

Love People, Use Things

What's in it for me? A full explanation of living with less.

Everyone wants to live a full and satisfying life. Yet, for many, modern living has only delivered a house full of junk, a wallet full of maxed-out credit cards, and a head full of distraction and despair. These blinks argue that our contemporary society is too defined by materialism – and that everyone might build fuller, happier, and less cluttered lives by adopting a more minimalist approach to living. Discover practical tips for letting go of all the stuff holding you down, and see how minimalism can renew your relationship with money, truth, creativity, and the people around you. In these blinks, you'll learn

why the best dates start naked; how a dumpster fire can renew your life; and what atheists and pastors can both agree on.

Your excess consumer goods may be holding you back from happiness.

Meet Jason and Jennifer Kirkendoll. By their mid 30s, this couple had it all – four kids, two dogs, and an enormous house packed with designer clothes, fancy furniture, and countless consumer goods. Really, they only lacked one thing: happiness. Despite their material wealth, the Kirkendolls were miserable. They had no time for each other and no energy for creative pursuits. So they made a change. They rented a dumpster and filled it with all their excess junk. Then, one day, the dumpster caught fire and all the junk burned – along with their house. Luckily, no one was hurt. And oddly, the fire was the best thing to ever happen to the Kirkendolls. It wiped away their material fixation for good. The only thing left was a sense of freedom. The key message here is: Your excess consumer goods may be holding you back from happiness. Minimalism is the art of living a fuller life by having fewer things. You see, our modern world encourages us to seek happiness, fulfillment, and meaning through consumerism. A constant barrage of advertising and social norms tell us that buying certain clothes, electronics, or other goods will enhance our lives. But these purchases only offer brief gratification and do little to actually improve how we feel. In fact, a lifestyle of consumerism is at the root of many contemporary problems. Excessive buying leaves many people struggling with debt – today, the average American holds more than \$16,000 in credit card debt. And the things we buy often go unused or unappreciated. They clutter up our homes and distract us from more fulfilling activities, like learning skills or spending time with loved ones. Luckily, it's possible to break this cycle by removing all the excess that's cluttering up your life. A good way to start is by separating all your goods into three piles. One pile is for essential goods, things like food and basic clothing. The second pile is for nonessential things, which are items that are useful but not strictly necessary – think furniture or treasured keepsakes. The final pile is the junk pile. You can sell, donate, or toss pretty much everything in this pile. Of course, this process isn't easy. Sorting your items makes you think deeply about what you truly value. But such introspection is really an added bonus. Thinking critically about the things you own opens space to reevaluate your entire life. It might even push you to recognize other changes you need or want to make.

Prepare to face uncomfortable truths as you simplify your life.

For a while, Joshua Fields Millburn had the perfect life. At least, that's how it seemed. He had a cushy six-figure job, lived in a palatial suburban home, and was married to Keri, his high school sweetheart. Yet, at the time, if he were to rate his life on a scale of one to ten, it would be a six. Sure, life was comfortable – but something was missing. One problem was his relationship. While he loved Keri, they were fundamentally different people. With each passing year, they grew more and more distant. Still, rather than face this uncomfortable truth, the two ignored the problem. Unsurprisingly, this only made things worse. The marriage dragged on longer than necessary and ended with infidelity and a difficult divorce. The key message here is: Prepare to face uncomfortable truths as you simplify your life. While minimalism begins with eliminating the unnecessary material goods holding you back, the philosophy has psychological aspects as well. You see, your mind, just like your home, can accumulate excess junk. Oftentimes, the most destructive rubbish it collects are the lies, fibs, and small fabrications we tell ourselves and others. Ditching these untruths is often harder than trashing objects, but it's worth it in the end. So, why do we lie in the first place? Mostly it's because lying is easier than facing the truth. Little lies allow you to hide who you really are. For instance, when talking to friends or colleagues, you may exaggerate the good things in your life while omitting any negative struggles. Additionally, you may lie to yourself in order to avoid facing a problem that's difficult to fix. For example, you may pretend your marriage is happy – when it's not. But even small fabrications add unnecessary complexity to your life. Maintaining a deception or false image for others requires effort and energy you could be spending more productively. Lying to yourself only sweeps issues under the rug – you'll have to face them eventually. As you begin your journey toward material minimalism, take the time to identify falsehoods you may be hoarding. Often, there's a connection between overconsumption and other issues. Maybe your compulsive shopping habit masks a deeper problem. Take this opportunity as a chance to ditch the lies and seek the truth.

Learn to appreciate the small joys – like a delicious, healthy meal.

