

Finding Fulfillment

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Mr. Lund

Do you want to be happy? Of course you do. Everyone wants to be happy. So, what do you think will fill that need for happiness and fulfillment? Many people turn to material possessions for happiness. They think the more they can accumulate, the more successful they are, bringing a sense of happiness. But this is not true joy. This sort of mentality only brings momentary happiness. My biggest fear in life is regret. I don't want to look back on my life and feel like I didn't achieve what I could've, or didn't take the road I felt I should've. When I look back on my life as an old man, I don't want to regret all the time I wasted on material things, and useless habits that did me no good. Instead, I'd like to look back and be proud of my achievements, and know that I lived for the Lord. I also see a slight problem with always wanting happiness. While we of course want to be happy, I would argue happiness isn't necessarily the goal of life. As a Christian, the ultimate goal of life is to bring glory to God and

to spread the gospel as we are called. I'd rather look back and know that the life I lived was meaningful. I'd want to know that I improved as a person, had a growing relationship with God, and helped out others along the way. There is a way to achieve this. Though it may not be easy, there is a way you can find more meaning in life and find fulfillment in the process.

How, you may ask? I will be arguing that you can find a life worth living through minimalism, and that living a life with minimalist habits is worth pursuing. When I say minimalism, you may think of art with simple shapes and colors. You may think of minimalist designed houses which are devoid of color, items, and personality. Maybe they have some plants. This isn't exactly what I'll be talking about. Instead, I'm referring to a minimalist lifestyle, a life that aims to spend less time on useless things. A simple definition of minimalism is "adapting voluntarily to simplicity." This doesn't necessarily mean owning as little as possible. It means that the things you own work for you. You aren't working for them. A better definition of minimalism that gets straight to the point is this:

"Minimalism is a tool to eliminate life's excess, focus on the essentials, and find happiness, fulfillment, and freedom."

– Joshua Millburn

While I will be talking about the benefits of buying less items, minimalism isn't *just* owning fewer items. It is making time for things in life that are more meaningful for you. There are some hardcore minimalists whose sole goal is to have few possessions and to live with as little as possible. That isn't my goal. My goal is to take time spent on conventional desires, like things, wealth, and status, and use it for more important things. In order to live a life of fulfillment and happiness, we need to abandon some of our consumer mentalities. While I don't

think “things” are inherently bad, I do think they are not worth our time, and they do very little to make us feel fulfilled.

We all like to go on a buying spree every once in a while. Our consumer culture makes the world go around. You walk into Target, see something that entices you, and you buy it. It’s as simple as that. In turn, we have a strong economy. A good economy has a high rate of growth and an increase of production. This in turn brings higher wages and higher employment, as well as lower inflation.

These are all good things, right? This is not a trick question. Yes, they are good things. And there is nothing *inherently* wrong with all of this. So then why should you pursue minimalism? It sounds like a win win, doesn’t it? I got my new clothes, and the economy is doing great. While this may sound good on paper, it isn’t as good as it seems. The problem is when you overdo it. The problem is when you accumulate more and more thinking it will make you happy. It won’t. Will that new wardrobe really make you happy? Does rocking those new 80 dollar pair of jeans bring you true fulfillment? My goal with this presentation is to change your perspective on what it means to live a life fulfilled. Some think the American idea of success is having money, a big house, and extravagant cars. In my opinion, a life of big buying and wealth will not bring fulfillment. I will not be arguing that minimalism itself will bring happiness, because it won’t. But in order to find happiness, we need to spend time where it matters most. And that means eliminating the distractions in our life that take away from what is more important. I’ll get into what those things are later. The important distinction here is that minimalism is not the key to true joy, but a helpful tool to find it.

I will be arguing this: In order to live a fulfilled life, you must eliminate worthless desires to create more time for what matters most. To clarify, my definition of “worthless desires” is

this: “desires and cravings that lack value.”The opposite of this would be “enlightenment” or “joy”. And today, I will be telling you how to find this in your life using minimalism.

