

THE MORE OF LESS



Finding the Life You Want
Under Everything You Own

JOSHUA BECKER

Creator of BecomingMinimalist.com

Praise for *The More of Less*

“I’m so inspired by this wise, timely book! Like so many people right now, I’m drawn to the idea of minimalism, but, to be honest, I find myself pretty deeply entrenched in bad habits of clutter and accumulation. I’m so thankful for Joshua’s clear vision for what life can be when we choose to surround ourselves with less stuff, and how in doing so, we create more space for living and dreaming.”

—SHAUNA NIEQUIST, author of *Bread & Wine* and *Savor*

“Joshua Becker is a distinguished voice in the modern minimalism movement. Engaging and nonjudgmental, *The More of Less* masterfully articulates the benefits—and the joy—of living with less.”

—JOSHUA FIELDS MILLBURN, creator of theminimalists.com and coauthor of *Everything That Remains*

“Joshua Becker is one of my heroes. If you’re struggling with too much stuff and too little happiness, here is your must-read.”

—PETER WALSH, *New York Times* best-selling author of *It's All Too Much*

“Joshua Becker reveals an innovative approach that adds more meaning to our schedules, personal well-being, relationships, finances, and passions. Don’t let the word *minimalist* intimidate you. There are no drastic measures required, and no set plans you must follow. Open this book to unburden your life and give oxygen to what matters most.”

—RACHEL MACY STAFFORD, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Hands Free Mama* and *Hands Free Life*

“I’ve enjoyed Joshua Becker’s message and writing for many years, and this is by far his best work. His very practical advice for living with less, together with moving stories from real people living with less, provides the tools and motivation for powerful change. I’m in awe of how Becker weaves the step-by-step *how to* with the moving *why to* of minimalism.”

—COURTNEY CARVER, author of *Simple Ways to Be More with Less*

“This is it—the book that will change your life with a surprisingly simple solution: Less can actually mean more. A whole lot more.”

—JEFF GOINS, best-selling author of *The Art of Work*

“Joshua Becker leads you through the steps of finding the life you want by getting to the heart of what you need. If you have been looking for a practical, actionable guide to help you find a simpler and more fulfilling way of living, this is it.”

—PATRICK RHONE, author of *enough*

“This definitive book on minimalism offers the ‘why,’ the ‘how,’ and the ‘who.’ Because Joshua is a longtime practitioner with sound credibility, readers can rest assured that whatever steps they’ll be taking will lead to a richer life of joy, generosity, meaning, and wholeness.”

—RICHARD DAHLSTROM, senior pastor of Bethany Community Church, Seattle, WA

“Often our biggest fear about living with less is that we might miss out, but Joshua Becker explains just how much we have to gain from the minimalist lifestyle. Packed with actionable ideas you can apply today, *The More of Less* is the perfect balance of instruction and motivation.”

—RUTH SOUKUP, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Unstuffed*

“Joshua Becker is promoting a way to do life that is more than attractive—it’s a really big idea that will radically change lives.”

—JEFF SHINABARGER, founder of Plywood People and author of *More or Less: Choosing a Lifestyle of Excessive Generosity*

“With amusing stories and practical advice, Joshua explains how to make your minimalist journey a group endeavor with friends and family.”

—DAVE BRUNO, author of *The 100 Thing Challenge*

“I came to *The More of Less* a skeptic. By the end, though—thanks to Joshua Becker’s gentle, simple, persuasive way of explaining things—I’d thrown out a bunch of stuff, and I was a convert.”

—JAMES WALLMAN, author of *Stuffocation*

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Dedicated to the entire Becoming Minimalist community. Your support and encouragement have served as an inspiration to me and made this book possible. May your lives continue to inspire others to live more by owning less.

Contents

1	Becoming Minimalist	1
2	Good Riddance	17
3	Minimalism Your Way	29
4	The Fog of Consumerism	43
5	The Want Within	63
6	Take It Easy	79
7	Troubleshooting	93
8	Experiments in Living with Less	117
9	Maintenance Program	137
10	The Minimalist Family	153
11	Shortcut to Significance	173
12	An Intentional Life	191
13	Don't Settle for Less	207
	Acknowledgments	220
	Notes	223

Becoming Minimalist

In 2008, Memorial Day weekend promised to deliver beautiful weather—not always the case in Vermont at that time of year. So my wife, Kim, and I decided to spend that Saturday shopping, running errands, and catching up on chores. Spring cleaning was our big goal for the weekend, starting with the garage.

