



Question & Answer with Joshua Becker author of *The More of Less*

Books about organizing and decluttering have become really popular recently. What makes *The More of Less* different?

First, I think it is important to understand why this is the case. The statistics are staggering. The average American home has nearly tripled in size over the past 50 years and according to the LA Times, families now own 300,000 items—no wonder, despite our increasingly larger homes, 10% of us have to rent offsite personal storage. The average 10-year-old in Great Britain owns 238 toys, but plays with just 12 daily. While the typical American boy or girl receives 70 new toys each year. And it doesn't stop with the children. The average American woman owns 30 outfits, one for every day of the month—in 1930, that figure was nine. Our homes contain more televisions than people, and 32% of people with two-car garages don't have room to park both cars inside them.

Meanwhile, the New York Times refers to us as the most stressed, tired, and rushed generation of all-time. There is a direct correlation.

We don't need more books telling us how to organize our stuff better, we need books that articulate and explain the benefits of owning less. This book does that. But it is so much more than that. This is also a book about generosity and selflessness and learning to pursue happiness in more fulfilling places than the acquisition of money or possessions. It's not just about owning less, it's about living a bigger life because of it.

For those unfamiliar with the term “minimalism,” what is it?

In the most basic sense, minimalism is about owning fewer things or owning only the things that are needed. But in reality, it is about so much more. Minimalism is about intentionality, freedom, and overcoming the desire to possess. It is a way of saying, “Let's stop the madness.” It is about redirecting our money, time, energy, and priorities towards our greatest passions.

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

What do you believe are the benefits of owning less?

The benefits of owning less are all around us and entirely life-giving. When we own less stuff, we reclaim time, money, focus, and energy. We spend less time cleaning, organizing, managing, and maintaining. We remove distraction and stress. We become better examples to our children and better stewards of the environment. When we seek to own less rather than pursue more, we find greater contentment, gratitude, and freedom. And we begin to discover opportunity for more generosity in our lives.

The book does a great job of highlighting these and other benefits of owning less. It always approaches the topic from a positive point of view: there is more joy to be found in owning less than we can ever discover pursuing more.

When you explain minimalism and its benefits to audiences and your readers at www.becomingminimalist.com, what is their typical feedback?

Almost always positive. When properly explained, I can count on one hand the number of people who have told me that I am flat-out wrong. We own too much stuff—and most of us know it.

No one really believes, in their deepest heart, that possessions equal joy. We've been designed for something greater. Unfortunately, we've just been told so many times and from so many angles that we would be happier with more, we start to believe it, even more than we realize. And our lives begin to align with that pursuit. We start to pursue bigger houses, nicer cars, newer technology, trendier clothing, and more toys for ourselves and our family. As a result, our possessions become a burden to us. They no longer serve us—instead, we serve them.

But inherently, we know that possessions are not adding value to our lives. We can probably even recognize how they are subtracting from it.

What is the biggest misconception about minimalism?

The biggest misconception about minimalism is that owning less is somehow a sacrifice rather than an invitation to a better way of life.

When we decided to become minimalist, we sold, donated, or recycled items from nearly every aspect of our lives: clothes, toys, decorations, cookware, entertainment, sporting goods, furniture, storage. Eventually, even moving into a smaller house.

As a result, we now have more money left in our pockets. We have more time available at our disposal. We have removed ourselves from the consumer-driven culture around us. And we have discovered more freedom to pursue the things in life that we truly value.

We have found more opportunity to invest in relationships, grow spiritually, experience gratitude, express generosity, discover truth, and find contentment. Minimalism, you see, is less about the things you remove and more about the things you add. The joy lies in what you choose to pursue with your life rather than material possessions. And in that way, minimalism is far more about addition than it is about sacrifice.

Why did you change careers in order to teach people about living simply?

My journey into minimalism began on a Saturday morning while cleaning out my garage. After a short conversation with my neighbor, I turned around to see the pile of things in my driveway.

