

# simplify.

7 guiding principles  
to help **anyone**  
declutter their  
home and  
**life.**

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# DEDICATED

**to my wife, Kim: thanks for journeying with me.  
to my kids, Salem and Alexa: thanks for cheering for me.**

# SPECIAL THANKS

**to Martha and Jana: your insights made this possible.**

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## OUR TYPICAL STORY

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*“Any half-awake materialist well knows – that which you hold holds you.” — Tom Robbins*

Memorial Day weekend, 2008, was a beautiful spring weekend in Vermont. I woke up early that Saturday with one goal in mind: clean the garage. I knew it was going to be an all-day project and set my alarm early to get a good start. My wife and I had decided to spend our three-day holiday weekend cleaning the house from top to bottom. After all, that’s what families do.

And we are, by definition, just your standard, run-of-the-mill, middle-class family of four living in the suburbs. My wife and I are in our early-thirties. My son is 7, my daughter, 3. We are everything typical (minus the dog and white picket fence).

It all started harmlessly enough that Saturday morning as my son and I began to clean the garage. The neighbors also happened to be outside planting gardens, watering flowers, and tending to the outside of their two-level home.

Nearly four hours later, we were still working on the same garage and our neighbors were still working on their home. My neighbor, noticing my frustration with the project, turned to me and said sarcastically, “Ahh, the joys of home ownership.”

I responded by saying, “Well, you know what they say, ‘The more stuff you own, the more your stuff owns you’.” Her next sentence struck a chord with my mind, heart, and soul, and changed the course of my life forever.

She responded, “That’s why my daughter is a *minimalist*. She keeps telling me that I don’t need all this stuff!”

Call me uneducated, naive, whatever you want – but I had never heard the term *minimalist* before. Yet, somehow, it was the one word that defined a desire that had been building in my heart. I went inside to tell my wife about my short conversation. Her response was the same as mine, “I think that’s what I want.”

I immediately went to the computer (garage still unfinished) and began researching the idea of minimalism. I found a variety of websites that described a simple lifestyle focused on owning just the essentials of life and removing the clutter. The more I read, the more I wanted it. And a minimalist was born.

## **Why Minimalism was an Easy Choice**

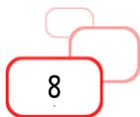
Now, two years later, I can look back and see why minimalism was an easy choice. Why it resonated with my soul from the very beginning:

- I was tired of spending vacation days cleaning.
- There are things in life that I value more than possessions – God, family, relationships, character...
- I enjoy clean, tidy, uncluttered rooms... but don't like to clean. Go figure, minimalism scratches that itch.
- I enjoy minimalist design in most things – from clothes & watches to art & interior design.
- We love to entertain – minimalism keeps the house in order.

- I don't fear change – becoming minimalist was definitely a life-change for us.
- We are done having children – although my kids are still very young, we have no need to “hang on to something just in case.” When they outgrow clothes, toys, or supplies, we just give them away.
- I'm frugal. Not cheap, frugal – there is a difference (or at least, that's what I tell my wife).
- I love inspiring others to live a worthwhile lifestyle. Our story has now inspired hundreds of thousands of people around the world through our blog ([www.becomingminimalist.com](http://www.becomingminimalist.com)).

You probably identify with one or two of the reasons above (just not the cheap one, right?). If so, you can probably agree that minimalism may be an easy choice for you. If you do not directly identify with any of our reasons and have some doubts, just keep reading. A simple, minimal lifestyle has benefits for all.

Since becoming minimalist, we have saved money, reduced clutter and removed distractions. Our home



is cleaner. And three-day weekends are spent together as a family, not cleaning the garage.

Over the past two years, we have learned many lessons about minimalizing our possessions and simplifying our life. This book is a compilation of those life lessons. We live typical lives... just like you. And if this family of four living in the suburbs can simplify their home and life, so can you!

This book is a collection of **7 Guiding Principles** that we have learned over the past two years. These principles are transferrable to anyone's life, and I am confident that taken to heart, they will help you declutter your home and life.

## PRINCIPLE #1: BE CONVINCED

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*“You can’t have everything. Where would you put it?”  
– found in my son’s fortune cookie*

There are many reasons why you may be reading this book: you desire a simple lifestyle, you are interested in pursuing a simple lifestyle, or your partner is interested in you pursuing a simple lifestyle. No matter your state of mind entering this book, Guiding Principle #1 of simplicity is always the same: **Be Convinced.**

### **Our Actions Follow Our Heart**

Our actions will always follow the true desire of our heart. What our heart believes and loves always determines the path of our life. We can mask our true wants for only a short while. Without a true heart change, we always return to our heart’s first love.

This truth applies to all areas of life: our energy, our time, our relationships, our spirituality, our money, and our possessions.

Before any of us can simplify our homes and lives, we must be convinced that the lifestyle is worth our effort. To accomplish that task, I have listed 10 benefits of living a minimal lifestyle:

**Benefit #1 SPEND LESS:** One benefit of living simply is the simple reality that it costs less. As you accumulate fewer things, you spend less money. Many people believe the secret to financial freedom is earning more money. Unfortunately, when they begin to make more money without spending restraints in place, they just spend more money. The reverse is probably more true: the real secret to financial freedom is spending less. If you live a life that accumulates less stuff, you will spend less.

**Benefit #2 LESS STRESS:** Leo Babauta, of [Zen Habits](#), reminds us that a minimalist home is less stressful. Clutter is a form of visual distraction, and everything in our vision pulls at our attention at least a little. The less clutter, the less visual stress we have in our environments. A simple, minimalist home is calming. I have found this to be true and you will too with a simple experiment. Go compare

two counter tops – one that is clear (minimal) and one that is cluttered. Look at each of them separately. What is your internal emotional response? Doesn't the clear one bring about a calming effect while the cluttered counter arouses emotions of distraction or anxiety? It's true: a simple, minimalist home is less stressful.

**Benefit #3 EASIER TO CLEAN:** When we began to declutter the decorations in our living room, I was surprised at the amount of dust that I found on the shelves (particularly the top shelves). Clearly, the vast number of knick-knacks on the shelving made the proposition of dusting a daunting task. When we finished decluttering our kids' toy room, we suddenly noticed that it took much less time to put their toys away in the evening. When we began decluttering our wardrobe, we found it much easier to keep our closets tidy. The fewer things in our home, the easier it is to clean.

**Benefit #4 FREEDOM:** This benefit took me by surprise. I had just completed minimalizing my office at work and as I put the last few items in their

new found home, I kept commenting out loud, “This feels so good. Today has been a great day.” A feeling of freedom was coming over me as I kept looking around at my new, simple office. No longer would my work environment feature three bookcases of books that I “should have read.” No longer would my desktop be cluttered with stacks of paper that “should be filed properly.” No longer am I strangled by clutter as I sit in my office trying to work. The sense of freedom that comes from minimalism is truly refreshing, because it is more than a feeling; it is a reality that can define your life.

