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Living with Less

Kayt E. Frisch

Dordt College, kayt.frisch@dordt.edu

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Living with Less

Abstract

"Minimalism is not about organizing or storing your stuff efficiently because simply storing or organizing does not address the root cause of why you have too much stuff in the first place."

Posting about the book *The More of Less* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<http://inallthings.org/living-with-less/>

Keywords

In All Things, book review, The More of Less, Joshua Becker

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Living with Less

 [all in allthings.org /living-with-less/](http://allthings.org/living-with-less/)

May 11, 2017

Kayt Frisch

Title: [The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own](#)

Author: Joshua Becker

Publisher: WaterBrook

Publish Date: May 3, 2016

Pages: 240 pages

Price: \$17.99

ISBN: 9781601427960

What is your relationship with your stuff? Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of stuff that you have to “pick up” before you can have people over to your house? Are you constantly looking for storage “solutions” to keep your house uncluttered? Do you feel like you need to buy more in order to be happy?

By way of introduction and illustration, let me tell you a little bit about the history of my relationship with stuff. I grew up in an extremely messy house. Not so badly messy that you would see it featured on the “Hoarders” TV show, but bad enough that my siblings and I were too ashamed to invite friends over. I always knew I didn’t want my house to look like that, but I didn’t really understand why until after my first child was born and our home became overwhelmed by toys and baby stuff. As a result, I set out on a quest to have a home that was uncluttered enough to invite people over (at short notice) without the feelings of shame I felt growing up.

For many years I thought that the secret to having a house that is reasonably clutter-free was a good storage system (and since I’m an engineer, that should be reasonably easy, right?). Then two years ago, the amount of stuff in our home exploded as we added a family member, so I began researching stuff-organizational strategies. About a year ago, in my search for an organizational scheme that would keep my growing family’s stuff (especially the seemingly inevitable hordes of kid-stuff that comes with small children) organized and relatively uncluttered, I read [“The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up”](#) by Marie Kondo. Kondo’s book, which has now sold more than five million copies worldwide, changed my understanding of clutter. Her basic premise is that you shouldn’t keep anything that doesn’t “spark joy” in you, and as a secondary idea there’s no point in keeping something “just-in-case” – she points out that the cost (both monetary and psychological) to store a “just-in-case” item is almost always higher than the cost to replace it. I started trying to apply Kondo’s ideas by looking at my closet, and I realized that I had lots of clothes that I was keeping just-in-case. Some of those “just-in-cases” were legitimate (e.g. if/when I get pregnant again I’ll want that shirt) but most were not (e.g. I should keep that t-shirt because it was free, and I might want it when these five other t-shirts that I like better wear out). Once I got rid of the clothes I didn’t like all that well (and therefore never wore), I was able to adopt her organization suggestion of storing clothes on end so that you can see all of them at one time and have space left over in my drawers.

I lost de-cluttering momentum after I got through my clothes. I told myself that it was because of extenuating life circumstances (picking up an extra 1/3 of a person’s work at work for a medical leave, constant stream of family visitors, etc.) but if I’m honest, part of the reason was probably that applying Kondo’s ideas to the rest of the stuff in my house felt a bit overwhelming. I think it can be easy to dismiss Kondo’s book as a bit exaggerated and extreme – after all, most of us did not have a teenage hobby of organizing our family’s stuff, and also I can’t imagine life with only one shelf’s worth of books (not one bookshelf full, one shelf on a bookshelf). It’s hard to completely forget the idea when you have the satisfaction of seeing less every time you get dressed, though, so when a friend mentioned [“The More of Less”](#) by Joshua Becker a few months ago, I was intrigued.

“The More of Less” is (like Kondo’s and several other popular books) a book about how we should own less stuff, but instead of focusing on getting rid of the stuff that clutters our livings spaces, Becker paints this goal in light of a ^{1/2}

broader picture that he calls minimalism.

What do you think of when you hear “minimalism?” Maybe you envision a picture of living in a rustic cabin off-the-grid, or maybe you imagine bare walls in a sparsely furnished house, or maybe you (like one of the mutual friends of myself and the person who suggested Becker’s book) exclaim “don’t tell me that you think you can live with just one spatula in your kitchen too!”

Unpacking people’s assumptions about what minimalism is (and is not) is one of Becker’s early goals in the book. He astutely observes that for some people this might look like living out of three suitcases, but for most people, this is not the case. After defining minimalism as “the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of anything that distracts us from them” he emphasizes that minimalism looks different for each person or family that adopts it. He also points out that minimalism is not about organizing or storing your stuff efficiently because simply storing or organizing does not address the root cause of why you have too much stuff in the first place. This emphasis on helping his readers understand why they have too much stuff is what sets Becker’s book apart from other popular books on decluttering (aka what to do with too much stuff). Becker spends the first third of his book on this topic, illustrating his points with real examples from his own and other’s experiences in decluttering for minimalism.

After establishing what minimalism is (and is not) and why his readers should consider embracing a minimalist lifestyle, Becker spends the next third of the book on the practical topic of decluttering. Instead of lots of specific “how-to” instructions, he focuses on big-picture ideas – giving broad guidelines to help readers discover how much is “enough” for their own particular circumstances through experimentation (as a personal example, in answer to my friend, I’m pretty sure my family can’t live with just one spatula right now). He also emphasizes that it is important to just get started decluttering – you will gain momentum through minimizing the stuff in small spaces (e.g. my closet) and that will help you address the more challenging areas like the basement or the attic. In this section, he also discusses troubleshooting common areas, including books; his advice about books seems more do-able than Kondo’s, especially since he himself reduced his office book collection from three bookshelves to one in his decluttering process. He also addresses the topic of gift-giving/receiving, which (especially if you have kids) can be a particular challenge in terms of new stuff entering your home.

Becker wraps up the book by discussing relationships and lifestyle choices. He acknowledges that you and your partner/family may not be on the same page in the minimizing process, and even if you are, you may not agree on everything. In Becker’s minimizing process, relationships are number one; the process of minimizing should not destroy your relationships. If your partner is not on board, minimize your own stuff and live as an example – he or she will probably eventually see the benefits of minimalism in your life and begin to be open to minimizing more.

I am far from arrived on my own minimalism journey. My husband and I agree that it is something that we want to do, but we are struggling to find the time in the midst of parenting, finishing a thesis, and a full-time job as a professor. There is still clutter on many of the flat surfaces, we still don’t agree how many spatulas we need in the kitchen (but we do agree it should be more than one), and our targets keep changing as our kids grow (and as their grandparents give us more toys). However, we are starting to see the small benefits of our intentional decision to live with less: this afternoon our church small group met at our house, and while I was writing this, my husband picked up the living room (including all of our toddler’s toys) in less than five minutes. My journey toward minimalism is still a work in progress, but small victories like this keep me moving forward and remind me that Becker’s message is worth spreading: “you don’t need to own all this stuff.”