

Carrying only one backpack this size, and I'm not exaggerating, I once spent four weeks touring the Holy Land. My toiletry kit was only this big. There are 1001 uses for baking soda, which I won't go into right now. I was much younger then. Today I rarely overnight anyplace without carrying three large pieces of luggage. I miss the freedom of travelling light.

When we go someplace, we generally take too much rather than too little. Better to have a few extra files along for the business trip, just in case. Better to have a few more clothes on the vacation, just in case. Even at home, it's better to have extra food, more closets, more telephones, more computer memory--you just don't know when you might need it.

When Jesus sends the twelve out to teach in the villages, we expect him to have them bring plenty of materials and to dress smart. Instead, he says, "Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts; you may wear sandals but only one set of clothes." It makes me wonder what these guys used to carry around. Did James have a U-haul? Was Philip a fashion maven? Bartholomew a clothes horse? With the new dress code, did Thomas complain that they had spoiled it for the rest of them? After all, if you want people to be prepared, you have them bring more, not less.

When it comes to possessions, the spiritual world runs counter-cultural. The ancient wisdom is you find God when you have less, not when you have more. People experience some of their most spiritual moments when nothing obstructs them from nature: seeing the mountains, hearing the ocean, watching a starry sky, observing a full moon, making love, giving birth, and facing death. Computers, wardrobes, and traffic rarely accomplish the same mystical experience.

This is one reason why the Scriptures continually turn us to the poor. The prophets fought for their rights, and Jesus proclaimed them blessed. The poor do not obstruct us from God. If God is with the poor, then how expansive must God's mercy be. God is not the possession of the privileged; God is for all.

This is why religious voluntarily become poor. They give away things they own, because having less brings them to God. Therefore, Jesus tells his apostles, "Travel light." When you are less distracted by things you carry, you'll discover God in the people you meet.

If Jesus sent them out today, he'd say, "No TV, no car, no air conditioning, and no telephone. And remember, 2/3 of the world doesn't even have this option." We like to think we're free, but we're prisoners of our culture. If we wish to meet God more directly, the conventional wisdom is find some way to simplify, some way to do less, some way to have less, and then we can have God more.