Rob Bell and Sam Harris are about as different as two people can be. Bell is deeply spiritual; he's a devout Christian and former pastor. Meanwhile, Harris is an ardent, outspoken atheist and a technically minded neuroscientist. But, despite their differences, these two thinkers agree on one important thing. Both men advocate the transformative power of being present. That is, they think the key to happiness lies in mindfulness – the art of appreciating life as it is, moment to moment. Of course, this isn't always easy. But when you start to declutter your life both physically and mentally, you'll suddenly have more space to consider the little things – and that can make a big difference. The key message here is: Learn to appreciate the small joys – like a delicious, healthy meal. One of the most profound effects of living a minimalist lifestyle is the way it can change your attitude. When you're trapped on the hedonistic treadmill of consumerist spending and instant gratification, nothing seems like enough. You're too distracted thinking about the next big purchase to appreciate what you have. Even the small joys of life begin to slip away. But, once you let go of these impulses, the everyday

world comes alive. Even a dull chore, like walking to the grocery store or picking up a coffee before work, becomes a source of delight. Free from distraction, you'll become more aware of the sights and sounds on the streets around you, and you'll be able to more fully appreciate the rich aroma of that morning joe. In fact, for minimalists, learning to enjoy the subtleties of food is an invaluable skill. We often eat mindlessly. We simply consume whatever is easiest and most gratifying. But this usually means gorging on unhealthy snacks that are high in sugar, fats, and empty calories. A diet like that is another form of clutter – it can lead to excess weight gain and a whole host of other stressful health problems. Now, no single diet is perfect for everyone. But, if you approach your menus mindfully and pay close attention to your body's reactions, you'll find which foods work best for you. Maybe cutting out dairy and gluten clears up your skin and stomach issues, or perhaps a vegetarian meal leaves you feeling light and energetic. Either way, incorporating mindful eating into your minimalist journey may introduce you to new foods to savor and enjoy, bite by bite.

Understand your core values to navigate life with ease.

Imagine this. You're relaxing one evening with a few glasses of wine. As you sip your chardonnay, your fingers mindlessly scroll through social media. Suddenly, an ad appears. Feeling a bit buzzed, you think, Sure, why not? and hit "Buy." Sound familiar? Maybe. A recent study shows that an astounding 79 percent of adults have engaged in some form of drunk shopping in the past year. In fact, inebriated customers drop an estimated \$45 billion on goods annually. But alcohol isn't the only thing influencing our decisions. Our choices are often swayed by other outside factors such as advertisements, peer pressure, and social norms. And unfortunately, these external forces don't always align with our internal needs. The key message here is: Understand your core values to navigate life with ease. The simplest way to build a life that feels meaningful and fulfilling is to always make choices based on your deeply held values. Without stable values guiding you, your entire trajectory will be molded by outside interests. For instance, you may take a job you hate just because it pays well, or spend all your money on luxury cars and clothes in order to fit in – when you really just want to save for early retirement. Sadly, many people don't make an effort to truly think about what values they hold dear. But you can avoid this trap. Set aside some time to examine the four main categories of values: Foundational, Structural, Surface, and Imaginary. Foundational values are the broad, baseline things most people want from life. These are things like good health and good relationships. Structural values are a bit more personal. They're the qualities you want to embody, like sincerity, humility, and autonomy. Surface values are the more ephemeral things you merely like – think things like aesthetics or hobbies. And finally, imaginary values are the day-to-day things that feel important, but really aren't. These include things like answering emails or watching your favorite TV show. Once you have a handle on these values, you can evaluate decisions – both big and small – based on how well they align with your ideals. For instance, if you get an enticing job offer, ask which values it enables. Sure, it may help you live your surface values by paying for swanky furniture, but maybe it inhibits your foundational values by putting your health or relationships at risk. Once you see the choice this way, the decision is easy – and true to you.

Manage your money and avoid

accumulating unnecessary debts.

Millburn's twenties were certainly roaring. After securing a sweet corporate job, he went on a nonstop buying spree. At 23, he bought a Lexus. At 24, he bought another one. Then, at 25, still unsatisfied, he bought a brand new Land Rover. Yes, Millburn's garage was very impressive. But his finances were a different story. While he was pulling in plenty of money, it was going out just as fast. In fact, all those slick cars were bought on credit - his wallet had no fewer than 14 maxed out cards. Really, Millburn was suffering from financial dysfunction. He was buried in debt, and the stress of keeping it all under control was slowly ruining his life. The key message here is: Manage your money and avoid accumulating unnecessary debts. For millions of Americans, managing finances is extremely difficult. In the past decades, wages have been stagnant, while the costs of housing, college, and medical services have steadily grown. As a result, about 44 percent of households have expenses that exceed their income. Worse still, nearly 25 percent of people wouldn't be able to cover a surprise \$400 expense. If you're struggling with debt, the best way to manage the situation is to reevaluate your relationship with money. Rather than continue your old habits, rein in your spending and stick to a strict savings plan. First, save up a \$1,000 emergency fund. Next, methodically pay off your debts from lowest to highest. Then, when you're finally debt-free, begin putting a minimum of 15 percent of your income into retirement savings. To really maximize your savings, learn a bit about investing. Amateur investors will often dump money into flashy ventures like individual stocks or precious metals like gold and silver. Avoid these - they are volatile investments and can be risky. Instead, put your money in a solid mutual fund, which is a package of many stocks bundled together. That way, your risks are distributed, and your wealth will grow slowly but steadily until you retire. It's true that sticking to such a rigid system will be difficult at first. But it'll be worth it in the end. After all, staying debt-free is the best way to reach your dreams, whatever they happen to be. For instance, if you have no debt, it's much easier to leave a job you hate, move to a new area you love, or simply set your children up for a smoother, more prosperous future.

