

# Christian Minimalism

Simple Steps for Abundant Living

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Morehouse Publishing  
NEW YORK

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Morehouse Publishing, 19 East 34th Street, New York, NY 10016

Morehouse Publishing is an imprint of Church Publishing Incorporated.  
[www.churchpublishing.org](http://www.churchpublishing.org)

Cover design by Paul Soupiset  
Typeset by PerfectType, Nashville, Tennessee

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ehrlich, Becca, author.

Title: Christian minimalism : simple steps for abundant living / Becca Ehrlich.

Description: New York : Morehouse Publishing, [2021]

Identifiers: LCCN 2020045672 (print) | LCCN 2020045673 (ebook) | ISBN 9781640653887 (paperback) | ISBN 9781640653894 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Simplicity--Religious aspects--Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4647.S48 E37 2021 (print) | LCC BV4647.S48 (ebook) | DDC 248.4--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020045672>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020045673>

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# 1

## Minimalism and the Christian Life

What do you think of when you hear the word “minimalism”? Do you picture an almost-empty room devoid of color or furnishings, except maybe a bed? Literally nothing else exists in this room. Bonus points if the room has glass walls.

Minimalism is nothing like that picture, which is about what isn't there—and that's only half the story. That picture represents an extreme version of a lack of things that is unsustainable.

Minimalism is *prescriptive* rather than *restrictive*, which means it is going to look different among those who decide to adopt a minimalistic lifestyle. It's a way of thinking and being, of living in the world rather than a lack of everything. My working definition of minimalism is:

A focus on the aspects of life that matter most and intentionally removing everything else.

What, then, are the aspects of life that matter most? Some of those are universal for virtually everyone. I think we can all

agree that relationships in our lives matter, whether they are with family, friends, or a significant other. I think we can also agree that taking care of ourselves matters—body, mind, and spirit—which includes having something that we are passionate about to get us out of bed in the morning. For a lot of people, a big part of the minimalist lifestyle is lessening their attachment to material goods by buying, consuming, and owning less.

Consumption is not bad in itself. We have to consume to live, and we can strive to *intentionally consume*. Minimalists strive to avoid mindless consumption and only buy and keep the things that they need or add value to their life.

Some minimalists sell everything and live as nomads, owning only the things they can carry with them. Some live in and own homes, have one or two cars, and collect things like stamps or magnets or funny comic strips. Many live between these two categories. Minimalism is a lifestyle that can be tailored to what works for you and those you live with. It is much more than buying and owning less. It's about refocusing life to gain the freedom that comes from more time, more energy, and more financial resources. It's about focusing on what matters most.

## Christian Minimalism

*Christian minimalism* aims to connect this minimalist lifestyle with the Christian faith. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Living an abundant, or full, life is what Jesus wants for us. That full life includes spending our time and energy and resources on what matters most, which means removing anything that keeps us from living that abundant life Jesus wants for us.

Our consumer culture has consistently told us that consuming more, owning more, and doing more is the abundant life

that we should be striving for. But Jesus calls us to a different life. Jesus consistently speaks about a simple and focused lifestyle.

Jesus says in Luke 12:34, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Whatever we focus on as most important is where our heart is. A paraphrase of that verse from *The Message* reads, "The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being." Christian minimalism helps us to be intentional about what our treasure is, and where our heart is.

Jesus lived a simple, minimalist lifestyle. He didn't own many possessions. He spent much of his time with family and friends. He spent most of his time traveling to help others by teaching, healing, and casting out demons. And he spent a lot of time in prayer.

In fact, Jesus summed up all of what we are supposed to do in life.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

Love God with your whole being. Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. Sounds like a Christian minimalist focus to me!

Jesus also talked a lot about money. In fact, it's one of the things he talked about the most. The message we get from consumer society is to buy, buy, buy. As Christians, we are called to be counter-cultural because we know that our life's meaning is not wrapped up in material things. It is through Jesus Christ, and what he did for us through the Cross and the Resurrection, that our lives have meaning. Minimalism helps cut through the

clutter and the busy-ness to refocus us on our Triune God—and the aspects of life that truly matter.

You are reading this book for a reason. You've heard God calling you to a different life, one that is lived deliberately and intentionally. You have, either consciously or unconsciously, longed for a life that is simpler and more minimalistic. Maybe you are sick of living your life on autopilot. Maybe you want more out of life than running from work to church to family activities to errands to who-knows-what-else, and falling into bed exhausted—and then doing it all over again the next day, and the next. Maybe you have experienced a major event in your life, and you're ready for a change. Whatever the reason, God has placed this book in your hands. How you decide to use it is up to you.

