



# Less Is More

A Guide to Simplifying Your Life in Four Weeks

Practicing the Way



# Introduction

Whether you're in a five bedroom house or a studio apartment, most of us have some kind of space — a drawer, closet, or even a room — where things just collect. When spring cleaning rolls around, we'll find ourselves thinking things like: "Why do I have so much stuff?" or "When did I start collecting \_\_\_\_\_?"

The fact that most of us have a space like this speaks to a false assumption that we have implicitly taken in over time: that more is better. But as we consider the way of Jesus and how to model our lives after the simplicity

and power of his, it becomes clear that more doesn't equal better; often, more equals more stress, more hurry, more distraction, and more greed. It also means less — less contentment, less margin, less room for love and joy and peace.

Most of us want that: a heart that is full of contentment and the "life that is truly life." The question is how: how do we index our hearts away from the desire for more and toward the freedom of less?

A photograph of a staircase with a simple, rustic pot on the top step. The pot is made of a textured material, possibly ceramic or stone, and has a handle. The staircase is made of light-colored wood or stone, and the walls are a neutral, light color. The lighting is soft and natural, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

# Overview of Simplicity

Simplicity (also called minimalism) is a way of life where we intentionally prioritize the things that really matter, by cutting out all that is ancillary, and stripping our life down to make abiding the center of everything. It's intentionally living with less, to make space for more of what we most value before God.

Translation: fewer clothes, fewer things we don't need, fewer hobbies, fewer options, less stuff, and more prayer, more joy, more peace, more loving relationships. Many judge minimalism as a kind of neo-legalism, but really, it's a form of freedom.

Since simplicity is a lifestyle, it affects how we live at every level, not just the number of "things" in our closet or home, but our activities, our schedule, our budget, and how we spend our time.

This four-week Guide is designed to help you step deeper into the practice of both generosity and simplicity through "de-owning" (or "owning less"), marking out the initial steps you can take to partner with God in transforming your relation to what you own.

# To Start

Two words of advice before you start ...

## **01. Take your time**

This exercise is designed to be done over four weeks, but it is more like four “steps.” Simplifying your life is a process that may take much longer than a few weeks, especially if you have a family or a larger number of possessions. That’s okay. Our lives rarely change overnight. Don’t rush it: pay attention to the emotions you experience and what the Spirit might be saying to you in each step.

## **02. Think of this as a first pass**

Most people go through this process multiple times, and then revisit on an annual or as-needed basis (since most of us unintentionally accumulate unnecessary stuff over time).

Think of this as your first pass. You don’t need to be heroic. Just aim to declutter your life by 20%.

What you will likely discover is that you really do not need, or even want, so many things. And as you discover the joy of living with less stuff (and more peace and purpose), you may find yourself naturally wanting to do another lap around the circle and simplify even more, each pass getting more strategic and clear. Again, take your time with this.

Simplifying is an act, but “simplicity” is a way of life.

Let’s begin.



Session 01 Exercise:  
**Clothing**

## Session 01 Exercise: **Clothing**

01 **Take everything out of your closet(s) and throw it in a giant pile.**

02 **Sort your giant pile into five smaller piles:**

- Keep
- Giveaway
- Sell
- Throw away/recycle
- Wait

03 **Place the “keep” pile back in your closet in an organized manner.**

04 **Pick a level of “enough.”**

Here are a few ideas, with varying levels of intensity, depending on how serious you want to get about minimalism:

- **Idea 1: Basic** — Just do the five-pile exercise above; keep as many items as you want.
- **Idea 2: Project 333** — a minimalism fashion challenge to dress with 33 items or less for 3 months. [Learn more.](#)

- **Idea 3: The “Ten Item Wardrobe”** — Limit your wardrobe to ten items (not including socks, underwear, umbrellas, etc.). This doesn’t mean ten outfits, as you can mix and match to come up with a surprising number of outfits with only ten items.

[Learn more.](#)

- **Idea 4: The Uniform** — Steve Jobs made this famous with his signature black turtleneck, jeans, and New Balance running shoes. But honestly, creatives, intellectuals, and elites (and of course, monks and nuns) have been doing this for hundreds of years, to give more mental space to their work. People who do the uniform usually have several copies of the same items, for laundry, cleanliness, wear and tear, etc. A more realistic version of the “uniform” for most people is to pick out two to three outfits per season and wear them consistently.

