also good so you can spend time with her poems and there's usually a little bit more that you can pull out with each reading but very accessible.

Tsh: I like that you mentioned the fact that this poem is called "*The Summer Day*" and that we're at the tail end of winter and maybe you're going to get to this later, but I still want to ask you now, the thing I think of you when I think of Christie Purifoy, I think of flowers and I think of your garden and I know in your book you talk about gardening some but in your first one, *Roots & Sky*, you for sure did because of seasons. I'm curious for a little garden update. What do you do in the dead of winter right now? When you are waiting for those summer bloom's, what's your gardening routine like or maybe the better question is what do you do with the land you're on in this season?

Christie: I'm actually looking at it here as I'm sitting in this little corner sunroom in our old farm house and I've got a table here with a tray on it full of little blocks of soil and there's some little seedlings already popping out. These are seeds that I planted just a couple of weeks ago of johnny jump ups, they're an old fashioned viola, a little purple and gold flower, actually edible too, which I love. You can put them on desserts or salads and stuff. Winter is both good and hard for the gardener. It's the season of dreaming and planning, but after a couple of months of that, I am just ready to dig in. I'm just aching for dirt under my fingernails and green growing things. You mentioned the flowers. I am not at all a practical gardener. I've just accepted that about myself. I grow beauty. That's what moves me. That's what inspires me. Mostly these days I grow flowers and this time of year, the ache and me just to get growing and into begin harvesting those flowers is just really growing in me. It's hard right now cause we're right on that cusp of transition. But starting seeds indoors is one way that I lean into that and I literally can watch that hope grow and I can look at these little tiny leaves reaching for the sun and know spring's coming and summer's coming. We're getting closer every day, Can you hear it in my voice? The longing?

Tsh: I feel it from Texas. Yeah. Um, is it snowing there? Because I know you guys have had some snow days recently.

Christie: It's actually sunny today, which is nice, but it's bitterly cold. We're getting some really cold air this week and there's snow outside. So looking outside the window, all that sun is bouncing off the white icy snow. It's still very much winter here, which the beginning of March that's just hard. I love snow. I love winter, but I'm tired of it by this point. Ready for a change.

Tsh: I think you're speaking the language of many people listening. Right? I'm so hankering for a little bit of warmth. I'm curious just because asking me about the garden just reminds me asking about your place. This is kind of a side thought, but I know you talk about trees in your new book, which I think is really cool and I'm curious, how do you know the specific age of your trees? How do you know this one tree was planted in 1643? That's just fascinating to me.

Christie: Isn't that wild? I wondered the same thing and I did a little research and the truth is you really cannot know the precise age of a tree until that tree has been cut down and the rings are counted. There's some ways that scientists have developed to get a pretty close estimate. Of course they'll measure all the parts of the tree. Sometimes they'll even take like a core sample, although they tend not to do that because that can hurt the tree, that can damage the tree. It's a scientific guessing game that you can't ever be exactly accurate. It's so interesting to me that that white oak tree you mentioned, I talk about in the book, I don't know why they have this exact year on the signs. 1643 it says, but my guess is that that's the estimated year and they've put that on there just to give you a sense of the age. Actually it's like this house we live in too. We have a sign out front with the name of the house, Maplehurst, and it says a circa 1880 because even with houses, apparently it's hard to know exactly when they were built. It's that way with trees. It's almost like we have to say circa and then give the age because you cannot know for sure until that tree has died and been cut down.

Tsh: Very interesting. That was my guess and so that's good to know that it's a circa thing and that's cool that there would be a tree that old so close to you. I'm sure we actually are probably around trees that old all the time. We're just unaware of it and that's really interesting.

Christie: Yeah, that's true. This is a really special tree. I actually just took a picture of it, I think on my Instagram this week and it's just majestic. It's so, so beautiful. If folks want to see what we're talking about, it's there.

Tsh: I have your Instagram pulled up right now. That's what made me think to ask you before I forgot. The number four thing on our good lists is a philosophy. This is a

way of thinking, some bit of wisdom you glean from someone smart in your life. I am curious, Christie, if you've got some philosophy that's guiding your way or just making you a little happier right now as you live your life.