My hope and prayer is that you will hear and experience Jesus as you read, and find aspects of the Christian minimalist lifestyle to try in your own life. There is no "right" way to be a Christian minimalist. Jesus calls each of us personally, and that means how you live out this lifestyle is going to be unique to you.

## Experimentation

One of the ways you can approach the suggestions in this book is by doing *minimalism experiments*. Don't worry, these experiments look *nothing* like the experiments you did in high school chemistry class. Since the Christian minimalist lifestyle is prescriptive rather than restrictive, these experiments give you the opportunity to find out how best to incorporate aspects of this lifestyle into your own life by experimenting with them for a short amount of time. You can experiment with how little you actually need by living with a set amount of less, for a set amount of time.

For example, some minimalists prefer a “capsule wardrobe” wherein they only use a specific amount of clothing for a set amount of time. Courtney Carver’s “Project 333,”<sup>1</sup> in which she uses only thirty-three items of clothing, shoes, and accessories for three months, is a great example. She didn’t get rid of all her clothes and jump right into the capsule wardrobe without time to adjust. She boxed up the rest of her clothes and put them in storage while she experimented with less. After her experiment, she decided that living with a capsule wardrobe was how she wanted to live; years later it is how she still manages her wardrobe.

Minimalism experiments can also show you how you *don’t* want to live in the future. If you tried Project 333 for three months and found it too restrictive, you could still experiment with less clothes, but more than thirty-three items. Maybe fifty-five is your “just enough” amount, but you won’t know until you try it out for a short amount of time.

You are invited and encouraged to try your own experiments as you read this book. At the very least, experimenting is a way to dip your toe into the Christian minimalist lifestyle. At the very most, it will help you figure out how God is calling you personally to live out your faith as a Christian minimalist.

## Prayer

While reading this book, it is important to envelope this process in prayer. Reading about Christian minimalism means contemplating a huge shift in how we think, act, and function in our world. It is, in a lot of the ways, the complete opposite of how we

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1. Courtney Carver, “Simple is the New Black,” *The Simplicity Space*, <https://bemorewithless.com/project-333/>.



currently live our lives. God has already been speaking to you; keeping the lines open for communication is essential.

Living as a Christian minimalist is a personal journey. As such, prayer is a powerful way to listen for God's guidance in how *you* are called to live out this lifestyle.

***Individual Prayer.*** A good way to start the Christian minimalism journey is to spend some time by yourself in God's presence. If you already do this on a regular basis, fantastic! Keep on doing what you're doing—just add a new focus on listening for God's input on your more minimalistic lifestyle. If you don't regularly spend time by yourself in prayer, here are some helpful hints:

- Set aside some time to pray every day, when you can be uninterrupted and be somewhere quiet. Pick a time in the day when you are awake and alert. For some people, that's first thing in the morning. For others, it's the last thing before bed. If you aren't sure what works best for you, try different times and see what works.
- Pray for God's guidance on how you can incorporate the aspects of Christian minimalism that you read in this book.
- After asking for God's guidance, make sure to spend some time in silence simply listening for God. Don't worry if you don't hear anything right away—trust that God is hearing your prayers and will lead you.
- Keep listening for God in daily life. God speaks to us through other people, through aha! moments in work situations, and in other unlimited ways. You never know when God will show you a new way you can start living more simply.
- Keep praying and listening for God as you continue on your Christian minimalism journey. Just as our life circumstances change over time, God's guidance can change as well.

**Prayer Partners.** In addition to individual prayer, some people find it helpful to have a designated person to pray with. When embarking on a lifestyle shift, it can be good to have someone you trust to talk to, as well as someone to offer prayerful support and encouragement. A prayer partner can be someone local that you meet with in person, or it can be someone you connect with over the phone or over video conferencing on a computer or phone. You can bring up those aspects of Christian minimalism that you feel could benefit from prayer, and then your prayer partner can pray for you, out loud, right in that moment.

Being prayed for by someone else can be a powerful experience. Sometimes God can speak truth to us through others when we are unable to hear it in other circumstances. I encourage you to find a prayer partner and set a regular time to pray together. Once every two weeks is a good place to start, but some people find once a week more effective.

## Scripture

In addition to prayer, reading the Bible and listening for God's guidance is an important part of the Christian minimalism journey. Throughout this book, there are scripture passages to help you think about the different aspects of Christian minimalism. It's also important to continue reading the Bible as you start—and continue—this process. Many times, we can hear God speaking to us as we read scripture. Even when we are reading a familiar Bible verse or passage, God can say something new to us depending on our current life situation. I've had God tell me very different things through the same Bible passage, years apart.

