

# SUMMARY

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# THE MORE OF LESS

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# **Summary of The More of Less by Joshua Becker**

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How de-cluttering your mind can maximize your life.

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# Introduction

In J.P. Delaney's bestselling novel *The Girl Before*, there is a magnificent house with a bizarre stipulation: please make a list of every possession you consider essential to your life. This is the question every prospective tenant is asked when they apply to live in the house. So far from being a standard tenancy agreement in which you are asked to simply pay the rent on time and live as a respectable tenant, the prospective residents of One Folgate Street have a very different task in front of them. Those who pass the stringent application process and are finally allowed to live in the house face an even more daunting set of expectations. You are not allowed books, throw pillows, photos or clutter or personal effects of any kind. There are no waste-baskets and the landlord regularly drops by to make snide remarks if you have left so much as your shampoo out.

Could you live in a house like that? Most people would, understandably, say no! Because the truth is, we love our clutter. We like our houses to be filled with art and throw pillows and little knick knacks. We like to decorate in a way that makes us say, "This house reflects my personality and I'm proud of it!" We take pride in transforming a space, in creating a home that is comfortable and cozy and uniquely yours. But of course, sometimes we accumulate too much stuff. Sometimes we have piles of junk mail that we said we were going to throw out and never did. We have clumps of receipts that we've been saving in the hopes of turning them in for surveys and rewards points at various assorted shops. (Spoiler alert: we always forget about the rewards points). Instead of turning them in, the receipts lay there for weeks, cluttering up our counter space and hiding things we actually need.

Eventually, the time comes for us to do a proper deep clean. Not a purge as harsh as that expected by JP Delaney's fictional tenants, but a purge nonetheless, in which we cleanse ourselves of the unnecessary detritus that covers our homes. And when we finally sort through the mess, reducing our space to a collection of helpful and necessary items, we breathe a sigh of relief

and think, “I really should keep it like this all the time.” We’ve all been in this scenario at one time or another; we all know how important it is to clean the house and make our homes a space where we actually want to be. But how often do we do the same thing for our hearts and minds? Over the course of this summary, we’ll learn why de-cluttering our minds can improve our lives and what steps we can take to make that happen.



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## A Package a Day Keeps the Sadness Away

You may have seen that slogan circulating in the form of funny Facebook memes, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Maybe you even put it into practice and took advantage of online retail therapy to help you cope with the pressure and stress of the pandemic. And if you did, you're not alone! There is something delicious about the anticipation of knowing you have a package in the mail. It's wonderful to have something to look forward to. And so we order package after package in an attempt to facilitate a happier mood or a brighter outlook on life. Maybe you're not even doing it for unhealthy reasons; maybe you really just wanted that sweater that's on sale. Maybe those earrings will go perfectly with your outfit for an important meeting. And there's certainly nothing wrong with buying yourself a few things you'll enjoy! Everybody can use a little retail therapy now and then.

But the problem is when your buying habits become excessive. The author observes that this is a significant problem for most American people today. In his popular blog, *Becoming Minimalist*, the author documents the lifestyle shift that had a radical impact on both his daily life and his worldview. And he also collected a list of statistics that highlight the growing epidemic of over consumerism in America. Here are a few samples of disturbing facts you might not know:

1. There are over 300,000 items in the average American home
2. The average size of the American home has nearly tripled in size over the past 50 years
3. And still, 1 out of every 10 Americans rent offsite storage—the fastest growing segment of the commercial real estate industry over the past four decades.
4. While 25% of people with two-car garages don't have room to park cars inside them and 32% only have room for one vehicle.

5. The United States has upward of 50,000 storage facilities, more than five times the number of Starbucks. Currently, there is 7.3 square feet of self storage space for every man, woman and child in the nation. Thus, it is physically possible that every American could stand—all at the same time—under the total canopy of self storage roofing
6. British research found that the average 10-year-old owns 238 toys but plays with just 12 daily
7. 3.1% of the world’s children live in America, but they own 40% of the toys consumed globally
8. The average American woman owns 30 outfits—one for every day of the month. In 1930, that figure was nine
9. The average American family spends \$1,700 on clothes annually
10. While the average American throws away 65 pounds of clothing per year

When we consider our shopping habits in light of these sobering statistics, “a package a day keeps the sadness away” doesn’t seem quite so light-hearted and whimsical. In fact, it sounds like our packages might actually be responsible for the sadness in our lives! The author certainly thought so, and that’s why he made the leap to a completely minimalist lifestyle. So, let’s take a look at the philosophy behind minimalism and how it can improve your life.



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# What Does Minimalism Really Mean?

When many people hear the word “minimalism,” I think they actually do picture a life that looks very much like that depicted in JP Delaney’s extreme minimalist thriller. But the author observes that, actually, nothing could be further from the truth! Minimalism isn’t about removing all the stuff from your life; it’s about cultivating a mindful relationship with a few possessions that are genuinely meaningful to you. For example, if we frame this philosophy in the context of the statistics we just considered, we can easily identify a massive amount of possessions we don’t need. Given the fact that the average American throws away 65 pounds of clothing per year, do we really need a different outfit for every day of the month? Do we really need to spend over \$1,700 on clothes every year?