Christie: This word it's a buzzword for a lot of lot of people, but it is just a good, good word. The word is simplicity. Like many people, I have read the books. I have read the blogs and it continues to have a hold on me. It just answers for me so many of life's questions. When I start to feel overwhelmed in my space or just in my head or in my life, if things feel difficult and complicated, I'm always going to come back to the things I've learned about simple living and what that means for me. And it means the practical things. It means cleaning out the closets and donating the excess things to the thrift store. It means being careful about all the things I bring into our home and our lives. But it also means about just trying to do, if there's an easier way to do things or if there's a way to do less or a way to go a little bit slower. That also is what simplicity means to me.

It's funny, when it comes to placemaking in homemaking and the kind of home I love, I'm not a minimalist. I love stacks of books and I love old bits of china sitting around and I love things. I love beautiful pretty things, but even so, I find that too much is too much. Too much noise, too much stuff, too many things on the calendar, whatever it is, too much just isn't good for anyone's heart. We talked about return earlier, so simplicity is just another thing that I have to make sure I just keep returning to and returning to and returning to because it is just so necessary for me.

Tsh: I like that you have named and labeled what it is you benefit from the idea of simplicity. And so for you, it doesn't look like how few things can you get away with. Because I think that's sometimes what a lot of people connect, this idea of minimalism being kind of a backwards race of who can have the fewest things and I win if I can live with a mattress on the floor and three tee shirts and that's it. That's not what it's about at all. I've always felt like living simply just means living holistically with your life's purpose. If your purpose is to cultivate this particular piece of land right now, or to be fully present or to open your doors for lots of people to come through and feel at home, that might mean you have 50 plates. Simple living because you're leaning into what you're made to do. It looks different for all of us.

Christie: Yeah, it absolutely does. I can tell you right now, one thing I have in my basement on shelves, I have these tubs full of all these little glass punch cups because no one uses punchbowls anymore. These little glass cups are so easy to find the goodwill and the thrift store. But anytime I host an event or you a large group of people, I don't want to use disposable cups and things. I've been collecting these little glass cups so that I can pull out things that were very inexpensive for me to get. If they break, it's not a big deal, but I've got them

stored in the basement and there's a lot of them. Some people would look at that and say, oh my goodness, she needs to let go these punch cups. But they really do serve a purpose in my life, which means that when I host a large group of people, I can do it more simply because I don't have to go out and buy a stack of plastic cups but I can just pull up these punch cups from the basement. That I think captures my rather unique approach to simplicity.

Tsh: I think that's perfect. You are working within both the confines of your life and its purpose. For me, I live in a very small house, a little 1935 cottage that's got no extra room, we barely have closets and so I wouldn't be able to have extra punch cups as, as much as I would love them. But if I were to have the space, I absolutely would love something like that for whenever we entertain and have people over. I think it completely makes sense. You work within what you have, no more, no less. I think you're embodying that really well.

Christie: Yeah, that's it, exactly.

Tsh: Christie, thank you for sharing your good list. This is a fantastic one and it makes me just feel very settled and at peace and also ready for spring. And your book does too! It looks like spring on the cover. I think it's so fun.

Christie: It does, doesn't it? I think this is just the perfect time of year for it to come out. I'm so glad.

### **Segment Three**

Tsh: [37:11](#) I am here with my friend Stephanie in Langford to answer more of your travel questions. This one comes in from someone named Jess Explores, which I think is fun. She says, I'm considering WWOOFing to travel for 12 plus months. Similar ideas for travel on a budget. For those who aren't sure, WWOOFing is spelled w-w-o-o-f, and that stands for Willing Workers On Organic Farms. What this is, it's a worldwide collaborative where you can sign up and for a membership and then look to see what farms around the world needs some extra hands. And in exchange you can stay on their farms for free or low cost and usually eat there as well. You just work on the farm for however long it's worked out between you and the farmer in exchange for being there.

I've never done this stuff has never done this. I have looked into it before because it does sound intriguing and there are some family friendly farms around the world, but I have not done more than a little bit of research. Jess, it sounds like you have looked into that and are just curious if there are other ideas. So Steph, do you have anything to suggest to her first?

Stephanie: Yeah, so like you said, I have never done this, but it did get me thinking that if the goal is to do something that helps me cover some of your accommodations or food costs or can I give you a way to really lower the cost from having to stay in a hotel or to even rent your own place while you're going or maybe even to have a bit of a base, I'm not sure. I know that people definitely hop around from farm to farm as well. I know that this could be a way that somebody wants to move around and see different places, but it just got me thinking that there are a lot of other volunteer opportunities beyond organic farms. For example, our family is going to the Galapagos Islands in March. Those are in Ecuador. As I was researching the Galapagos, I was hoping that maybe I can find some volunteer opportunities for our kids to be able to do some work with animals there because there's a lot of animal sanctuaries, animal rescue, that kind of thing.