You'll also find that once you start reading scripture from a Christian minimalism perspective, you will find minimalism *everywhere* in the Bible. It may even be a good idea to have a separate Christian minimalism highlighter or pen color in which you

can highlight and make notes (either on paper or electronically) on minimalism verses and passages as you read them and hear God's guidance. Here are some suggested ways you can listen for God in scripture:

***Devotionals/Reading Plans.*** Picking Bible passages to read can feel overwhelming when you're looking at the whole Bible and wondering where to start. It can be helpful to have an author's curated Bible passages around a topic so that you don't have to worry about what to pick. Many devotionals and reading plans have built-in reflections and prayers along with the Bible texts, which can be an added bonus. Reading plans and devotionals can be found in smartphone Bible apps, online, and in separate books.

***Bible Study Groups.*** It can be encouraging to read the Bible in a group with other Christians. Having discussion around Bible passages with others can open up new insights and challenge you to think differently. You might even have a study group as you read the Bible through a Christian minimalism lens.

***Read through a Book of the Bible.*** If you've ever wanted to know more about a specific book of the Bible, this is your chance. You can choose the book you think would be most helpful for where you are in your Christian minimalism journey and read a chapter of that book a day.

***Read through the Bible in a Year.*** Reading through the whole Bible in one year is not for the faint of heart, but it is a great way to read all of the scriptures in a manageable amount of time. You can find suggested ways to break the reading up online and in smartphone Bible apps. Just think of how many Christian minimalism-themed Bible passages you'll come across in that year.

***Read a Psalm Each Day.*** A mentor of mine reads one psalm a day as part of his devotional time. The Psalms are chock-full of honest moments, including those times in which living out our faith can be difficult. The Christian minimalism journey is both amazing and challenging, and the Psalmists can give voice to

our thoughts and feelings even when we aren't able to verbalize them ourselves.

**Lectio Divina.** From the Latin for "divine reading," this is a monastic scripture-reading practice in which the reader is encouraged to listen for God's voice as a Bible passage is read multiple times. This practice is usually done corporately but can also be done individually. Different translations of scripture may be used at each step, or the same translation can be used throughout. *Lectio Divina* has four main parts:

1. **Read:** *Read* the passage, encouraging everyone to listen with the "ear of their heart." What phrase, sentence, or even single word stands out to you?
2. **Meditate:** Read the passage again and *reflect* on the word of God. Encourage everyone to be aware of what touches them, a thought or reflection that is meaningful. Allow a minute or two of silence.
3. **Pray:** Read the passage again and *respond in prayer* spontaneously to the word of God. Be aware of any prayer that rises up within that expresses the experience. Allow a minute or two of silence.
4. **Contemplate:** Read the passage a final time and *rest* in the word; reflect or pray and allow God to speak in the silence. Allow three or four minutes of silence.

To extend the practice: Take the phrase, sentence, or word into your daily activity and listen to it, reflect on it, pray over it, and rest in it as time allows during the day. Allow it to become part of you.

## A Major Question

Living as a Christian minimalist means paring down to the most important aspects of life. In that paring down, we assess how we use the resources God has given us and intentionally remove

those aspects of our lives that are not most important. In order to remove the things that aren't the most important, Christian minimalists ask themselves a major question regularly:

Is this possession/time commitment/activity adding value to my life and the lives of others in Jesus's name?

In other words, Christian minimalists continuously assess what is most important and whether they are using their God-given resources to best serve God and others, which means becoming much more aware of how they use their money, time, skills, and energy. It's easy to live mindlessly and fall into unhelpful habits—like spending countless hours falling down the rabbit hole of social media. We are not using our time and talents to the glory of God by scrolling endlessly through our feeds. Posting encouraging words to others on social media, however, is a great way to focus on what matters most by helping others and sharing God's love.

Too often we live life on autopilot, living the way society expects of us and how we have always functioned. Christian minimalists aim to live an intentional life, one that is well thought-out and focused on the most important things.

## Living Counterculturally

Being a Christian minimalist means living in a way that is different from the dominant consumer culture around us. Living as a Christian in a post-Christian society is in itself countercultural; living as a Christian minimalist is doubly so. Society constantly tells us:

- More is better. We are what we own, so we need to own lots of impressive and expensive things.
- We are what we do for our job. Having an impressive job title should be one of our main goals.

- Our financial bottom line is what defines our self-worth. If we don't make a lot of money, we should work harder and climb up the ladder to make more money.
- Being busy is a badge of honor. Resting is just wasted time that could be used producing more.
- Being famous, having power, and receiving worldly accolades are worthy goals to continuously strive for.