After all, we’re highly unlikely to wear every article of clothing we own. So, wouldn’t it be better to pare down our wardrobe and donate some of those clothes to a local charity? Wouldn’t it be better to stop buying things we don’t need and use that money to help someone else? This is the philosophy of minimalism. It’s not about taking a Spartan approach to life and depriving yourself or your home of any joy. Rather, it’s about asking yourself the simple question: what do I truly need?

For some people, the answer to this question lies in a radical de-cluttering spree. Some people might sell their home and most of their possessions, choosing to live in a smaller space and rely only on the possessions that can be packed in a single suitcase. But it’s important to remember that minimalism does not exist on a stark black and white binary scale. It’s not an “either/or” situation that demands complete adherence to only one of two choices. If the extreme minimalist path isn’t for you, that’s okay! At the end of the day, this philosophy is malleable; it’s a set of values that can be molded to fit the circumstances of your individual life. For example, maybe you’d like to pare down your possessions and set some limits for yourself. Maybe it would help you to say, “I’m going to keep twenty outfits and donate all of my

other clothes to charity. And I'll only buy something new if I donate something else to charity."

If you struggle with shopping too much and you feel weighed down by the sheer amount of stuff in your closet, this is an example of a minimalist philosophy that could help you. Likewise, if you find that your pursuit of the perfect home has caused you to accumulate more space and stuff than you need, you might find it helpful to downsize a bit. Maybe you don't need that massive house. Maybe you're struggling with the stress of maintaining your huge lawn, your swimming pool, and the upkeep for a large house. Maybe you work so much that you're not even home enough to appreciate your house! In this case, you could eliminate unnecessary stress by minimizing your home and responsibilities. Moving into a small and tidy apartment might be the best choice you've ever made!

The same is true for families with children. Families-- especially those with small children-- can amass an overwhelming amount of stuff. It's pretty easy to do, given the necessity of diapers, bottles, toys, and clothes that are absolutely necessary for your children's daily life. But the author observes that a lot of that clutter is more unnecessary than you think. After all, if your child owns 238 toys but plays with just 12 daily, doesn't that mean that 226 of those toys are unnecessary? Much of this clutter arises from our desire to give our children the best of everything. That desire is not wrong in and of itself, but it might be something that we need to put in perspective. For example, "giving your children the best of everything" probably doesn't mean that you have to buy them a new toy every time you go in a store! It also doesn't mean that you have to spoil them at every birthday and holiday. For example, instead of buying your children 12 toys for each special occasion, what if you bought them only one or two toys and encouraged them to use their birthday money to buy a toy for a child in need?

If you cultivate minimalist habits as a parent and encourage your child to avoid accumulating needless things, it's possible to create a de-cluttered environment and raise a mindful and compassionate child. However, that's not to say that cultivating this atmosphere in your home will be easy; your

child is likely to throw a tantrum each time they don't get a new toy. But, as with every other aspect of parenting, consistency is key. If you set mindful boundaries and stick to them, you can soon teach your child to be conscious of their impact on the world. You can teach them to be grateful for what they have and to be kind to those who are less fortunate. You can teach them that happiness does not come from the accumulation of material goods. And in so doing, you can create a genuinely happy home.

Put simply, the author believes that changing your physical space in meaningful ways can help you free up mental space as well. If you remove unnecessary stressors from your life and create a space that makes you happy, you will soon find that you have more peace of mind. This peace can then lead to new opportunities for growth. When you have the mental space to really be mindful about your life, you will find that it's easier to make decisions and identify what you really need. For example, if you felt overwhelmed and stressed by your life, de-cluttering your physical space might give you the clarity to see that you're actually unsatisfied with your career. Now, instead of feeling overwhelmed and voiceless, you can clearly identify that you're in the wrong line of work and you want to go back to school. Similarly, if you have all the stuff in the world but your life still feels empty, purging your possessions might help you to see that you don't want more stuff at all; you actually want a real human connection. In this case, the best thing you can do is stop hitting "add to cart" and go re-connect with people!

Maybe that means spending more time with your family. Maybe it means seeking a life partner or giving back to your community. The steps you take can look different for everyone, but one thing remains universal: when you purge your possessions, you will discover what's really important to you. And when you find out what really matters, you can cultivate lasting happiness.



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## Final Summary

Advertisements are everywhere. And even though each one is selling something different, they are united in their quest to convince the average person that we need whatever they're selling. Commercials, billboards, and music seek to infect us with unhappiness; if we are dissatisfied with our bodies, our homes, or our food choices, we will buy more in an endless effort to become happier, prettier, and more successful. But the author observes that these advertisements are merely empty promises.

It's easy to believe that more stuff will make us happy, but it never does. What we really crave is a meaningful existence and this can only be achieved by cultivating a mindful relationship with ourselves and our possessions. When we limit our possessions to the things that bring us the most joy, we can remove stress from our lives, homes, and minds. And, most importantly, we can free up the mental space to discover what really matters to us.



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