There are three main areas of our lives where living minimally will improve our quality of life. The first is for personal growth. I cannot stress enough the importance of improving yourself as a person. If you want to live a happy life, personal growth is absolutely essential. There are a lot of bad habits in everybody’s day to day life that should be eliminated. And healthy goals and routines need to replace those habits. The second reason you should live minimally is for the sake of others. Our relationships and the people we value in our lives are a must when it comes to fulfillment. Relationships take time and effort. And without them, you will not be happy, it’s as simple as that. We also must be generous with what we have, and help those who need it most. The last reason is for God. Consider the following verse from Matthew 6:24, it reads as follows, *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”* This verse is basically telling us that we cannot serve both God and ourselves, whether being with money, possessions, or your status. God must be priority number one.

Let’s start with the area of personal growth and development. Think of all the things that keep our attention throughout our day. What about the overuse of your phone and social media? According to a study done by IDC Research, 80% of people check their phone within 15 minutes of waking up in the morning. Our phones take up so much of our attention throughout our day. The average person spends 3 and a half hours on their phone in a single day. You might be thinking, well minimalism doesn’t apply to my phone: it doesn’t take up much space, and it even fits in my pocket and counts as one possession. Well, as I said earlier, the goal of minimalism isn’t to own as little as possible. The goal is to reduce time spent on worthless things and habits,

and make more time for habits that are more worthwhile. Not to mention, research shows that scrolling on your phone right away in the morning is harmful for your brain. Social media has so much negativity on it. According to a 2020 survey, 44% of all internet users in the United States report experiencing online abuse. When you immediately expose yourself to that negativity when you wake up, it can leave you on edge for the rest of the day.

According to Australia's leading sleep expert, Olivia Arezzolo, "It overwhelms the nervous system and our cognition, making us stressed, anxious and tense. Biochemically, it skyrockets our cortisol levels, which contributes to feelings of anxiety, depression and poorer mental health." I would suggest finding a morning routine that suits you. For example, getting up, eating a good breakfast, and maybe going outside. Get ready to face the day without relying on some external source of constant entertainment and stimulation. I would especially suggest going outside as soon as possible after you wake up. Direct sunlight in the morning will boost your energy, and leave you feeling more alert for the rest of the day.

Now what about physical things? While I did say I wouldn't be focusing on owning as little as possible, I do think it's important and beneficial to declutter your personal belongings and excess things. Have you ever thought about how many clothes you own? Have you ever seen the outfits of people like Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg? They essentially wear the same outfit every day. Barack Obama had this to say in an interview: *"You'll see I wear only gray or blue suits. I'm trying to pare down decisions. I don't want to make decisions about what I'm eating or wearing. Because I have too many other decisions to make."*

Decision fatigue is when the quality of your decision making deteriorates due to making too many decisions. This is why many successful people wear the same outfit every day. When you can eliminate a few small choices that don't matter very much, (like your outfit or what you

eat) you have more mental space for productivity and better decision making throughout your day. If you shrunk down your closet to just the necessities, and decided to stop buying new clothes at every opportunity, you would save money and have more time. Your mornings would have less stress trying to pick out an outfit, and your closet would be well organized and full of less clutter. If you look in your closet, I'm sure you'll be surprised at how much of your clothes you don't wear. I strongly encourage you to donate old clothes.

I especially admire Steve Jobs' minimalist mentality. He wore the same black turtleneck, jeans, and new balance sneakers everyday. Former Apple CEO John Sculley said this in an interview regarding Jobs:

"I remember going into Steve's house and he had almost no furniture in it. He just had a picture of Einstein, whom he admired greatly, and he had a Tiffany lamp and a chair and a bed. He just didn't believe in having lots of things around but he was incredibly careful in what he selected." (Muldrew, 2019)

I think Jobs' philosophy is one of the reasons for his massive success in the tech world. He was passionate for the industry, so he eliminated all distractions that may prevent him from reaching his potential. And his minimalist philosophy even shows through Apple's signature designs. We can't deny the simplicity of Apple products. Just look how clean the logo is. Here's a quote from the man himself: *"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. It takes a lot of hard work to make something simple, to truly understand the underlying challenges and come up with elegant solutions."* I think Steve Jobs' perfectly captures the idea of minimalism. Though having no furniture may be a bit excessive, it worked for him and he became one of the most successful men in the tech industry.

