

**MAY MONTHLY THEME:**  
**MANY/AND—THE VALUE OF COMPLEXITY**

Thoreau famously wrote, "Simplify, simplify, simplify." And yet, much of life is not simple, but complex. Our weekly ritual of joys and sorrows bears witness to this by naming both joys and sorrows. Indeed, life does not simply have two emotions, but many different experiences. And yet, from the media coverage of events to casual conversations among friends, there can be a tug to smooth over complexity and convey a simpler, easier version. What is lost in such moments? What do we gain by resisting the tug and exploring the many aspects of a complex situation? This month invite us to notice this tug and the dynamic pull between complexity and simplicity.

**Which question is calling to you? Where is it leading you?**

1. Describe a situation or experience for which you hold complex thoughts or feelings.
2. When does holding on to the complexity of a situation have merit?
3. How do you approach complex conversations with people who hold differing perspectives?

**Wise Words:**

You've got to keep asserting the complexity and the originality of life, and the multiplicity of it, and the facets of it. This is about being a complex human being in the world, not about finding a villain. This is no time for anything else than the best that you've got.

*Toni Morrison*

The ideal art, the noblest of art: working with the complexities of life, refusing to simplify, to "overcome" doubt.

*Joyce Carol Oates*

Read books. Try to understand the reason why things happen, why they are as they are. If you see only the surface phenomena, then the world becomes extremely confusing, ever more unsettling. But if the reasons are understood there's a kind of simplicity that emerges.

*David McCullough*

I never knew anybody . . . who found life simple. I think a life or a time looks simple when you leave out the details.

*Ursula K. Le Guin*

The notion of the infinite variety of detail and the multiplicity of forms is a pleasing one; in complexity are the fringes of beauty, and in variety are generosity and exuberance.

*Annie Dillard*

One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings.

*Franklin Thomas*

To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost, almost all of the time — and in one's work. And part of the rage is this: It isn't only what is happening to you. But it's what's happening all around you and all of the time in the face of the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, indifference of most white people in this country, and their ignorance. Now, since this is so, it's a great temptation to simplify the issues under the illusion that if you simplify them enough, people will recognize them. I think this illusion is very dangerous because, in fact, it isn't the way it works. A complex thing can't be made simple. You simply have to try to deal with it in all its complexity and hope to get that complexity across.

*James Baldwin*

The thing about black history is that the truth is so much more complex than anything you could make up.

*Henry Louis Gates*

Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius — and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.

*E.F. Schumacher*

Resource: [Complementarity as the Quantum of Life and Why Reality Is Woven of Opposing Truths](#)