I didn't manage to find something that would work for us a short term enough with kids. But I did notice that there are a lot of nature reserves and animal sanctuaries, places that are focused on environmental work that frequently accept volunteers. You have to apply and you have to commit to a certain period of time. Some of those were 8 to 12 weeks, sometimes they were a little bit longer. Sometimes they would like you to have some language experience in the local language, so it really depends. But what I noticed was there were not just in the Galapagos Islands, but all over the world, there are opportunities like that and it's very frequent, very common for them to cover stuff like your accommodations or maybe some of your meals during the day or to offer you a communal kitchen with other volunteers.

That's one thing that I thought of that that could be a really interesting opportunity that's different than farming. We also are going to be doing some volunteering when we go to Columbia in a short while actually, I think we will have already gone by the time this airs, but we will be staying on the property of a campus that they have for a nonprofit organization, there in Colombia. While I was researching that, I just saw a ton of opportunities for people, if you're willing to make a certain time commitment, there are just so many organizations around the world that are looking for people. You don't necessarily need to volunteer all day long. I'm only going to be volunteering about four hours a day. I'm still going to have time for working and being with my kids and doing Spanish lessons. There's just a lot of ways to work it. But I would begin there just by researching some of the places that you're interested in and volunteer opportunities abroad or travel volunteer opportunities or things like that.

Tsh: [41:11](#) Yeah, I think there are more. I mean honestly, what it comes down to is just doing some fine tooth googling, maybe more specific to a place instead of just what is there around the world because that's not going to help you narrow

down your choices. Another suggestion I would make, and this is a little bit more to do with maybe if you want to stay somewhere longer term, as in not backpacking around the world or anything, but you want to stay put maybe four a year, maybe half a year in one place, and that's being an English teacher. That sounds a little, I don't mean it in a way that I'm going to come in and swoop in and teach out all these locals everything I know. Nothing like that at all. There's a lot of well established schools and organizations around the world who would welcome native English speakers to help teach conversational English. You're not necessarily formally being a teacher with a classroom and graded assignments and homework. It's a little bit more casual where you can meet with people maybe at a coffee shop or a small group or something where you just talk back and forth and help them improve their conversation skills when it comes to interviewing for a job or they want to be more fluent so that they can apply for a university outside their home country, something like that. There are opportunities all over the place that would love to hear native English speakers so that they can get their pronunciation down and maybe more slang or just colloquialisms down to where it's less formal and structured classroom English and more just the English you and I speak all the time without thinking about it. If you just Google places, I know that there are opportunities in China, for example for that. There are some in maybe eastern Europe. When I went to Kosovo, now of course this was almost 20 years ago now, but that's how I went the first time. I went as a conversational English teacher and I just signed up with an organization and we worked back and forth and I ended up for about 10 months teaching high schoolers, conversational English after their high school time. That could be an opportunity to, if you're willing to stay put for a while and not do so much traveling longterm.

Stephanie: [43:26](#) I will piggyback off of that and say that that was the very first thing my husband and I did when we got married is we went and we worked in Japan as English teachers and we did not have experience and we literally took a one week course in teaching English as a second language just to get a little bit of an idea of what we were doing. We had no degree in this or any previous experiment experience. It was exactly what you said Tsh, we were just doing conversational teaching. We worked with both kids, sometimes we work with college age students one on one who just really wanted to get better conversationally and we worked with adults who actually just came in as a hobby, like a weekly class with other friends and they just wanted to talk and have a good time and that really gave us the opportunity to explore that area. But we were also making money and the school provided an accommodation for us. There are also short term. I have a friend who I went to Nepal and it was much less structured than what I was doing. She was provided with accommodation and I think she just went for a couple of months. There's just so many opportunities like that.

Tsh: [44:25](#) I mean that's one of the privileges of being a native English speaker that we could use for good, to not come in and be saviors to a particular culture, not at all. It's receiving an invitation and accepting it to come and meet a need that they have already expressed that they have. That's an important one.

Like Steph and I have said, we don't have a lot of experience and actual volunteerism or backpacking around the world doing different things here and there. I know there are ways to do that ethically, I just don't have a lot of personal experience. Do you have anything else to add in this department, Steph?