Saturday morning dawned, and as Kim and our infant daughter slept on, I got our son, Salem, out of bed early for some eggs and bacon. I thought that after a nice breakfast he might be in a state of mind to help his dad. Looking back now, I'm not sure why I thought a five-year-old would feel eager about cleaning a garage, but nevertheless this was my hope. After breakfast we made our way to it.

Our two-car garage, as always, was full of stuff. Boxes stacked one on top of another threatened to fall off shelves. Bikes were tangled together, leaned against a wall. A garden hose slumped in loops in a corner. Rakes and shovels and brooms leaned every which way. Some days we'd have to turn sideways when getting in and out of our cars to squeeze through the mess that filled the garage.

"Salem," I said, "here's what we need to do. This garage has gotten dirty and messy over the winter, so we're going to pull everything out onto the driveway. Then we're going to hose down the entire

garage, and after it's dry, we'll put everything back more organized. Okay?"

The little guy nodded, pretending to understand everything I had just told him.

I motioned to a plastic bin in the corner and asked Salem to drag it out.

Unfortunately, this particular bin happened to be full of Salem's summer toys. As you can imagine, as soon as my son was reunited with toys he hadn't seen in months, the last thing he wanted to do was help me clean the garage. He grabbed his Wiffle ball and bat and began heading for the backyard.

On his way out, he stopped. "Will you play with me, Dad?" he asked, a hopeful expression on his face.

"Sorry, buddy. I can't," I told him. "But we can play as soon as I finish. I promise."

With a pang, I watched Salem's brown head disappear around the corner of the garage.

As the morning crept along, one thing led to another, and the possibility that I would be able to join Salem in the backyard began to look less and less likely. I was still working in the garage hours later when Kim called Salem and me in for lunch.

When I headed back outside to finish the job, I noticed our next-door neighbor June working in her own yard, planting flowers and watering her garden. June was an elderly woman with gray hair and a kindly smile who had always taken an interest in my family. I waved to her and got on with my work.

By this point, I was trying to clean and organize all the stuff I

had dragged out of the garage in the morning. It was hard work and taking much longer than I had expected. As I worked, I thought about all the times lately that I had been feeling discontented while taking care of our stuff. Here was yet another time! What made it worse was that Salem kept appearing from the backyard to ask questions or try to convince me to play with him. Each time I'd tell him, "Almost done, Salem."

June could recognize the frustration in my body language and tone of voice. At one point, as we happened to pass each other, she said to me sarcastically, "Ah, the joys of home ownership." She had spent most of the day caring for her own home.

I responded, "Well, you know what they say—the more stuff you own, the more your stuff owns you."

Her next words changed the course of my life. "Yeah," she said, "that's why my daughter is a minimalist. She keeps telling me I don't need to own all this stuff."

I don't need to own all this stuff.

The sentence reverberated in my mind as I turned to look at the fruits of my morning labor: a large pile of dirty, dusty possessions stacked in my driveway. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed my son, alone in the backyard, still playing by himself. The juxtaposition of the two scenes dug deep into my heart, and I began to recognize the source of my discontent for the first time.

It was piled up in my driveway.

I already knew that possessions don't equal happiness. Doesn't everybody? At least we all profess to know that our things won't bring us true satisfaction. But in that moment, as I surveyed the pile of stuff

in my driveway, another realization came to me: *Not only are my possessions not bringing happiness into my life; even worse, they are actually distracting me from the things that do!*

I ran inside the house and found my wife upstairs scrubbing a bathtub. Still trying to catch my breath, I said, “Kim, you’ll never guess what just happened. June said we don’t need to own all this stuff!”

And in that moment a minimalist family was born.

A NEW CALLING

That weekend, Kim and I started talking about what we could get rid of to simplify our lives and return our focus to what really mattered to us. We began selling, giving away, and throwing away things we didn’t need. Within six months, we had gotten rid of 50 percent of our belongings. We quickly began seeing the benefits of minimalism and developing a philosophy for how simpler, more purposeful living is something everyone can benefit from.

I was so excited about it that by the end of Memorial Day weekend, I had created a blog—called *Becoming Minimalist*—to keep our extended family up to date with our journey. It began as nothing more than an online journal for me. But then something amazing happened: people I didn’t know began reading the blog and telling their friends about it. My readers grew into the hundreds, then the thousands, then the tens of thousands . . . and the numbers just kept growing.