#### **Benefit #5 GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:**

Assume for a moment that you have one of those mothers that does all the work around the house for you. Every morning when you wake up she makes your bed and the kitchen is spotless no matter what the family ate for dinner the night before. If that was the case, how would you show the most respect and honor to your mother? Would you best bring her honor by pulling out every toy and making as large a mess as possible for her to clean? Or would you bring her honor by keeping things clean, by

putting your own toys away, and keeping the room as close to perfection as possible? The second one of course. You would bring honor to her by sustaining the perfection that she desires for you as much as possible. That's how I look at the environment. If it started in a state of perfection, we would most honor it by taking as much care of the environment as we can. The less we consume, the less damage we do to the environment. And that benefits everyone.

**Benefit #6 BE MORE PRODUCTIVE:** Our possessions consume our time. Whether we are cleaning them, organizing them, buying them, or selling them, the more we own the more time they rob from our lives. Take shopping for example: the average American spends nearly 12 hours every month shopping. Now, while it is impossible to completely remove shopping from our schedules, one benefit of living simply is the opportunity to live a more productive life by the plain fact that we spend less time shopping. Add in the time we spend cleaning, sorting, and organizing our stuff once we get it in our homes and we're beginning to talk

about a significant chunk of time. We only get one chance to live this life; we would be wise to make it as productive as possible.

**Benefit #7 EXAMPLE FOR MY KIDS:** As I mentioned, my son is 7 and my daughter is 3. Right now, they are soaking up values from my wife and me about how to live and how to achieve significance. Becoming minimalist has modeled for my children that personal belongings are not the key to happiness, that security is found in their character, and that the pursuit of happiness runs a different road than the pursuit of possessions. These are valuable life lessons they will never learn at school or in the media.

**Benefit #8 FINANCIALLY SUPPORT OTHER CAUSES:** Closely related to the benefit of financial freedom, living a simple life provides the opportunity to financially support other causes. Minimalism provides an opportunity to not just save money for the sake of keeping it for myself, but to use it to further causes that I believe in. I met a man recently who has just put his house on the market to sell so

that he can donate some money to a charity that he believes in strongly. Let me adjust that... he has put *one* of his homes on the market. He has recently decided that there are more important things in life than owning houses in every imaginable climate. Now, I may not be tempted to sell my house (I only have one), but I am seeing the value of not purchasing another coat this winter, another piece of art for my wall, or another “new and improved” cleaning solution so that my finances can be given to bigger causes.

### **Benefit #9 OWN HIGHER QUALITY THINGS:**

I will admit this benefit of minimalism came unexpected to me. For some reason, I didn't combine owning fewer things and owning nicer things in my mind. But the truth is, they go hand-in-hand and are directly related. When we made a commitment to buy fewer things, we opened up our lives to the opportunity of owning nicer things. Take your wardrobe for example: if you are like most, you have 25 mediocre shirts hanging in your closet – even though you really only wear 10 of them and truly love even less. A much more sensible

approach is to have 10 shirts that you truly love hanging in your closet rather than 25 that you just “kinda like.” Based on the budgetary reality that we only have a certain amount of money that we can spend on clothes, you can either purchase 20 shirts at \$20 each or 10 at \$40 each. In this way, a minimalist lifestyle allows you to purchase higher quality items. Remember, more is not better... better is better.

### **Benefit #10 LESS WORK FOR SOMEONE ELSE:**

This past year, my mother sorted the belongings of a deceased parent. This past month, my close friend oversaw an estate sale of a family as they transitioned into assisted living. This past week, I helped a family move out of their residence of 45 years. Hours and hours were spent going through boxes and boxes of belongings, room by room. Some things were kept, some things were sold, much was thrown away. In each case, someone other than the owner of the possessions was doing all the work. Consider the fact that at some point in your life (or in your death) every single item of your belongings will be sorted by another human being.

You can create for yourself a less stressful life today by living a minimalist life and lessen the burden on someone close to you as well. For the sake of your closest friends and family, choose to live a simple, minimalist life.

I have offered ten rational reasons why choosing minimalism as a lifestyle is superior to the alternative lifestyle of purchasing, collecting, saving, and hoarding. On our blog, we have compiled a list of over [25 benefits of minimalism](#). If you need more persuading, that may be a helpful place to continue your pursuit.

On the other hand, if you are ready to experience for yourself the benefits that come with simplifying your possessions, proceed to Guiding Principle #2: **Make Minimalism Work For You.**

## PRINCIPLE #2: MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

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*Minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of anything that distracts us from it.*

### **Rational Minimalism**

Many people that I speak with get nervous when they hear the term “minimalist.” For them, it conjures up images of destitution, barren walls, and empty cupboards. Rightly so, they decide that is no way to enjoy life. Believe me, I agree – that is no way to enjoy life.

Maybe that is why I have been called a “rational minimalist.” I have become one of the leading proponents for “rational minimalism” and wear the label with pride. If you walked into our home today, you would not immediately deduce that a “minimalist” lives here. When you look in our living room, you would see a television, couches, books and childrens’ toys (probably some on the floor). In our coat closet you would find a variety of coats, boots, mittens, and gloves. In our toy room downstairs, you would find a video game system and probably more toys on the floor (unless we cleaned them up before you arrived,

of course). Since deciding to become minimalist two years ago, we have been on a journey to define what that means for us.

We live in suburbia. We have two small children. We are active in our community. We love to entertain and show hospitality. While not exceptional, our life is not identical to anybody else. It is our life – nobody else's. And if we were going to become minimalist, it would have to be a style of minimalism specific to us. It would require us to ask questions, to give-and-take, to identify what we most value and be humble enough to change course when necessary.

Eventually, we defined minimalism in five aspects:

- 1. WE WILL INTENTIONALLY PROMOTE THE THINGS WE MOST VALUE.** The heart of minimalism can be summed up in this phrase: *It is the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of anything that distracts us from it.* This promotion can be seen in how we spend our time, the artwork that we display, and even the clothes that we wear.

## **2. WE WILL REMOVE ALL “CLUTTER” FROM**

**OUR LIVES.** This process began with physical items as we moved from room to room selling, donating, and recycling everything that we no longer used. As we did, we realized that simplicity and order brings freedom, joy, and balance. Our home began to give life and energy rather than drain it. As we began clearing physical clutter from our lives, we noticed opportunity to remove other non-physical clutter from our lives: emotional clutter, relational clutter, and spiritual clutter. Since then, we have worked hard to maintain a clutter-free life.