Stephanie: I really don't. I think it's such a great opportunity for somebody who is young or somebody who's single or a young couple. It hasn't really been the thing we've done as a family. Instead we focused more on how can we make travel affordable for us and how can we work as we go. I mean we could talk a little bit more about that if you want.

Tsh: [45:21](#) Let's talk for a few minutes about that. Even though we've had past episodes that we can link to in the show notes of Steph and I talking about budget travel or just how to save money on the road, but we can just hit a few highlights here so that maybe, Jess, this is what you're getting at more than wanting to actually volunteer as you go. Maybe you're just wanting to save some money? Let's just go back and forth Steph with a few tips that have helped us the most while we travel with our family.

Stephanie: [45:46](#) She's talking about wanting to go for 12 plus months. The biggest trick for us to be able to make that work is to get rid of all of our expenses back home so that all we have is our travel expenses while we're on the road and then we just need a way to be able to earn income. Of course, we've done that because we are entrepreneurs and we run an online business and so it works for us that way. But there are so many other ways that you can make, even if you don't as much income because you're trying to travel really cheap, that if you have a computer with you or an iPad or something, you can figure out ways to do different types of online work or to do consulting. Maybe you have skills in teaching. It could be teaching other languages or it could be teaching, singing through online Skype lessons. There's just so many different things that you could do. But if you could find some kind of work that you could take with you, then if you can keep the travel expenses low, which we can discuss, then you really can keep going for quite a long time.

Tsh: [46:45](#) Another thing that I know you and I both do Steph, is that when you travel for an extended period of time, you want to spend more time in the lower cost areas and less time and the more expensive ones. I know that's a big fat duh, but it's helpful when you think about it. If you're going to be somewhere

for a year or you're traveling for a year, it makes sense to only spend a few weeks in an expensive country like Australia and spend a couple months in an affordable place not as far, like in Southeast Asia where your dollar will go so much farther. And even within that, sometimes it's good to think about city versus country. I know sometimes cities are just more expensive than the countryside. If you can find smaller towns that are less well known. In fact, there are so many bloggers out there that write about some hidden gem that they just discovered, some kind of seaside town that maybe is off the beaten track. Just do some research like that and just consider spending a week there and a weekend in the well known city that's not too far. That's another suggestion just to strategize your itinerary more.

Stephanie: [47:49](#) Absolutely. Then another really key thing I think is to stay places a little bit longer because you could do those little weekend trips to go to that cool more expensive place you want to go to, but then settle down somewhere for longer for a couple of weeks or maybe even a month. You can often get a better deal on your accommodation when you're staying for a more extended period of time. You can also stock up more on your groceries and you can get into more of a rhythm of preparing meals for yourself. Whether you're renting a little apartment or you're staying in a hostel with the shared kitchen or whatever it is. You can just find ways to start cutting your costs low. You can get a monthly card for the local public transportation or there's just a lot of ways that it becomes cheaper when you just slow down and soak up a place for awhile rather than moving quickly.

Tsh: [48:34](#) Very smart. I love that. Another suggestion is this sounds obvious again, but it's hard to remember when you're in the thick of the place, is to not buy souvenirs. Souvenirs, and I mean that in the classic sense, like the gift shop kind of things in the highly traffic tourist areas, are so overpriced and they tend to not really be worth it. When all is said and done and you come home and you think about your experience, it really doesn't have much to do with that thing you bought at a gift shop. To instead, think of your souvenir being the experience itself and that that's what you're capturing and taking home. If you need to buy a postcard so that it feels like you got something, fine. But even just the photos you take and you make a photo book at the end, that can be your experience. Or if you really truly want to buy something, stick to something local and something that you would maybe incorporate in your home anyway. Art to hang on your wall or some kind of small food that you find at a grocery store or even an item of clothing like a piece of jewelry or a skirt or something that you would wear in your real life. Basically, don't try to add more to your life by spending money where in reality you're not going to wear a sarong if you live in Ottawa, Canada, that kind of thing. Think about how to incorporate your experiences in just to the thing itself instead of just adding clutter.

Stephanie: [49:58](#) Tsh, are you saying that I should stop wearing my sarong on a daily basis?

Tsh: [50:02](#) Well, you know, in the winter, maybe? If you want to in August in Ottawa. You do you. I have one more suggestion, but I'm curious if you have anything else, Steph?