I kept thinking, *What is going on here? What does this mean?*

For years, I had been a student-ministry pastor at various

churches. In Vermont, our student ministry was the largest of any church in New England. I loved helping middle-school and high-school students find greater spiritual meaning for their lives. Nevertheless, I began to sense that this minimalism blog played some role in my life's destiny.

I began receiving e-mails with specific questions about owning less, inquiries from media outlets, and speaking requests. Promoting minimalism became a deep and enduring passion for me. I realized this was an important message—one that could help people of all backgrounds and all spiritual persuasions, living all over the world, to better their lives. Perhaps I needed to promote minimalism full time, I thought.

As an experimental transition, in 2012 I agreed to move to Arizona and spend two years helping a friend start a church, while at the same time laying the foundation for a new career. At the end of those two years, I made the transition to full-time promoter of the benefits of owning less.

Today, the blog is going stronger than ever, with readership now in excess of one million readers every month. I have also published a subscription newsletter and some books. More and more these days, I am asked to speak at sustainability conferences, professional-organizing chapter meetings, entrepreneurial events, Christian conferences, and other gatherings. The opportunities to share about minimalism continue to increase.

I have learned a lot about minimalism in the years since my garage-cleaning experience. The best of my discoveries appear here in *The More of Less*. Yet the point I will keep coming back to is the same

insight I had on that first day: Our excessive possessions are not making us happy. Even worse, they are taking us away from the things that do. Once we let go of the things that don't matter, we are free to pursue all the things that really do matter.

This is a message desperately needed in a society heavily motivated by the possibility of owning large amounts of stuff. And I believe it is a message that will bring you new life and greater joy.

WHAT YOUR CLOSETS ARE TELLING YOU

Will Rogers once said, “Too many people spend money they haven’t earned to buy things they don’t want to impress people they don’t like.”¹ His analysis is truer today than when he first uttered it. It’s true, I suspect, in all the wealthier nations of the world. But let me take my own country—the United States of America—as an example.

In America, we consume twice as many material goods as we did fifty years ago.² Over the same period, the size of the average American home has nearly tripled, and today that average home contains about three hundred thousand items.³ On average, our homes contain more televisions than people.⁴ And the US Department of Energy reports that, due to clutter, 25 percent of people with two-car garages don’t have room to park cars inside and another 32 percent have room for only one vehicle.⁵ Home organization, the service that’s trying to find places for all our clutter, is now an \$8 billion industry, growing at a rate of 10 percent each year.⁶ And still one out of every ten American households rents off-site storage—the fastest-growing segment of the commercial real-estate industry over the past four decades.⁷

No wonder we have a personal-debt problem. The average household's credit-card debt stands at over \$15,000, while the average mortgage debt is over \$150,000.⁸

I'll stop there with the statistics dump, because I don't want to depress you. Besides, you don't need statistics and surveys to help you recognize that you very likely own too much stuff. You see it as you walk through your house every day. Your living space has become filled with possessions of every kind. Your floor space is crowded. Your closets are stuffed. Your drawers are overflowing. Even your freezer can't hold all the food you want to put in it. And there never seems to be enough cabinet space.

Am I right?

Although you probably sort of like most of the stuff you own, I suspect that, nevertheless, you have a sense that it's just too much and you want to do something about it. But how do you know what to keep and what to get rid of? How do you go about removing unneeded stuff from your life? When will you know that you've reached the right level of accumulation?

You may have picked up this book hoping for ideas about decluttering your house. You'll get them, I promise. And so much more as well! I'm going to show you how to find the life you want hidden under all the stuff you own. It's a "less is more" message with an emphasis on the *more*.

The payoff isn't just a clean house—it's a more satisfying, more meaningful life. Minimalism is an indispensable key to the better life you've been searching for all along.

I'll be honest with you. Deep down, I have a big dream for this

book: I want to introduce the world to minimalism. On average, at least in my own country, we see five thousand ads every day telling us to buy more.⁹ I want to be a voice urging us to buy less, because the potential benefits for our world are incalculable when hundreds, thousands, millions of lives are transformed by minimalism.

THE UNIVERSAL BENEFITS OF MINIMALISM

There is more joy to be found in owning less than can ever be found in pursuing more. In a world that constantly tells us to buy more and more, we often lose sight of that. But consider the life-giving benefits. You can expect a payoff in every one of the following areas if you practice the principles of minimalism taught in *The More of Less*.