I've said a few times so far that you will have more time for more important things. You may be wondering what exactly I mean by more important things. Let's start with some healthy habits that should be in everyone's life, no matter the lifestyle you live. The first is reading. Whether it's books about philosophy, space travel, or how to live a minimalist lifestyle, just sit down, find a book you enjoy, and read. Research shows that reading on a regular basis improves brain connectivity, reduces stress, aids in sleep, and (believe it or not) can lengthen your lifespan. There is something so rewarding about finishing a book. I, myself, struggle to sit down and read a book. The idea of sitting still and just reading can be daunting to me. It seems like such a commitment. Why would I do this when I can just watch TV or play video games? Well, as they say, nothing good in life comes easy.

I would also strongly encourage taking care of your body. We only have one body, and taking care of it properly is one of the keys to feeling happier and more fulfilled. Getting a regular amount of sleep is very important for your body. When you get the recommended amount of sleep, you are less likely to get sick, you are less stressed, and you just feel better overall. I also strongly believe everyone should have some sort of daily exercise. Whether it's getting a gym membership, going for a daily run, or just doing some calisthenics at home, you need to be exercising your body one way or another. According to Dr. Ben Singh, a leading researcher at the University of South Australia, "Physical activity is 1.5 times more effective at reducing mild-to-moderate symptoms of depression, psychological stress, and anxiety than medication or cognitive behavior therapy." I like Jim Ledbetter, our P.E. teacher, (I know him as Mr. Ledbetter) says, "Exercising makes you feel better, look better, and be better." That sums it up perfectly. As Mr. Ledbetter also says, "When you have your health, you have just about everything." I couldn't agree more.

Let's move on to the area of our relationships with others, as well as serving others. The first way we can serve others is with our money. God calls us to be generous with our funds.

When we are generous in our giving, God has promised to always provide for us. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 says:

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” This is applicable to tithing, as well as other giving. A lot of people are less fortunate, and don't have the basic necessities of life. Giving to charitable organizations and trying to be generous to others is very important.

Donating your items to those in need is another way to help out others. Donating your items gives others a chance to buy them at discount prices. A lot of people in America are struggling financially. If you have ten dollars in your pocket and no debt, you are richer than 25% of Americans. Many people do not have the opportunity to purchase nice things. But donating to thrift stores makes everything available for whole communities. And most charitable organizations like Goodwill and The Salvation Army donate their funds to other organizations in nearby communities. Goodwill is a nonprofit organization that uses their money for employment-related education and workforce development services for people with special needs. According to the Salvation Army's website, 82% of its proceeds go directly to supporting people in the communities the Salvation Army supports. Overall, donating is a wonderful idea and is beneficial to all who are involved.

That's how you can support others, but what about the relationships in your life? Relationships need time. In Joshua Becker's book *Minimalism: Live a Meaningful Life*, he speaks of the most important relationships in our lives. He categorizes them into three main groups: intimate relationships, closest friends, and immediate family. In order to have healthy relationships, we must invest time and attention into them. It is worth spending extra time with

those we love, trust me. To quote Joshua Becker from the book, *"If your relationships aren't growing, they're dying. But when your relationships grow, you feel alive."* (page 78)

I am a big fan of minimalism, but, like anything good, it can definitely be overdone. Take Diogenes for example. Diogenes of Sinope was a Greek cynic philosopher. Some consider him to be the father of minimalism, the original minimalist, if you will. He is known for living in a barrel in the streets, and survived off of begging and foraging. He supposedly held a candle up to the citizens of Athens, claiming he was searching for an honest man. He rejected the concept of "manners" and advocated complete truthfulness at all times and under any circumstance. He was said to have owned only one thing: a wooden bowl. But one day, he saw a boy scooping water out of a river with his hands, and he gave him the bowl, realizing how materialistic he had become.