Stephanie: [50:12](#) The one other thing I would say that adds on to that don't buy things is don't pay money for all these pricey experiences when there are so many free or cheap or just really local and authentic experiences to be had. You do not need the packaged tours or the fancy boat rides or you just don't need to do the zip lines everywhere. We can giggle about it, but when you go to a place like what's in your face immediately? It's all these tourism activities that they put together. And it's not that you don't want to support any of this stuff that they're doing with the local tourism, but that's not what's really going to give you the real flavor of the place where you are. There are always free things that you can do. I would just say don't let yourself get sucked into feeling like you haven't experienced a place if you haven't done the pricey activities.

Tsh: [51:02](#) That's so true. Especially when you're doing your research, if you type in a name of a place and then things to do with kids, they're always going to suggest the amusement parks or the zip line tours or the whatever and you think, no, I don't mean that. I mean what are some cool parts of town that the kids are going to really be fascinated by? I don't mean that kind of thing. It's really true, it's ridiculous how expensive it can get if you do all those things.

Stephanie: [51:29](#) Totally. So what's the last thing you were going to say?

Tsh: [51:31](#) The last thing is it's a little bit unconventional. It's not found everywhere, but it's really fun when you can find it. There are RV companies. In other parts of the world they are called camper vans, those kinds of driving vehicles that you can sleep in, that need relocating in their country. You can find them for cheap whenever they need it. If you can be flexible, whenever they need an RV moved from this city to this city and they need it moved within two weeks time. They don't care the route you take or whatever you do along the way, so long as the RV is back in this city by this time. We did this on the South Island of New Zealand and it was such a cool experience because that country is really expensive and we were able to rent an RV, a camper van, for \$5 a day. That was transportation and housing for \$5 a day. You are not going to find it that cheap anywhere. Of course we had to pay for gas and food along the way. But we are already in camping modes, so these places, you just stay at the state parks or the national parks along the way and you have a little kitchen in the camper van so you just do your grocery thing. It's like slightly luxury camping because you're not in a tent. But otherwise it is such a great money saver. I'm going to put a link

in the show notes of somebody who did a roundup of the different places around the world where you can do this. It's tricky because you have to be flexible. I just looked right now, for several months down the road and there are no listings. That's because they usually list them only within a few weeks to a month in advance. You have to be the type of traveler that's willing to just go with the flow. That's what we did and it was so worth it and the kids still talk about that all the time. Hey, let's rent a camper van and go somewhere. They even have those in the U.S like cross country, from New York to San Francisco and they just need it by a certain date. Otherwise you can go anywhere you want between there. It's a really fun, flexible way to see a lot of cool things.

Stephanie: That's a great suggestion. Five bucks a day. That just blows my mind. It's so great.

Tsh: I know. I even saw some listed for \$1 a day. I can't even imagine. That's cheaper than just staying home, you know?

Those are our suggestions for either volunteering or saving money as you travel, especially extended time. Hopefully that answered your question, Jess. If you have a question for me and Steph related to travel, we'd love to hear it. Email [hello@theartistsimple.net](mailto:hello@theartistsimple.net), toss in your question and we will do our best to get it in the queue.

Tsh: [54:13](#) You can find Stephanie at [WonderingFamily.com](http://WonderingFamily.com) or on Instagram [@wonderlingfamily](#) Last week, they just finished a week long family trek in the Amazon, so go check that out. You can find Christie on her blog at [ChristiePurifoy.com](http://ChristiePurifoy.com) and on Instagram [@christiepurifoy](#) and of course, check out her new book called *Placemaker*. It's really good. To keep up with me, I'm on Twitter [@Tsh](#) and Instagram [@tshoxenreider](#), and of course at [TheArtofSimple.net](http://TheArtofSimple.net). Don't forget to make sure you get the weekly email [fivequickthings.email](mailto:fivequickthings.email). Follow the blog and podcast on Instagram [@ArtofSimple](#) and to be extra awesome, show your support of the show by becoming a patron for just a few bucks a month. As always, because I just gave you way too many places to go, I've got all of these things, including Christie's book linked in this episode's show notes number 185, so just head there at [thesimpleshow.com](http://thesimpleshow.com). This show was produced by Chad Michael Snavely and Jesse Montonya, and thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink, and my intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening, I'm Tsh Oxenreider and I'll see you back here soon.