- *More time and energy*—Whether we are making the money to buy them, researching and purchasing them, cleaning and organizing them, repairing them, replacing them, or selling them, our possessions consume our time and energy. So the fewer things we have, the more of our time and energy we'll have left to devote to other pursuits that matter more to us.
- *More money*—It's simple enough: By buying fewer things, we spend less money. Not just to acquire things in the first place but also to manage and maintain our goods. Maybe your path to financial freedom comes not from earning more but from owning less.
- *More generosity*—Living a less acquisitive, less costly lifestyle provides the opportunity to financially support

causes we care about. Our money is only as valuable as what we choose to spend it on, and there are countless opportunities worth vastly more than material accumulation.

- *More freedom*—Excess possessions have the power to enslave us physically, psychologically, and financially. Stuff is cumbersome and difficult to transport. It weighs on the spirit and makes us feel heavy. On the other hand, every time we remove an unnecessary item, we gain back a little freedom.
- *Less stress*—Every added possession increases the worry in our lives. In your mind, imagine two rooms: one that is cluttered and messy, and another that is tidy and sparse. Which one makes you feel anxious? Which one makes you feel calm? Mess + excess = stress.
- *Less distraction*—Everything around us competes for our attention. These small distractions can add up and prevent us from giving attention to the things we care about. And these days, who needs more distraction?
- *Less environmental impact*—Overconsumption accelerates the destruction of natural resources. The less we consume, the less damage we do to our environment, and that benefits everyone, including our children's and grandchildren's generations.
- *Higher-quality belongings*—The less money you spend on an excess quantity of things, the greater your opportunity to purchase quality possessions when you need

them. Minimalism is not necessarily the same as frugality. It is a philosophy recognizing that owning more stuff is not better; owning better stuff is better.

- *A better example for our kids*—What is the most common three-word phrase our children hear from us? Is it “I love you”? Or is it “I want that,” “It’s on sale,” or “Let’s go shopping”? It’s important to give our children a framework with which to counteract the out-of-control lifestyle marketed to them.
- *Less work for someone else*—If we don’t make the effort to sort through and pare down our possessions, then when we die or get to the point where we can’t take care of ourselves anymore, someone else (probably a loved one) is going to have to take up that burden. By sticking to the minimalist path, we make it easier for the other person.
- *Less comparison*—Our natural tendencies cause us to compare our lives with those around us. Combine that with the fact that we seem to have a built-in desire to impress others by owning as much as possible, then as Will Rogers said, we’ve got a recipe for disaster. Purposefully owning less begins to take us out of the unwinnable game of comparison.
- *More contentment*—We tend to think that we can resolve our discontentment by getting the item whose lack is seemingly making us unhappy. Yet material possessions will never fully satisfy the desires of our hearts. (That’s

why discontentment always returns after a purchase.) Only after we intentionally break the cycle of accumulating more, more, more can we begin to discern the true causes of discontentment in our lives.

More time, more money, less stress, less distraction, more freedom. It all sounds appealing, doesn't it? You'll be hearing more about these themes in the rest of the book, where I'll show you how to make these universal benefits your own.

Even if these universal benefits were the only reasons for practicing minimalism, they would be enough. But there's more. There's also the *personalized* benefit each of us can get from minimalism. Getting rid of what you don't need is the first step toward crafting the life you want.

FULFILLING YOUR GREATEST PASSIONS

When we embrace minimalism, we are immediately freed to pursue our greatest passions. And for some of us, it's been a long time since we've had access to the resources required to chase our hearts' greatest delights—however we define those delights. Living with less offers more time to spend on meaningful activities, more freedom to travel, more clarity in our spiritual pursuits, increased mental capacity to solve our most heartfelt problems, healthier finances to support causes we believe in, and greater flexibility to pursue the careers we most desire.

For me, one passion I have been freed up to pursue is inviting others to discover the benefits of the minimalist lifestyle. In many

ways, I feel like I get to play the neighbor role in others' lives. I am thankful that June introduced me to minimalism, and I am thankful that I have opportunities to pass it on to others.

Another big part of what I have personally gained from minimalism is better relationships. I love having more leisure time to spend with my immediate family, my extended family, and my friends. I also still participate regularly in my church, volunteering to do many of the things I used to do as a church employee. At the same time, I am free to pursue my relationship with God with less distraction and more freedom, and that means everything to me.