As I did, I noticed my 5-year old son playing alone in the backyard. And suddenly, a life-giving truth became clear: All the possessions I owned were not bringing joy into my life. Even worse, they were distracting me from the very things that did.

My wife and I would go on to remove many of the nonessential possessions from our lives. All told, 60-70% of our stuff would eventually be sold, donated, recycled, or thrown away. Along the way, I started a blog, *Becoming Minimalist*, as a place to journal our progress.

Within months, the blog began to grow—slowly at first, but then quite significantly—currently reaching over 1 million readers each month. Through it all, because I loved my work and found rich meaning in it, I continued to work 50+ hours/week at my full-time job helping middle school

and high school students find fuller-meaning in their hearts and souls.

However, I knew pursuing both passions was unsustainable for the long-term. At this point in my life, my greatest opportunity for impact is to promote living with less in a world that has bought into the lie that pursuing possessions is a worthy endeavor.

What has surprised you the most about your journey of living with less?

There have been countless positive surprises. But one of the most significant is how minimalism forced me to journey inward. Dropping off a handful of clothing at Goodwill is not hard. Dropping off a van load of unused possessions is not even that difficult. But pulling up to the same Goodwill drop-off for the fourth time with a van load of completely unnecessary possessions initiates a lot of soul-searching. The journey toward minimalism forced me to reexamine my heart and soul. Correctly pursued, it forces us to ask some hard questions in deep places about our most intimate motivations in life. Why did I buy all these clothes? Why did I buy a house with rooms we never use?

Why do I still flip through the ads every Sunday even though I own so much already?

Why am I still envious of my neighbor's stuff? These are hard questions to ask with no easy answers. But the darkest truth is that unfortunately, far too many people, will never even ask them.

Your message is counter to our consumer-driven culture. How does one resist all the advertising messages or the urge to compare oneself to the neighbors?

Well, you ask a good question here—in fact, I devoted several chapters to this question in the book. It seems to me owning less is great, but wanting less is even better. It's one thing to declutter your closet or home, but it is something entirely different to reorganize your life away from excessive consumeristic patterns and habits. In the book, I outline a three-step approach: Evaluate the external forces that hijack our passions, identify the internal motivations that prompt unnecessary consumption, and then embrace the opportunity of owning less.

Doesn't it seem odd to tell someone to buy something about how not to buy things?

I sell books that encourage people not to buy stuff—the irony is not lost on me.

However, in a very real way, people need this help and this message.

Experts tell us the typical person sees 5,000 advertisements per day. Since the moment we were born, we have been told to pursue more and more, that our lives will be happier and more fulfilled the more we earn and buy and own.

Because we have been told the message so many times, from so many places, we subtly begin to believe it.

But in their heart and soul, people are looking for something greater and longer-lasting than material possessions. Sometimes, they just need an extra reminder and some specific steps to help them get there—this book offers both.

Where is this minimalism journey taking you and your family?

When I received the advance payment for writing this book, my wife and I had an important decision to make. Because we have been living a minimalist lifestyle, we didn't need the advance to cover a burdensome mortgage payment, pay off a vehicle, get out of consumer debt, or buy new furniture for the living room.

Largely through our religious upbringing and the good examples of others, Kim and I have come to understand that the most fulfilling thing we can do with our lives is help other people. So we decided to give away the advance money.

We founded an organization called The Hope Effect to change orphan care around the world by providing solutions that mimic the family. What will become of this new endeavor? We don't know. It will undoubtedly grow and change over time. We'll make some mistakes. But we really believe that the net result will be better lives for a great many of the world's most vulnerable children.

But here's the truly amazing part: a significant part of the money for these projects is coming from the *Becoming Minimalist* community, those who follow my blog regularly. Minimalists are providing the resources! Ordinary men and women all around the world have decided their lives are better by owning less, and because they are not out buying and caring for more stuff, they are free to use their resources to accomplish great things for others.

This has happened not because Kim and I are special—we never set out to accomplish anything like this. But we stand as proof that once the passion to acquire material possessions has been removed, incredibly life-fulfilling opportunities begin to follow.