## **3. WE WILL DECORATE IN A MINIMALIST**

**STYLE.** Since becoming minimalist, we have removed numerous pieces of furniture and countless decorations from our walls and shelves. What remains is not just clean, sleek, and modern, but also meaningful. The decorations and paintings that remain are the pieces most dear to our souls and lives. As a result, our house draws praise from many who enter and enjoy its simple beauty.

#### **4. WE WILL USE OUR MONEY FOR THINGS MORE VALUABLE THAN PHYSICAL POSSESSIONS.**

Madison Avenue has controlled our finances for too long. Since the day we were born, it has told us what needs to be bought, when it needs to be purchased, and what store we should visit to find the best value. When we chose freedom from material possessions, we broke the control that our consumer-driven, capitalistic society has had over us. Suddenly, we have been freed to use our finances to pursue endeavors far greater than those offered at our local department store.

#### **5. WE WILL LIVE A COUNTER-CULTURAL LIFE THAT IS ATTRACTIVE TO OTHERS.**

We have met many minimalists over the past two years that live a life that is far from attractive to us. They have sold all their possessions to live communally on a farm... no, thanks. They have listed all their possessions on a sheet of paper and determined to eliminate all but 100... no, thanks. Instead, we have determined to live out a rational minimalism that fits our lifestyle and invites others to simplify their lives as well.

The benefits of our decision are unmistakable: more freedom, more impact, more time, and less stress. Since our decision, we have encouraged hundreds of thousands of households around the world to simplify their life, remove clutter, and become minimalist. After all, if this typical family of four in the suburbs can become minimalist, so can you!

Your particular practice of minimalism is going to look different from anyone else. It must! After all, you live a different life than anyone else. You may have a large family, small family, or no family. You may live on a farm, in a house, or in a studio apartment. You may collect antiques, stamps, or bottle caps. You may love music, movies, or books. You may cherish old photographs, family heirlooms, or romantic letters from a lover.

Find a style of minimalism that works for you. One that is not cumbersome, but freeing based on your values, desires, passions, and rational thinking. Be aware that your definition will not come overnight. It will take time. It will evolve – even change drastically as your life changes. It will require give and take. You

will make a few mistakes along the way. And thus, it will also require humility.

You will not have it all figured out when you begin simplifying your home. That's okay. Realize that you can't figure it out until you actually begin the process of simplification. That is why Guiding Principle #3 is **Jump Right In!**

## PRINCIPLE #3: JUMP RIGHT IN!

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*Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful. — William Morris*

This past weekend, Burlington, Vermont (where I live) held its 20th annual marathon. I look up to marathon runners because I admire their self-discipline. Yet, when I talk to runners about their accomplishment and the daunting task that it must have been to run 26.2 miles, they usually tell me the same thing: you don't run 26 miles your first time out. You start with a small, manageable distance and build your way up.

For many, the idea of decluttering their home seems daunting... or even worse. It may be helpful to consider the process more like training for a marathon. You don't declutter your whole house the first day out... you start with a small, manageable job and build your way up.

### **Victory Leads to Victory**

I have a good friend who is trying to get out of debt. He was given some interesting advice by his debt counselor. His counselor didn't tell him to pay off the

highest percentage loans right away, instead he was told to pay off the smallest debts first. At first, I thought that was a bit odd until my friend told me the rationale: paying off the smallest debts first results in a victory – one less monthly payment. Even though it wasn't the biggest burden, it is still one less burden – one victory. And victory breeds more victory.

With this picture in mind, you can begin your marathon. Jump right in. Start small. Gain some quick victories. And let victory breed victory!

## **Minimalism Encourages Minimalism**

You'll find that those small quick victories will motivate you to gain more victories and tackle larger jobs.

When a surface is left clean, one piece of clutter seems out of place and calls you to put it away. After we minimalized my office and removed all the clutter, I couldn't stand the idea of leaving one piece of paper on my desk overnight – it seemed out of place. After we minimalized our bedroom, I could no longer leave a shirt lying on the floor.

We specifically chose not to start with the biggest burdens (basement, kitchen, toy room). We decided to start simple and gain some quick victories. Even though the victories were small, every time I opened the bathroom cabinet or looked at the fridge, I was reminded that this was not something that we just really wanted to do... it was something that we could do.

## **One Suggested Order**

This is the exact order of rooms that were decluttered in our home:

- Vehicles
- Living Room / Dining Room
- Guest Room
- Bathrooms
- Children's Bedrooms
- Wardrobe
- Master Bedroom
- Home Office
- Toy Room
- Kitchen
- Storage Room
- Garage

Your exact order may look different, but I offer our progression as a beginning guide. We chose rooms with the least amount of clutter first and worked our way up to eventually declutter and simplify every room in our home.

## Simplifying Any Room

No matter which drawer, closet, or room you choose to simplify, the same process can be applied to each. As reasonably as possible, remove every item from the space. Physically touching each item provides your mind adequate room to focus. Then, sort each item into one of three categories: keep, move, or discard.

- **Items to be kept** should be returned to their home in an organized manner with less-used items in the back and frequently used items in the front.
- **Items to be moved** should be moved to their new home immediately. Sometimes, these items will just be returned (a hammer goes back to your toolbox or a book goes back to your library). Other times, they will find a brand new home. This new home may be a new drawer, a new room, or a new level, i.e., the attic.

- **Items to be discarded** should be sorted as you see fit to be removed completely from your home: sold, donated, recycled, or thrown away.

These simple steps hold true for any space you choose to simplify if you just split whole rooms into smaller parts.

## A Definition of Clutter

Webster (you know, the one who wrote the dictionary) defines clutter as “to fill or cover with scattered or disordered things that impede movement or reduce effectiveness.” Is it just me or does that definition feel cluttered?

Here is a much more practical definition of clutter:

- **Clutter is anything that is disorganized.** The motto in our house is, “Everything has a home.” Clutter collects when things have strayed from their home and got mixed up with everything else. Anything that is disorganized or untidy is clutter.

- **Clutter is anything you don't need or love.**

One of the joys of becoming minimalist is that we are constantly pushed to define what we truly value in life. Through the process we have learned that a home filled with only the things we use and love is a home that we truly love to use.

- **Clutter is too much stuff in too small a space.** This takes many forms: too many clothes in one drawer, too many items in a bathroom cabinet, too many knick-knacks on one shelf, or too much furniture in one room. Remember, you can be creative with your storage solutions for only so long.

## Leveling vs. Minimalizing

I learned a valuable lesson early in our journey that needs to be passed on. I was having a great conversation with some friends about our new desire to live a minimalist life. I started telling the story of our progress from the weekend and happened to mention that we had moved some things downstairs to get them out of the way. My friend Liz, one of the ladies at the table, wisely responded, "That sounds more like leveling than minimalizing."