He was a student of Antisthenes, and lived by cynic principles. Cynicism is the school of thought that teaches this: All conventional desires in life are meaningless (e.g. fame, wealth, fortune, status), and the greatest good in life is virtue. The purpose of cynicism is to live in accordance with nature and to be virtuous. Diogenes often insulted other philosophers and social superiors publicly. Alexander The Great came to Athens and was interested in meeting Diogenes. He found him resting in the sunlight, introduced himself, and asked if there was anything he could do for him. Diogenes replied, "Yes. Get out of my sunlight." Alexander admired him and said, "If I were not Alexander, I would wish to be Diogenes." Diogenes replied, "If I were not Diogenes, I would also wish to be Diogenes." He was definitely the most eccentric philosopher of his time, or really, all time. I don't necessarily believe in his entire school of thought. It has some flaws, but I do believe there is some truth in his philosophy. He rejected all things physical and deemed them useless. While this is a bit of a stretch, it is generally true. One

of the issues I have with his beliefs is what he thought the purpose of life was. I agree that virtue is important, but I wouldn't put it as number one. The purpose of life is to bring glory to God, and unfortunately, this was absent from his teachings.

Then we have stoicism. Stoicism says that the goal of life is happiness, achieved through virtue. The difference between cynicism and stoicism is this: stoicism says you can have physical items and be rich, as long as you practice moral virtue in your thoughts and actions. Stoics are indifferent to the idea of physical items, while cynics say you should abandon all things physical. The similarity is that both schools of thought put virtue as the only good thing. I think stoicism is a step in the right direction. Stoicism lines up better with my idea of minimalism. Wealth and things aren't bad on their own. They just shouldn't be your purpose in life. Stoicism may have some good ideas, but there is still something missing: that thing is God.

With that being said, let's move on to the area of serving God. Remember earlier when I said that quote from Mr. Ledbetter? *"When you have your health, you have just about everything."* The key words here are *just about*. Another area that could always use more time is probably the most important thing in your life, your relationship with the Lord. Whatever we can do to find more time for prayer and reading scripture is time we need to take. There is no better habit than to be in your Bible everyday. Joshua 1:8 says this, *"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."*

Jesus said this in Matthew, *"Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in*

heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are."

1 Timothy (6:6–10) :

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

If that isn't convincing enough, then I don't know what to tell you. Here we read that godliness is enough for us to be content. When we chase after wealth, temptation, and harmful desires, we will plunge into ruin and destruction. This verse talks about the consequences of running after foolish desires, but what is the reward for doing the opposite? Well, Hebrews 13:5 says this: *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"*

I can't stress enough how important it is to be in your Bible daily. Do you remember the story of Jesus and the rich ruler? A young ruler asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to follow the commandments. The ruler said that he had already done this his whole life, and asked what else he must do. Jesus tells him this in Luke 18:22: *"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Only true fulfillment comes from the Lord. No money nor thing from this world can bring you true lasting joy except God. It is the number one most important thing in your life. Using your life for God's glory is the best decision you could ever make.

I've heard some criticism of minimalism. Some may argue that minimalism is bad for the environment. The argument is that those who become minimalists throw everything they own in the trash. All the stuff then ends up in landfills, piling up even higher than they already are. This certainly could be true, but I would advocate for donating rather than trashing. If you're decluttering the right way, then you shouldn't just be throwing everything away, but donating it. You should be finding a better home for your item rather than a landfill. So yes, some people may not take the time and effort to sort through their things to properly do away with them. Minimalism can be harmful to the environment, if you do it half-heartedly. But, I would challenge anyone who is interested in decluttering to do it properly, as it is better for the environment, as well as helpful for others who could use your items.

Some may also argue that minimalists have a constant cycle of buying and decluttering. This is what I call the "fake minimalist." I made up this term for the person who gets rid of things, just to make more room for other things later. This is not a true minimalist idea of living. If you are struggling to get rid of things and bad habits, you need to reflect on those things. You need to get to the bottom of why there is clutter in your home. Ask yourself these questions: Where does my clutter come from? How did I allow these things to get into my home? If you ask yourself these questions when decluttering, you will become a more conscious consumer. You will be more intentional with your purchases, and in turn, buy less, breaking the cycle of buying and trashing.