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As you explore these ideas and more, remove unnecessary guilt from your decision-making process. Remember: this is about freedom.

Additionally, you can listen to these three interviews John Mark did with author, former pastor, and minimalist expert Joshua Becker: ***Simplifying your wardrobe***



Session 02 Exercise:  
**Stuff**

## Session 02 Exercise: **Stuff**

**01 Go through your home room by room and do the above exercise with your things.**

**02 Place the contents of each room in five piles:**

- Keep
- Giveaway
- Sell
- Throw away/recycle
- Wait

A good place to start is your linen closet or bathroom, as there are very few sentimental items, and they are small and easy to do. Save major projects like the garage, and any sentimental items, for last.

The living area is an easy next step, since you feel an immediate relief, and there's rarely closets involved.

**03 Carefully put the “keep” pile back in an organized manner.**

**04 Navigate by a few basic principles:**

- **Avoid duplicates** — We rarely need two of anything. Including sheets, towels, brooms, etc.
- **Avoid collections** — Do you really need a coffee mug from every city you've ever been to? Your DVDs from 1995? Every Star Wars Happy Meal toy? Usually a few will do just fine, if we need them at all.
- **Avoid the “I may use this someday” trap** — This is going to cover a huge number of items and is the reason many of us hold on to so much!
- **Hold each item and ask a few questions** — Does this spark joy (Marie Kondo's question)? Do I need this? Does somebody else need this? Is this helping me in my life's goals, or hindering me? Do this prayerfully, offering any guilt you may feel up to God.
- **Save sentimental items for last** — This process is far more emotional than most people realize.

Additionally, you can listen to [these three interviews](#) John Mark did with author, former pastor, and minimalist expert Joshua Becker: *Simplifying your living room and bedrooms* and *Simplifying your kitchen, bathrooms, and laundry*



Session 03 Exercise:  
**Papers**

## Session 03 Exercise: **Papers**

**01 Go through all your papers and files and do the above exercise, but this time using some kind of a digitizer.**

- You may want to buy or borrow a digital scanner, or simply use your smartphone.
- A surprising number of things around the house can be digitized, such as:
  - Photos/photo albums
  - Most of what's in your filing cabinet
  - Much of what's gathering dust on your desk
  - Almost all of what's sitting in your "junk drawer"

**02 File or organize what you can't digitize.**

- Pick up some filing cabinets, and/or plastic bins, and find a way to sort the leftover items you can't digitize.
- This can be a tedious, time-consuming process, so you might want to give yourself more than a week.

**03 Remember to recycle where possible.**

A spiral-bound notebook with a brown cover and a blank, light-colored page. A silver pen with pink accents is tucked into the spiral binding on the left side. The notebook is resting on a light-colored surface, and shadows are cast across the page.

Session 04 Exercise:  
**Budget and Schedule**

## Session 04 Exercise: **Budget and Schedule**

### 01 **Create a fixed-hour schedule.**

- Get out a blank sheet of paper or daily calendar.
- Put in your sleep time. Yes, set a bedtime and wake-up time of your choosing. Remember, most people need more sleep than they think.
- Put in your spiritual disciplines — morning prayer, Sabbath, church, etc.
- Put in your core relationships — family dinner, a weekly meal with your community, coffee with your mentor or best friend.
- Put in your daily habits of health — exercise, mindfulness, reading, play, family movie night, basketball on Saturday mornings, etc.
- Put in your key work habits — day planning, deep work, meetings, set times for email, etc.
- Make sure there's room in your schedule for margin. Just write in "margin" or "free time" or "rest."

### 02 **Create a budget.**

- Get out a calculator, spreadsheet, and pay stub.
- Calculate your tithe, and/or set a giving goal for each paycheck.

- Use whatever method you prefer to make a budget.
- Do everything you can to live under your means, not at (and definitely not over) your means. This will give you less stress and more breathing room for generosity, justice, and your most precious commodity — time.

### 03 **Commit to your schedule and budget for a set time.**

- Pick a time; we recommend a minimum of thirty days.
- Share your schedule and budget with a friend, roommate, spouse, or somebody you trust to hold you to your commitment. A level of accountability to both how you intend to spend your money and how you actually do spend your money is very wise and helpful.

### 04 **Adjust as necessary along the way.**

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