I tried to defend myself listing the things that we had thrown away, but it didn't take long for me to realize that she was right. Looking back, for the most part, we had begun "leveling" not "minimalizing." Sure, there is some place for "leveling" in the decluttering process as you move less used items out of your way, but remember that "leveling" doesn't address the underlying issue – that we just own too much stuff. Choose to minimalize, not just level.

## Quick Tips for Every Room In Your Home

What and how much you decide to purge from each room in your house is a decision entirely up to you. A general rule of thumb to guide you is, "If it isn't essential, remove it." Here are a few quick tips to think about in each room of your house:

- **Living Room / Dining Room** – Make a commitment to keep only the decorations that mean the most to you. Too many knick-knacks and photos in one room distract you and your guests from the ones you hold most valuable.
- **Bedrooms** – Look to clear as many surfaces as possible. Keep your drawers and closets free

from clutter by removing the items you no longer use.

- **Wardrobe** – A typical person wears 20% of their clothes 80% of the time. Try this experiment: turn around all of the hangers in your closet. After you wear an item, return it to the closet with its hanger facing the right direction. After 2-3 months, you will have an irrefutable, visual representation of the clothes you no longer wear. Donate them.
- **Bathrooms/Linens** – Someone once said, “You really only need two towels or sets of bed sheets. One to use while the other is being washed.” While minimalizing down to only two towels may be a bit irrational, you can certainly find inspiration in the thought above to clear your closets of unused linens.
- **Home Office** – Paper clutter is a never-ending battle. You’ll need a filing system. And you’ll need the discipline to use it.
- **Toy Room** – Kids need to play. Kids need toys. They just don’t need quite so many. Include them in the purging process – as difficult as it may be at first, they will get used to it. Make sure every

toy gets a home and every child knows where that home is.

- **Kitchen** – In the New York Times, Professional Chef, Mark Bittman wrote an article titled, “[A No-Frills Kitchen Still Cooks](#)” where he outfitted an entire kitchen for less than \$300. Check out his comprehensive list to be reminded of how few gadgets we really need to cook.
- **Storage Room** – While some argue against the use of boxes in the storage room saying they discourage true purging, I believe they can be helpful in storing things neatly. If you are nervous about the minimalizing process, store items in a specially-marked box with the date clearly marked. After 3-4 months if you had no need for the item, perhaps you can function without it permanently.

## Where Our Clutter Went

Since we became minimalist, we have removed countless boxes of clutter from our home. Each box that leaves our home seems to allow in an extra breath of fresh air. Here is what we chose to do with our old clutter:

- **We turned it into money.**
  - **Garage sales** - Not the best return on investment, but what you sacrifice in money you gain back in time and convenience. Set-up a few tables, slap on a few stickers, and watch total strangers turn your old clutter into cash.
  - **Ebay** – The world’s largest marketplace takes a little more time, energy and computer skills, but the financial return is worth it.
  - **Craigslist** – We have found Craigslist helpful in selling some of our larger items such as furniture and vehicles - where shipping would be a problem.
  
- **We helped someone who needed it.**
  - **Goodwill** – Countless boxes of books, clothing, and home decorations have been delivered to our local goodwill outlet.
  - **Pregnancy Centers** – Because of our stage in life, we have given plenty of quality baby and maternity items to help out young mothers through our local pregnancy center.
  - **Refugee Resettlement Programs** – Our local program gladly accepted quality bedding,

linens, and cookware to help refugees begin a new life in a new home.

- **We recycled when possible.**
  - **Landfill Recycle Center** – Our local landfill offers the opportunity to drop off items that are still usable. These items are free for anyone to take home and use.
  
- **We threw things away.**
  - **Garbage** – If a different home could not be found, the garbage man gladly threw our black plastic bags into the back of his truck.

No matter where it ends up, whether in your bank account, in another person's home, or in the landfill, the important thing is that the clutter is no longer a part of your life.

Once the clutter has been removed, we must ensure that it does not return. That is why Guiding Principle #4 in decluttering your home and life is **Stop the Trend of Consumerism in your Life.**

## PRINCIPLE #4: STOP THE TREND

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*“You say, ‘If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied.’ You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled.” — Charles Spurgeon*

Last August, we took our son to a big-box toy store to spend some gift certificates that he had gotten for his birthday. He wanted a skateboard. I liked the idea of having a kid that can ride a skateboard so we took a trip to Toys ‘R Us to spend his gift certificates.

As soon as we walked in the store, his eyes got really big and started wandering. I had hoped to make a beeline for the sports section, but immediately realized that this shopping trip was not going to happen as I planned. As we were walking (I mean, as I was pulling him) my son quickly noticed an aisle with dinosaurs and spotted a pop-up tent that was designed to look like a cave. On the package was a young boy smiling from ear to ear while playing with 15-20 dinosaurs around the cave. At that moment, my son decided that he no longer wanted a skateboard; he wanted a pop-up tent that looked like a dinosaur cave.

As the father, I had to step in. I'm smart enough to realize that this toy would get played with once or twice and never again – if it didn't break right away. He would have quickly realized it wasn't really that exciting (the dinosaurs weren't even included). Through some heavy persuasion techniques, I talked him out of purchasing the dinosaur cave and he ultimately did buy the skateboard (that experience looks much neater on paper than it did in the store... if you know what I mean).

I'm glad I was there to play the father-role and save my son from wasting his birthday money on that unwise purchase. I was above the situation enough that I knew, in the long run, he would find more enjoyment in a skateboard than a pretend dinosaur cave.

But this book isn't about him, it's about me and it's about you.

This story got me asking the hard question: "Who do I have in my life that keeps me from making foolish

decisions with my money?” Sure, I have more life experience and wisdom than my son which helps give me some discretion. But as I look around my house at all the things that seemed like a good purchase at the time, I can’t help but wonder if my house (and bank account) would look different if I had somebody looking over my shoulder... playing the daddy-role... keeping me from wasteful spending.

Here are some practical tips to help decrease the influence of consumerism in your life. The more we decrease its influence, the easier it is to control our spending.

- **Realize possessions do not equal joy.** As a part of my full-time job, I frequently take adults and students to third-world environments. I have taken enough trips over the years that I can predict what the emotional response is going to be in the life of somebody who has never seen life outside of the established, consumer-driven, American culture where I live. They will inevitably have three emotions at some point during the trip:

1. They will be shocked that people with so little can be so joyful.
2. They will wish that they enjoyed life as much as the people they meet.
3. They will say that they are blessed to live in America and own so many possessions.