Unlock your latent creativity by logging out of the digital world.

Picture a creative person - who comes to mind? Is it Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel's marvelous ceiling? Jimi Hendrix performing musical acrobatics on the guitar? Maybe it's F. Scott Fitzgerald tapping out perfect sentences on his typewriter? There's no question that these are all creative people. But creativity isn't the exclusive realm of fine artists. A carpenter cobbling a table, a dietician designing a healthy meal plan, or a corporate account manager making a punchy Powerpoint - these are all also creative people and pursuits. Really, anyone who solves problems or contributes value to others is creative. Chances are, that includes you too. But if your creative fire has fizzled out lately, maybe a little decluttering can help it burn again. The key message here is: Unlock your latent creativity by logging out of the digital world. Creativity may come in many different forms, but all creators encounter similar struggles. Specifically, making something new - whether it's a novel, a business plan, or a hit video game - requires a massive amount of hard work and dedication. Amassing the motivation to power through long hours in the studio or the office can be daunting. But cutting some excess out of your life can make it a bit easier. A major source of distraction - and a big driver

of procrastination – are our digital devices. It’s hard to focus on creative projects when your smartphone is right there, offering endless easy entertainment. According to studies, we check our phones about 150 times a day. Moverover, a whopping 86 percent of us even check our phones in the middle of a conversation. All that screen time adds up to hours we could be using more creatively. One way to scale back this distraction is the “digital declutter” method invented by computer science professor Cal Newport. To complete a declutter, simply uninstall or avoid any digital technologies that aren’t 100 percent necessary for 30 days. For most people, this means no social media, no YouTube, and no endless channel surfing. Even a short break from these services gives your brain a chance to recover from all that overstimulation. By the end of the month, analog tasks such as writing and drawing will be much more engaging. In fact, the break may even encourage you to try activities you’ve never considered before. Just remember, don’t get discouraged if you don’t excel immediately. When it comes to creativity, the process is often more important than the final result. Simply appreciate the chance to express yourself rather than merely consuming.

Reserve your time and energy for genuine and positive relationships.

First dates can be nerve-racking – especially first dates where you end up naked within the first five minutes. But for Millburn and his now wife, Rebecca, it was the best way to start a new relationship. You see, for their first date the pair had arranged a couples massage. The treatment began with the massage therapist asking both participants to strip down to whatever level made them comfortable. After a brief, awkward pause, they went for it. Rebecca shed all but her underwear, while Millburn opted for fully nude. The quirky meeting was the perfect introduction to their relationship. Each person got to be a little bit vulnerable while still maintaining their preferred boundaries. The whole scene was flirty, fun, and, most importantly, authentic. The key message here is: Reserve your time and energy for genuine and positive relationships. Every good minimalist knows that what matters in life isn’t our things, but our human relationships. This isn’t limited to romantic partnerships, either. All relationships are unique and special – this includes the bonds you have with your spouse, your parents, your coworkers, or even your dog walker. As you go through life, it’s important to manage your relationships carefully. You should cultivate ones that empower you, and leave ones that feel toxic. So, what makes an empowering relationship? Well, three qualities are important. For one, it’s essential to share values – this is the basis of real compatibility. Next, it’s crucial to build strong bonds based on trust and understanding. This takes time and energy, but the quality of relationships is more important than the quantity. And, finally, there has to be reciprocity. Each person must add value to the other's life. Even the best relationships have boundaries. These differ from person to person, and so it’s vital to learn and respect them. The most obvious boundaries are the physical ones – that is, limits on how you touch and how often. But there are other boundaries that revolve around mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects. These describe limits on which opinions, feelings, or religious beliefs you’re entitled to share, engage with, or influence. Sometimes, a person may consistently overstep your boundaries – this is called a toxic relationship. These kinds of relationships can have a seriously detrimental impact on your life. Don’t be afraid to cut off people who have become toxic. After all, ending a painful relationship will leave you with more time and energy to invest in ones that feel empowering.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: For many people, the world has become defined by things. Our advertising-saturated consumer culture encourages everyone to mindlessly acquire goods. But all these material items do is clutter up our homes and distract us from what's really important in life. Take the time to remove all the unwanted junk from your home, and you'll find that the process unlocks more time, energy, and attention for introspection, creative pursuits, and building strong relationships. And here's some more actionable advice: Follow the 20/20 rule! Decluttering often requires you to make some tough choices. If you're torn about tossing a certain object, consider this: if the item can be replaced in 20 minutes for less than \$20, it's probably not worth keeping around. Put that thing in the bin!