Okay, but can't minimalism be bad for the economy? If I buy less, then how will the economy still thrive? Well, there's a difference between living minimally and living frugally. Just because you are a minimalist, doesn't necessarily mean you spend less money. A minimalist may spend less money on clothes and things, but may still spend a lot of money on traveling,

experiences, or whatever they are passionate about. The point isn't to avoid spending money, but to avoid spending money on useless things that get in the way of what you love most.

The least compelling argument I've heard against minimalism is this one. Minimalism is boring. Some would say that it lacks life and substance. To me, this idea is completely backwards. You know what is boring? Clutter, excess things, bad habits. The whole point of minimalism is to live a life worth living. It is the exact opposite of boring. I am actively telling you to get rid of things that are boring. That way, you will have more time for things that bring value and joy into your life. So no, it is not boring. It is part of living a life that is fulfilling and full of what brings you happiness; it couldn't be further from boring.

I'd like to close with some side effects you should consider before pursuing a minimal life: you may find yourself having too much extra time. You may end up finding new hobbies or things that interest you, that'll inevitably take up your extra free time. What a nightmare! Also, you may become more fit and healthy from all that time spent working on your body. You may even feel less depressed from getting proper rest and exercising. Perhaps you may end up going outside more and enjoying nature, due to the lack of things to keep you occupied and distracted inside. You may also develop your relationships further, by spending more time with the people you love. I mean, really, who needs that? The worst side effect of all is that you may not enjoy pleasure shopping as much as you did before. Instead of spending your limited time in aisles full of items you don't need, you may spend it on reading, going outside, or even touching grass! Gross! You also may grow in your walk with the Lord, as you spend more time reading, praying, and meditating on his word. From all these things, you may find yourself feeling happy, content, and fulfilled.

On a serious note, I'd like to share a personal testimony of how minimalism is doing good in my life. I do admit that I enjoy shopping. I like going into Target to buy clothes I don't really need. I guess that's what happens when you have a twin sister (she would be proud). But, this year especially, I've gotten in the habit of clearing out my closet of useless clothes and things. I used to have probably 5 or 6 shoeboxes full of junk. Now I have just one shoebox, mostly filled with some sentimental items. I periodically go through my clothes to clear up more space whenever I can. All clothes I get rid of, I either donate to thrift stores, or give to someone who can find good use of it. I'd like to think my bedroom is a minimal space with not too many things. It makes being there a lot less stressful. I used to have posters and pictures covering my walls. Now my walls are blank and I don't hang anything. It makes cleaning my room a lot easier as well. I've started going to the gym on a regular basis. I started going in September of last year, and I've never felt more confident, and I think my mental health is at an all-time high. I've deleted social media apps like Snapchat and TikTok, as they seemed like a waste of time. I am still in the process of convincing myself to delete Instagram. I love seeing posts of my friends and sending funny videos to them as well. Ideally, I would delete Instagram off my phone, and only check it on my laptop every once in a while to like friends posts. It's a work in progress, but I do plan to be completely social media free in the near future.

As I stated earlier, I've always had a hard time making a conscious effort to read a book. This is the area I need to work on most. Truthfully, I've never been very good at reading my Bible either. I've been trying to start a habit of reading a chapter every night before I go to bed. I'm currently trying to read through Matthew. I've really enjoyed implementing this into my day before I end it. It makes sleeping at night a lot better, too. When the last thing I focus on is God's Word, any worries or concerns that may have kept me up at night are now in the back of my

mind, and put to rest. I plan on going deeper in the Bible as the summer progresses and throughout the rest of my life as an adult. I realize that we are now all graduating, there is no more Bible class that tells me to read my Bible and pray. As an independent, it is all on me to grow in my relationship with the Lord. None of these things are easy, but they are completely worth it, and if I decide to pursue a minimal lifestyle, I know I won't regret it.

I leave you with this verse: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*

– *Philippians 4:8*

Thank you.

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