The reflective ones will connect the dots and realize the foolishness of their third statement as soon as they say it out loud. Others will repeat the same three emotions over and over again. Studies have shown over and over again that “possessions” and “joy” are not equal (for example, America ranks #1 in rate of depression).

The unfortunate truth is, we have equated possessions with joy for so long that even when the evidence is right in front of our faces, we don't recognize it.

- **Consider the true cost of your purchases.**

Usually when we make a purchase, we look at the amount on the price tag as the full price of the item. While that number accurately represents the actual

cost on the day of the purchase, it rarely represents the full cost of the item. Consider some of these hidden costs:

- 1 in 11 American households purchase self-storage space outside of their house. On average they spend over \$1,000 per year storing their stuff.
- It costs an average of \$10/square foot to store items in your home.
- Stephanie Winston, author of the Organized Executive, estimates a manager loses 1 hour/day of productivity to disorder (costing the business over \$8,000/yr if earning a \$65,000 annual salary).
- Estimates say that somewhere between 8-13% of your electrical bill is a result of standby power – the electricity that an appliance pulls just from being plugged in when not in use.
- Harris Interactive reports that 23 percent of adults say they pay bills late (and incur fees) because they lose them.

- The National Association of Professional Organizers says we spend one year of our lives looking for lost items.

- **Understand the Downside of Consumerism.**

Consumerism is an economic theory that argues an increasing consumption of goods is economically desirable for a civilization. It is most often associated with the western world, but is true of far more economic systems around the world than just the west.

- Consumerism has its advantages:
  - The consumer chooses his/her lifestyle – what goods are necessary and what luxuries can be afforded.
  - There are economic advantages to a large segment of the population (middle- and upper-class).
  - There is opportunity and motivation to improve your social standing by working hard.

- But consumerism has its disadvantages:
  - In a consumerist market, it is in the interest of producers that the consumer's needs and desires never be completely or permanently fulfilled, so the consumer can repeat the consumption process and purchase more products. This can be accomplished with made-to-break products, continuously changing the trends of the market (i.e., fashion), employing class-envy, or encouraging individuals to purchase above their means.
  - In a consumerist society, people begin to seek money/goods as the greatest good rather than influence or helping others.
  - Consumerist societies are more prone to damage the environment and use up resources at a higher rate than other societies.
  - In consumeristic societies, the upper- and middle-class typically

benefit at the expense of the lower-class or other non-consumeristic societies.

Please understand, this piece is not written in support or opposition to the theory of consumerism. It is meant only to provide you with enough understanding to help you make wise financial choices in the consumerist society in which you live.

- **Create a Spending Plan.** While deciding to live simply has financial benefits, it won't automatically fix your financial problems. Chances are if you overspent before decluttering your life, you'll continue to overspend after – (you just may find different things to spend it on). If you or your family have been overspending your means, let me offer a spending plan that I have used with great success.

The idea that distinguishes this “spending plan” from “a typical budget” is the understanding that while a budget dictates to you what you can spend, where, and when (“we can only spend

\$200 on groceries this month...”); a spending plan allows you the control of your money every single month. Also, it realizes that your purchases change and expenses vary from month to month and that a one-size-fits-all monthly budget doesn't truly fit anything.

Using this model that I propose is quite simple, although it does require some effort from you on the front end and throughout the month. To get started, determine your monthly take-home pay (not your gross income, but your net income - the amount on your check).

Second, sit down and determine your fixed monthly costs. These are the things that you currently have in your life that require some of your income every month – no questions asked. The actual monthly expense may vary (within reason) from month to month, but you know it is going to be there. For us, here is our list of monthly expenses:

- mortgage
- charity

- groceries
- auto fuel
- savings/retirement
- gas
- electricity
- water
- auto insurance
- college loan repayment
- cable
- phone/internet
- cell phone
- garbage
- newspaper
- blockbuster online

After you have determined your monthly income and your monthly fixed costs, you can easily recognize your monthly discretionary income (the money that you have left over to spend as you desire) by subtracting your monthly fixed costs from your monthly net income. For example, if you have \$500 per month left over after paying your fixed costs, you have \$500 in discretionary income. The spending plan allows you the opportunity to spend that \$500 as you

desire: golf clubs, cinnamon rolls, dining, new clothes, this book...

This spending plan has some wonderful benefits:

- The initial realization of your discretionary income will give you a healthy framework to determine how much money you actually have to spend each month.
- The plan allows you to see how life patterns affect others. For example, if you lay out your plan and realize that you need more discretionary income, you have a list of fixed costs that can be cut. Maybe you don't really need cable tv if it means you can spend more on a vacation...
- You will be able to easily recognize how economics should be influencing your spending. If auto fuel goes up \$1.00/gallon, you can quickly recalculate your fixed costs and determine how much discretionary income has taken a hit. Conversely, if fuel goes down, you'll have a little extra that you can spend or save that month.

Even if you don't hold yourself to consistent tracking of expenses throughout each month, I

recommend going through the initial layout just to get a sense of your “actual discretionary income.” It may just be the first step for you to finally control your spending.

- **Become a Fan of the Invisible.** There is a wise saying that goes like this, “Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

April 15 is tax day in America where every citizen is required to fill out their forms and send in to the government any taxes due. It is an interesting feeling to fill out your tax forms. It’s one of those moments in life where everything gets flipped upside-down.

For example: during the year I look forward to every paycheck and every bit of extra income. But when I sit down to fill out my tax forms, I cringe at every bit of extra income that I received during the year. In the same way, making a charitable donation can be a difficult check to write during the year, especially when money is tight. But, on April

15, I celebrate every charitable donation I made and often wish I had made more as each one slowly reduces my tax bill.

The end of our lives will be much the same. It will be another moment when everything gets flipped upside-down. At that moment, we won't care about how many hours we had worked, we'll just care about the time we spent with family and friends and probably wish we had done it more. We won't care about the size of our bank account or the things we had acquired... we'll care about the difference we have made, the lives we have changed, and the legacy we have left.

Tax day and deathbed are two moments in life when everything gets flipped upside down. But there is one big difference between them: we'll have to do our taxes again next year (unfortunately), but we only get one shot at this life (unfortunately). Live it for the things that matter by becoming a fan of the invisible, lasting things today.

## PRINCIPLE #5: PERSEVERE

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*Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted. — Albert Einstein*

### **Goals Shape Us and Change Us**

My friend Cheryl had a goal in mind. I knew her in high school and her goal was to receive a diving scholarship from the University of Nebraska. All through her high school years, this goal motivated her in incredible ways. It inspired her to wake up early in the morning and hit the gym. It inspired her everyday after school as she was in the pool diving over and over again, for hours at a time. It affected her eating habits, causing her to choose healthy salads and bottled water rather than cheeseburgers and tacos (like I was eating). She would go to bed rehearsing dives in her mind, and she would wake up thinking about them and what she needed to work on that day. Her goal of making the college diving team affected nearly every aspect of her life.

