

Simplicity

Review

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 a life of focus in a cultural moment of distraction. It's intentionally living with less, to make space for *more* of what we most value before God.

Translation: less clothes, less stuff, less things we don't need, less hobbies, less options, and more prayer, more joy, more peace, *more* loving relationships. Many judge minimalism as a kind of nuevo-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.

To begin, make four piles (most people find it easiest to use bags or boxes):

1. Give away—stuff you can give to family, friends, or those in need. We often have too much, and people we're in relationship with have too little.
2. Sell—stuff you can/want to sell secondhand to generate a little income.
3. Throw away or recycle – stuff you just need to get rid of.
4. Wait—stuff you're not sure about yet. Usually, it's things you're emotionally still attached to. This pile is *key*, as most of us don't realize just how emotionally connected we are to our stuff. Just stick any emotional items you're not quite ready to get rid of in this pile, and then stick it in a closet or garage for 3-6 months. If at any point, you want to get an item back out, go for it. But more likely, you won't think about it until you reopen the bag or box, at which point, it will be much easier to get rid of, should you decide to.

Once you have your piles, you're ready to start a four-week process to minimize your life. This process may take you much longer. That's totally fine, don't rush it. Remember, we're unhurrying our life for what really matters...

Exercise/week #1: Clothing

1. Take *everything* out of your closet(s) and throw it in a giant pile.
2. Sort your giant pile into five smaller piles:
 - Keep.
 - Give away.
 - Sell.
 - Throw away/recycle.

- Wait.

3. Place the “Keep” pile back in your closet in an organized manner.

4. Pick a level.

- Here’s a few ideas, with varying levels of intensity, depending on how serious you want to get about minimalism:
 - Idea 1: 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. See <https://bemorewithless.com/project-333/>
 - 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. See



- 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 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 2-3 outfits per season and wear them consistently.
- As you explore these ideas and more, remove unnecessary guilt from your decision-making process. Remember: this is about *freedom*.

Exercise/week #2: Stuff

1. Go through your apartment or home room by room and do the above exercise with your *things*.
 - Place the contents of each room in five piles:
 - Keep.
 - Give away.

- Sell.
 - Throw away/recycle.
 - Wait.
- Carefully put the “keep” pile back in an organized manner.
 - A good place to start is your linen closet or bathroom, as there’s 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.

2. Navigate by a few basic principles.

- Here’s mine, but feel free to come up with your own:
 - 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 DVD’s from 1995? Every Star Wars Happy Meal toy? Usually just a few will do just fine, if we need them at all.
 - 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? Do this prayerfully and with zero guilt.
 - And again, save sentimental items for *last*. This process is far more emotional than most people realize.

Exercise/week #3: Papers

1. 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 what’s gathering dust on your desk.
 - Almost all of what’s sitting in your “junk drawer.”
2. 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 week.
3. Remember to recycle.

- I'm from Portland; I can't not say that.

Exercise/week #4: Budget and schedule

1. 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 wakeup 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.”

2. Create a budget.

- Get out a calculator, spreadsheet, and pay stub.
- Calculate your tithe, and/or a set giving goal for each paycheck.
- Use whatever method you prefer to make a budget. I recommend using the template in *Free* by Mark Scandrette. Many people have benefited from Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University.
- 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.

3. Commit to your schedule and budget for a set time.

- Pick a time, I 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.

4. Adjust as necessary along the way.