

# Removing the Static, Hearing God's Voice

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**H**ave you ever noticed that every month, most shelter magazines feature one or two articles about getting organized? It used to be the big January feature after the Christmas haul, but lately articles about de-cluttering appear regularly.

Entire magazines are now devoted to living a clutter-less, more organized life. *Real Simple* magazine used to be one of my guilty pleasures. But this is not your father's live-off-the-land, bake-your-own-bread kind of simplicity. In its thick, glossy pages, the magazine promises a simpler, elegant lifestyle—while every other page is an ad for the very things that create clutter, such as housewares, clothing, cosmetics, and perfumes.

For years, I fell into the cycle of buying, organizing, de-cluttering, and shopping for more. I even entertained the idea that I was actually living a simple life, despite evidence to the contrary. Then, when my family decided to move to a much smaller, older home, I was forced to examine my consumer habits. It was painful to realize how much time I had spent just moving my stuff around, even getting rid of it, and then, inexplicably, replacing the very stuff I had just unloaded with other stuff, somehow thinking that these new items would make my life easier. They didn't.

Since moving into smaller space, I have learned that the key to a simple life is not better organization, it's less stuff. And for the Christian, the point

of having less stuff is making room for Jesus, becoming better stewards of the things we do choose to own, and identifying with those who have less. For years, Christian writers such as Richard Foster have written about simplicity as a spiritual discipline, not just for the sake of rejecting materialism, but for the sake of embracing a single focus—Christ. When he is our role model, keeping up with trends, owning the “best” of everything doesn't seem to matter as much.

Getting rid of most of my belongings in order to fit into a small house has been a long and difficult process, involving saying good-bye to a lot of things I thought I wanted or needed. However, owning less has been a transforming experience for me. In fact, the less I own, the less I want to own, which is not at all what I expected when we downsized. The funny thing is, when I limit my choices, I seem to find more freedom. For example, I have pared down my wardrobe to some basic essentials, even choosing just a few basic colors and adding accessories I love if I want to perk things up. When I had a closetful of clothing, I could never find anything to wear. Now, with less to choose from, I don't worry about it as much. And I've discovered that most people aren't paying attention to what I wear anyway, as long as I'm dressed appropriately.

Somehow, living with less has removed a kind of static from my life, a constant distracting buzz. I feel

lighter, more purposeful, more focused on the things that bring me joy. With more joy, I'm less miserly with my time and energy for the people in my life.

The secular world has tapped into that feeling, perhaps as a response to the consumer lifestyle that seems so prevalent and feels so meaningless. “Minimalism” encourages its followers to pare down to the barest essentials so that they can pursue their dreams and personal ambitions. Some “minimalists” even encourage their followers to limit their clothing to seven items, or their diets to ten foods, or their personal possessions to 100 things. Most minimalists also focus on living sustainably, just owning “their share”—an idea I applaud and try to pursue in my own life. However, even minimalism itself, while it feels good for a while, can become judgmental and Scrooge-like, just as Christian simplicity can turn into latter-day Puritanism taken to its extreme. That's why I think there are limits to minimalism if pursued from a strictly secular point of view.

The Christian discipline of simplicity is about freedom, about faith—trusting Jesus to provide for our needs while we free up resources for others—our time, our gifts, our stuff. It's not just about removing the static. It's about tuning in to hear God's voice. ■

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