That was, until March of her senior year at the conclusion of the Nebraska high school diving season and the state competition. Unfortunately, despite all

her hard work, she was notified that she would not be receiving the diving scholarship she desperately desired. She had poured her heart and her soul into realizing that goal, but it had vanished and was out of her reach.

Overnight, Cheryl became a different person. Once she came to grasp that it was not meant to be, her life changed drastically and radically. Suddenly, she began spending tons of time with her friends, hanging out after school and staying later at their parties. She started ordering cheeseburgers and soda instead of salads and water (which made us feel better about ourselves, by the way). She began sleeping in on weekends instead of hitting the gym at 6am. It was almost as if she had a different life before and after the birth and death of her goals. She became a completely different person.

The truth is that goals move us and goals shape us. Our goals affect us and they affect the way we go about living our lives.

When you begin the decluttering process in your home, you will feel excited and energized. You will gain small victories and they will compel you to set even loftier goals (next Saturday – the attic!). They will mold you, shape you, and motivate you. Then, you'll finish.

And the difficult task of keeping your home clutter-free will set in. Your energy will no longer be set by the goal of decluttering one more room. Instead, you will learn to persevere.

To help you persevere and keep your home clutter-free, here are 6 helpful hints:

### **1. Recognize Your “Clutter Collection Sites.”**

After just a few short months of decluttering, I began to recognize some “clutter collection sites” in my home: the kitchen counter (mail, school papers, kids' artwork), the bedroom dressers (coins, magazines, books, pocket items, work projects brought home), the dining room table (toys, shopping bags), the home office desk (receipts,

unpaid bills, computer print-outs, paperwork) and the toy room (toys, toys, toys).

Because clutter attracts clutter, these specific areas of my home brought frustration to my life as they continued to collect clutter even after months of purging. I did gain some relief in the realization that I could even identify our trouble spots. Before beginning the journey, I'm not sure I understood the flow of my home enough to even realize which spots were the sore spots. After you purge your clutter and recognize your clutter collection sites, you are able to begin addressing the problem:

- Admit that some things will require daily attention by their nature: beds, clothes, dishes, mail, toys...
- Install "clutter busters" in those areas. For example, a tidy inbox for your mail or kid's schoolwork should help keep the unsightly clutter to a minimum. A junk drawer for those little odds and ends that end up on the kitchen counter. Find a solution that fits for you.

- Change your habits. Stop putting your mail on the kitchen table, your coat on the back of a chair, or your change on the countertop. Find its home and get in the habit of putting it there.

**2. Minimize Your Junk Mail.** One step to not allowing junk mail to clutter your home is to throw it in the recycle bin immediately after you bring it through your door. However, the better solution is to not receive it at all.

Removing your name from mailing lists is not as time-consuming as you might think and it shouldn't cost you a penny. You can reduce your junk mail 75-85% by following these three easy steps:

- Register your name with the direct marketing association's mail preference service ([www.dmchoice.org](http://www.dmchoice.org)) and be added to their "do not mail" database.
- Opt-out of pre-approved credit card, mortgage, and insurance offers by using the online form at [optoutprescreen.com](http://optoutprescreen.com).

- For individual catalogs that you receive, call the company and ask them to remove you from their mailing list.

These changes may take up to 90 days to begin working, but you will certainly notice the difference when they do!

**3. Stay Ahead of the Game with Clothing.** I get it: you change, your kids change, seasons change, and styles change. Never buying new clothes is out of the question. Therefore, determine to stay ahead of the game when it comes to clothing. Perhaps a “one-in, one-out policy” works for you. For my family, the wardrobe experiment with the hangers mentioned above works for us. At the start of every season, we turn our hangers around and commit to removing any article of clothing that doesn’t get worn. It has helped us to stay ahead of the game when it comes to our closet space.

#### **4. Stay Clutter-Free with Kids.**

I get asked often (by readers and friends alike) how we maintain a simple home with two small children

in the family. It certainly adds to the challenge. We have found a few key steps to be very helpful in our house:

- **Identify the toys they actually use.**  
Our kids' toy room was given a substantial facelift by taking one simple step: we removed the toys they no longer used. We involved them in the process and gave them a voice in the decision to keep a toy or remove it. Surprisingly, they were very candid and honest in their responses.
- **Purge often.** During your initial purge, you will probably remove a large number of toys. That's great. But stay on top of it. Purge often. As new toys are brought in the home (holidays, birthdays, seasonal changes), be on the lookout for old toys that can be removed.
- **A home for everything.** The rule for you applies to them as well. Everything gets a home. When everything has a

home, cleaning up becomes a much easier chore (and a little bit more fun).

- **Quality over Quantity.** Allow this principle to permeate all areas of your life including the toys that you purchase. It is better to own a few toys that your kids love to play with than to own a pile of junk that they don't.

## **5. Be Ready for the Holidays/Gifts.**

I almost gave up minimalism one time. As I mentioned, we chose rational minimalism as a lifestyle in May, 2008. Subsequently, we spent the summer purging every room in our home. It looked great by the time we were finished and we loved living in our new home.

But then, came Christmas. We quickly realized that two small children plus four sets of relatives equals a lot of gifts. Our home was quickly cluttered with toys, gifts, and boxes. It felt like all of our hard work was for nothing.

We persevered. We decluttered. And we chose to make some changes before the next birthday or Christmas:

- **We chose not to remove the joy that our relatives receive from giving gifts.** Our families love giving gifts, especially on holidays. It is one way they share their love for us. It would be unfair to rob them of their joy and rob our kids of their joy by asking for no more gifts. Therefore, we wisely chose not to go down that road.
- **We made a point to give them lists.** Before every birthday/holiday, we give our relatives a wish-list for each of our kids and ourselves. We include just the things that we truly need. Again, we choose quality items over quantity.
- **After a time, we purge again.** It can be difficult to know, right out of the package, how our kids will respond to a new toy. Some toys they play with for a day and never touch again. Some toys they play with for a week and never

touch again. Other toys become some of their favorites and get used often. After the dust has settled, we evaluate their new toys and their old toys and determine which toys to keep and which to remove.

**6. Think Outside the Box.** Here are a few more tips to help you persevere in your clutter-free lifestyle:

- **Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.** Stop trying to impress others with your stuff and start trying to impress them with your life.
- **Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.** Refuse to be a slave to anything: coffee, cigarettes, soda, television, chocolate, alcohol...
- **Develop a habit of giving things away.** Most of us could get rid of half of our possessions without any serious sacrifice.
- **Refuse to be propagandized by modern gadgetry.** Technology doesn't

always make your life simpler. As a matter of fact, most of the time it just makes your life more cluttered.