Christian minimalists, on the other hand:

- Aim to live with less, intentionally consume, and focus on what's most important, rather than continuously buying things that won't ultimately make us happy (Luke 12:15–21).
- Strive to focus on what God is calling us to do (our vocation) rather than basing our identity on our job title or how we make a living (1 Corinthians 7:17).
- Understand, as Jesus tells us in the Gospels, that having money actually makes it harder to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:23–24) and amassing wealth shouldn't be our main goal (1 Timothy 6:10). Our identity is as beloved children of God (1 John 3:1).
- Intentionally spend Sabbath time in rest and renewal alone, with our loved ones, and with God (Matthew 14:23).
- Know that fame, power, and worldly praise are not our goal; we are called to serve rather than be served, as Jesus did (Luke 22:24–30).

As Christian minimalists, we aim to live counterculturally. As Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). We are called to live differently than society's accepted lifestyle driven by consumerism.

Being part of a counterculture can be a challenging undertaking at times. It's not easy to go against the grain. We are swimming upstream, like salmon. When it's time to reproduce, salmon make the arduous journey swimming upstream against the current. These fish go back to where they themselves were born and lay eggs in this more protected area. After they reproduce, the salmon die and their remains provide nutrients for their growing offspring. The salmon's difficult trip upstream—although it results in their death—actually ensures the continuation of their species.

This biology lesson is in itself interesting, and it also teaches us a lot about what it means to live counterculturally. Like salmon swimming upstream, it can be difficult to live a different lifestyle than everyone around us. Temptations tug at us on a regular basis, because it's frequently easier to live like everyone else. But God calls us to a different life. As we live counterculturally and swim upstream, we can live a more minimalist lifestyle in Christ. Being countercultural as a Christian minimalist isn't always easy, but it is always worth it.

## A Word About Decluttering

In popular culture, decluttering has become a buzzword. TV shows, social media feeds, blogs, and articles expound on the joys of decluttering and how people can get a new lease on life by getting rid of a boat-load of their personal possessions.

Getting rid of stuff we don't need is great—in fact, it can be a part of the Christian minimalism journey—but two major things are missing in many of the popular decluttering efforts: the reality that decluttering material possessions is only part of the process, and the “why” behind why we want to do it in the first place.

***Decluttering personal possessions is only one part of the process.***  
A good place to start the Christian minimalism journey is by

dealing with material possessions—it's an obvious issue, and it's an easy way to start making progress relatively quickly.

But Christian minimalism is more than getting rid of stuff. It's a full lifestyle, focusing on serving God and serving others by living deliberately and removing everything else. It's about intentional consumption and living with less. It's about a work/rest balance and making Sabbath a priority. It's about using our time and energy for the glory of God rather than just “killing time” until the next scheduled thing, or chaotically rushing through life with no time for loved ones, God, or leisure. Christian minimalism is a complete lifestyle change.

***Understand the “why” behind decluttering.*** Most of the time, decluttering is presented as an end in itself; having less stuff means being happier. But decluttering must be about more than making our living spaces more open and attractive, although those are great side effects. Minimizing and paring down our lives is done so that we can truly live the abundant life Jesus is calling us to live. We can live fully into our God-given calling only when we remove those things that are in the way. Removing material possessions is only part of the process—it's also about minimizing our whole lives and figuring out our needs versus our wants.

## Not “One and Done”

Becoming a Christian minimalist is not a “one and done” process. You don't get to an end and say, “Okay, I'm done. I'm a Christian minimalist now.” It is a life-long process. It's a continual assessment of what is adding value to your life, and how you can continue to prune and cull all aspects of your life to focus on what's most important.

How we live as Christian minimalists looks different depending on our current life situations and contexts. How a



single college student lives out this lifestyle is not the same as a married couple with three kids. What adds value to our lives now may not add value years from now. It is a process of continual evaluation—a tool to focus on what matters most.

That's not to say that there won't be continuous Christian minimalism themes across all parts of life. Some aspects of Christian minimalism will be appropriate no matter what life looks like. But a Christian minimalist strives to focus on the most important things, and to do that we must periodically assess our lives and remove everything that keeps us from doing so.

I can tell you that the journey of Christian minimalism is worth it and fulfilling. After becoming a Christian minimalist, I had way more freedom to fulfill God's calling for me. When I started to remove those things that weren't important, I had much more time and energy. In fact, in the time that was freed up by living as a Christian minimalist, I wrote this book! Imagine what *you* could do if you simplify and focus on what really matters.