Recently, I have been very excited that, through the profits from this book, my wife and I have been able to create a nonprofit organization called The Hope Effect. Its mission is to change how the world cares for orphans by establishing a reproducible model of orphan care that mimics the family unit. When we had the idea for this nonprofit, Kim and I said to each other, "Why not? Let's do something meaningful with our resources." Because our financial obligations are modest, we were able to go for it. I'll be telling you more about this project later in the book.

My life is proof: subtracting unneeded stuff multiplies opportunities to pursue things you care about. The result is exponential growth in personal satisfaction. Maybe the life you've always wanted is buried under everything you own!

So let me ask you, what are your greatest unfulfilled passions? What might you have the potential to enjoy, pursue, or complete if you minimize your possessions? Do you want to connect more deeply with loved ones? See the world? Create art? Improve your

physical fitness? Achieve financial security? Give yourself to a big cause?

Keep those dreams in mind while you're reading, because that is really what this book is about. It's not just about owning less stuff. It's about living a bigger life!

WHAT TO EXPECT

I hope you are excited about the possibilities that this book represents. I have much more to say to you, both about the philosophy and the practicalities of minimalism. I believe this is the kind of book you will look back on later and think, *That book changed my life forever!* And I hope it is one you will pass along to others when you finish it.

To be clear, this book is not a memoir about my own journey in minimalism. Although I will share some of my own story along the way to illustrate what I am saying and hopefully provide inspiration, the book isn't about me. It's about you. It's about the joys of owning less. It's about how to implement minimalism in a way that transforms your life for the better.

I will also be introducing you to other people who have become minimalists and today intentionally own less. Many of them have been in situations that you will recognize from your own life, and what they did about their consumeristic habits will give you inspiration and ideas for embarking on a minimalist journey of your own. For example, you will learn about . . .

- Troy, for whom chipped paint on a windowsill started an adventure in minimalism

- Annette, who decided not to own a home at all, preferring to travel the world
- Dave and Sheryl, who saw creative and charitable desires bubble up inside themselves when they minimized
- Margot, who amazed herself by getting rid of one thousand items from her home
- Courtney, who has slowed the progress of a life-threatening disease by de-stressing her life
- Ryan, who packed every single thing he owned in boxes, then took out only what he needed
- Sarah, who changed her shopping habits forever by refusing to buy new clothes for an entire year
- Jessica, who developed her own minimalist philosophy starting when she was fifteen
- Ali, who gave up her most precious piece of jewelry—and changed the lives of people on the other side of the world because of it

You'll notice too that I will mention some stories from the Bible. My religious background has played a significant role in both my understanding and my practice of minimalism. You'll see me make the connection periodically throughout the book.

If you are from a different faith or a nonfaith background, I think you will find these stories both interesting and helpful. They highlight and illustrate some universal truths about life and the world around us. It won't take you long to recognize why I chose to include them.

Based on my experiences in meeting people all over the world and talking about the benefits of owning less, I don't have any hesitation

in affirming that minimalism is a way of life that can be transforming for everybody, everywhere. Keep reading *The More of Less* and let me prove it to you. Like a seed, its message is so simple and so full of the promise of growth.

RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER

I remember the Saturday of Labor Day weekend in 2008. It was a day with clear skies and warm weather, similar to that day three months earlier when I had gotten so frustrated while cleaning out our garage. This day, however, Kim and I had very little housework to do. Although we weren't yet finished minimizing, already we had reduced our possessions to a point where we didn't have to work around the house nearly as much as we used to. So our family was free to spend the day together doing the things we enjoyed. We wandered the wooded trails near our home, enjoyed a leisurely lunch on our porch, and pushed our kids on the swings.

Early that evening, I headed with Salem to the quiet street in front of our home. He was learning to ride his bike, and I was as proud as a father can be, straightening his helmet, giving him pushes to get started, and running up and down the street to make sure he stayed upright. I was pleased to see that he was really getting the hang of this new skill.

Before we finished, I challenged Salem to ride his bike all the way around the block without any help. I would go with him on my own bike—our first bicycle ride together.

As we turned the corner, I observed a neighbor in his driveway, looking tired, exasperated, and frustrated . . .

. . . cleaning out his garage!

I smiled to myself.

Someday, when the time was right, I would have a life-changing message for him: you don't need to own all that stuff.



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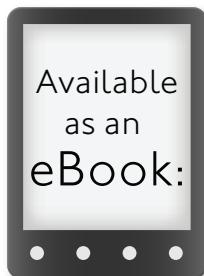
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