- **Learn to enjoy things without owning them.** Ownership is nothing, access is everything. Visit a library, a park, or a museum.
- **Develop a deeper appreciation for nature.**

## PRINCIPLE #6: SHARE THE JOY

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*“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” - Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)*

### Telling Our Story

Over the past two years since we intentionally decided to become minimalist, I have had thousands of conversations with people about our decision. And it usually starts about the same way.

My wife and I will be seated at a table with a group of people when one of our friends will say, “Joshua, you should tell us about your minimalism decision.” I tend to be a smidge reluctant not desiring to draw all the attention to us, but often oblige when the question is repeated. I try to begin as close to the beginning as possible and take them through our journey while the others ask questions along the way. Somewhere about half-way through, I inevitably find agreement on the part of the listeners.

Typically, they will respond with statements like, “I have so much stuff that I need to get rid of too,” or “You should see my basement, it’s a disaster,” or my personal favorite, “I can’t wait to get home and start throwing things away right now!” A smaller percentage will email or post a comment on our website the following day journaling the boxes of junk or bags of clothes that they have removed from their lives.

The attractiveness of minimalism (to date, only two men have outright determined that they would never get rid of their stuff) seems so universal that I can’t help think that this is the way life is meant to be lived. When a soul hears the invitation, it responds favorably, just like ours. We were never meant to live life accumulating stuff. We were meant to live simply enjoying the experiences of life, the people of life, and the journey of life - not the things of life.

Guiding Principle #6 for decluttering your home and life is **Share the Joy** by telling your story. You will find people are excited to try it themselves. They will cheer you on. They will motivate you by holding you

accountable and ask you how things are going the next time you see them.

Joy is best enjoyed when it is shared. When my wife and I got engaged, she couldn't wait to tell her friends. When our first child was born, I couldn't wait to call everybody I knew. Joy reaches its fullness when it is shared with others. So be sure to share your stories of decluttering with others.

On our website, we encourage our readers to share their stories of becoming minimalist. My heart is warmed when I read about the joy they are experiencing from decluttering their lives. Every story is unique, but the outcome is always the same. Here are two of my favorite stories:

## **Christine's Story**

*I've always liked the idea of having less "stuff" around. However, I was truly enlightened during a particularly stressful week at work.*

*I'm a 26 year old insurance agent. I'd been working with clients on their policies and couldn't get over the greed that consumed so many of them. I had a client call me up to complain about her insurance*

*prices and in the same breath she asked me to quote her a new BMW. Another client was obsessed with insuring every belonging he and his wife had – jewelry, furs, antiques, paintings, etc. And it just clicked in my head: I didn't want my husband and myself to become these people. I wanted to live without the stress of owning so many unnecessary belongings. I wanted freedom from stuff!*

*Since that moment, I've been going through my small apartment and "minimalizing." I've always been organized and not much of a pack-rat, but you'd be surprised at how much you have that is hiding in drawers and closets! I went through my jewelry and got rid of everything I'd never wear. I brought the gold I didn't want to a jeweler and sold it. Ebay has been fantastic for the other items. I keep making sweeps through the rooms in my apartment to see where else I can minimalize. I've still got a long way to go, but it's been great so far.*

*One of the perks is that in my attempt to become more minimalist I've stopped shopping almost completely. I plan on wearing out the clothes/shoes I have before buying anything new. I don't even think about shopping much at all anymore. My husband has really started getting into my new lifestyle choice – it's great to have him on board!*

*I just think that it's a great way to live. I carry less in my bag when I go places. I have fewer material*

*things to worry about. I don't feel "consumed with consumerism". It's liberating!*

## **Christy's Story**

*I have spent the last 10 months de-cluttering and simplifying our home and lives. I did one round of simplifying and when I started looking at my things more critically, I realized that the first go-around was really the tip of the iceberg.*

*It all started last Halloween. I was schlepping to the door for trick or treaters. I was embarrassed at the state of my house and thinking about Christmas and it all just came to a head internally.*

*The thought occurred to me – I live in a darling little Victorian house that could be the epitome of home and warmth, but it feels cramped and messy. And I knew Christmas would be here before we know it and that will mean \*more\* decor and clutter. Talk about missing the point and skipping the whole peace and reason for the season.*

*So I decided that night to start the next day removing as much clutter and reorganize so that in a few weeks when the Christmas season hit, I was going to enjoy my little house and cramming it full of people and things I really loved.*

*I worked my TAIL off and it made a huge difference in our Christmas and in my mental clutter. I started to look for things that had meaning in my stash of*

*Christmas decor and somewhere along the process, I started to see \*all\* my things in a new way....I wanted to be surrounded by things I love and not by stuff I should keep. I re-thought what I wanted our living spaces to be like and how they could serve our family better. For example...while a rocking chair evokes a feeling of warmth and comfort, how practical is it when my wrestling little boy gets it in the head and floor space is at a premium?*

*And in the 10 months since, I have kept at it...paring down our entire house – basement to bathroom – every drawer and corner. I've taken countless overflowing cartfuls of possessions to the thrift store and there isn't a single thing I wish I'd kept. That concept has been sobering to me to say the least...I had \*that\* much stuff that was "out of sight out of mind". Oy...no wonder we're considered the "haves" of the world. And I'm still finding things weekly that I can purge.*

*To me, this isn't about if I have 100 things or 1000. It's about living on the least I can. It's about spending less time thinking about stuff and more time loving people. It's about living in the present and not being caught up in the past or waiting for the future. It's about seeing everything I have as a huge blessing.*

*Am I down to the bare minimum? Probably not, but I'm working on it. But I feel like I've discovered a*

*new way of living that involves real thought and priorities and creativity. I ask myself questions now when dealing with my things... Will I really use this thing (and not just in theory!)? Is it in the most sensible place for it? Would it mean more to someone I love to have it? And most importantly "Just because I CAN buy something, does it mean I have to"?*

I hope these stories inspire you. But more importantly, I hope you are able to tell a story that inspires others.

## PRINCIPLE #7: SIMPLIFY EVERYWHERE

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*You don't need to chase everything you've always wanted if you already have everything you need.*

Simplicity brings freedom. Simplicity brings joy.

Simplicity brings balance. You will experience this freedom, joy, and balance as your home becomes simple and decluttered. Soon, you will begin to ask the question, "Where else in my life can I remove distraction and simply focus on the essential?"

Your answer to the question should sound something like this, "Almost everywhere I look!" In all areas of your life, choose to intentionally promote the things you most value and remove anything that distracts you from it. Here is a partial list of areas that we have found this principle add value to our lives:

### **Time Management**

I once spoke to a roomful of teenagers on priorities. I shared this story which originated with Stephen Covey:

A university professor was addressing his new group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, “Okay, time for a quiz.” He pulled out a one-gallon, mason jar and set it on the table in front of him. He also produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, “Is this jar full?”

Everyone in the class yelled, “Yes.”

The professor replied with a little smile, “Really?”

He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then, he asked the group once more, “Is the jar full?”

By this time the class was on to him. “Probably not,” one of them answered.

“Good!” he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all of the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, “Is this jar full?”

“No!” the class shouted.

This time, he said, “Well done.” He grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked at the class and asked, “Can anyone tell me the point of this illustration?”

One student in the front row raised his hand and said, “The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things in it!”

“No,” the speaker replied, “that’s not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: if you don’t put the big rocks in first, you’ll never get them in at all.”

What then, are the ‘big rocks’ in your life? Since becoming minimalist, we have been able to identify the big rocks in our lives – our kids, our friends, our faith, our goals, and our influence. Simplifying life is about identifying the big rocks, putting them in the jar, and intentionally eliminating the little rocks.

## **The Tyranny of the Urgent**

In 1967, Charles Hummel wrote a book called Tyranny of the Urgent. A man ahead of his time, Hummel describes the tension between two contestants which battle for our time: the urgent and the important. He argues that the urgent things—such as the demands at the office, the demands of other people, and even our own “inner compulsions”—typically trump the things which are important, like regular dates with our spouse, personal solitude, exercise, or meditation.

With incredible depth of insight, he noted that important things are polite; they don’t clamor for our attention. They just wait patiently for us to act. In the long run there’s a price to pay for this neglect of the

important stuff. Like a volcano, there comes a day when the neglected areas of our life explode and wreak havoc. Ironically, we wonder how we missed the early warning signs.

Our temptation is to say, “Well, I just didn’t have enough time to do everything.” Hummel suggests that the lack of time is ultimately a problem of setting appropriate priorities.

Last month, I read an article from CNN titled, “Drop that Blackberry! Multitasking may be Harmful.” Some recent studies are suggesting that technological multitasking actually lowers productivity. Specifically, heavy multitaskers are more easily distracted by irrelevant information than those who aren’t constantly in a multimedia frenzy, according to the study in the proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. David Goodman, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine said, “We are being flooded with too much information and you can’t selectively filter out quickly which is important and which is not important.”

Which bring us back to the principles argued in Tyranny of the Urgent written over 40 years ago.

Simplifying your life can be more than just removing physical belongings. If minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things that I most value, it is also about deciding what is most important in my life and removing the things that distract me from it. It is about removing the urgent for the sake of the important.

## **Plain, Honest Speech**

Make honesty and integrity the distinctive characteristics of your speech. If you agree to do something, do it. Avoid flattery and half-truths. Steer clear of words only used to impress others. You will never regret it, and you will sleep well at night.

## **Your Television Channels**

Last January, we got rid of extended cable. It was the cable company's idea. Although we considered changing our service every time they raised our prices, when they went over the \$60/month threshold,

we finally pulled the plug and downgraded to their Basic Package (13 channels).

Because that was over one year ago, we have had sufficient opportunity to evaluate our decision:

- Less channels
- More boardgames
- More family walks
- More playing sports rather than watching them
- More time at the dinner table
- More reading
- More sex
- More money in the savings account
- More time with friends
- More interest in real peoples' lives
- More time at the gym
- More appreciation for both political parties (less FoxNews, CNN, MSNBC)

Let's be clear: we have not eliminated television completely from our lives. My children (7 and 3) still watch at least one hour per day (30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes after school). I still watch

sports when available. My wife still enjoys her dramas in primetime. But our television watching has been drastically reduced. We are overwhelmingly pleased with our decision and would recommend the experiment to anyone!

## Your Computer Screen

Computers, even with all their time-saving devices, can actually become one of the most distracting things in our life. In order to keep your computer use stream-lined, I recommend these simplifying techniques:

- Clear your email inbox every day.
- Uninstall unused software.
- Use folders to sort documents.
- Hide desktop icons.
- Use a simple word-processor.
- Limit your time on social networking sites.

## SIMPLICITY'S INVITATION

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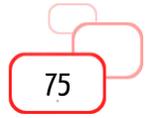
*"Everyone chases after happiness, not noticing that happiness is right at their heels." - Bertolt Brecht*

One day a fisherman was lying on a beautiful beach, with his fishing pole propped up in the sand and his solitary line cast out into the sparkling blue surf. He was enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun and the prospect of catching a fish.

About that time, a businessman came walking down the beach, trying to relieve some of the stress of his workday. He noticed the fisherman sitting on the beach and decided to find out why this fisherman was fishing instead of working harder to make a living for himself and his family. "You aren't going to catch many fish that way," said the businessman. "You should be working rather than lying on the beach!"

The fisherman looked up at the businessman, smiled and replied, "And what will my reward be?"

"Well, you can get bigger nets and catch more fish!" was the businessman's answer.



“And then what will my reward be?” asked the fisherman, still smiling.

The businessman replied, “You will make money and you’ll be able to buy a boat, which will then result in larger catches of fish!”

“And then what will my reward be?” asked the fisherman again.

The businessman was beginning to get a little irritated with the fisherman’s questions. “You can buy a bigger boat, and hire some people to work for you!” he said.

“And then what will my reward be?” repeated the fisherman.

The businessman was getting angry. “Don’t you understand? You can build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all over the world, and let all your employees catch fish for you!”

Once again the fisherman asked, “And then what will my reward be?”

The businessman was red with rage and shouted at the fisherman, “Don’t you understand that you can become so rich that you will never have to work for your living again! You can spend all the rest of your days sitting on this beach, looking at the sunset. You won’t have a care in the world!”

The fisherman, still smiling, looked up and said, “And what do you think I’m doing right now?”

## **The Invitation**

There is a life of simplicity that is calling out to you. It is inviting you to live the life you were born to live, not the life your neighbor is trying to achieve. It is inviting you to value the things that you want to value, not the values of billboards and advertisements. It is inviting you to remove the distractions in your life that are keeping you from truly living.

And it’s been here the whole time...



Since choosing to simplify his life two years ago, Joshua has encouraged hundreds of thousands of others around the world to pursue minimalism in their life through his blog: [www.becomingminimalist.com](http://www.becomingminimalist.com). As one of today's leading proponents of "rational minimalism," Joshua presents 7 principles that will help guide the reader into a practice of simplicity that works for their unique, individual lifestyle. You will

enjoy his unique blend of illustrative stories, theoretical principle, and practical application. After all, if this typical family of four living in the suburbs can simplify their life, so can you!