



Declutter Your Heart and Your Home

HOW A MINIMALIST LIFE YIELDS MAXIMUM JOY

JULIA UBBENGA

FOUNDER OF RICH IN WHAT MATTERS

This book is the coach you've been looking for. Not just a practical, doable map to declutter your home, this book reorders your interior world so you experience the gift of dwelling in genuine peace.

ANN VOSKAMP, author, *One Thousand Gifts*,
The Broken Way, and *WayMaker*

The Christian space has long needed a book like this—one that challenges the narrative of overconsumption while gently inviting us to examine the state of our inner world. Julia is a thought leader for the ages. She doesn't push or preach; instead, she shows up as a soothing presence who knows the way. This book is a brilliant blend of wisdom, practicality, and a profound call to declutter not just our surroundings but also our hearts and minds.

HANNAH BRENCHER, author, *The Unplugged Hours*
and *Come Matter Here*

Julia Ubbenga doesn't just teach you how to declutter your house—she shows you how to reclaim your peace, your purpose, and your connection with what matters most. Her honest storytelling, combined with practical tools, offers a lifeline to overwhelmed moms and anyone ready to let go of the noise and chaos of excess. This book is more than a guide to minimalism; it's an invitation to a freer, more joyful life.

ZOË KIM, author, *Minimalism for Families*

If you're looking for a guide to decluttering your stuff—not just your outer stuff but also your inner stuff—that leads to a lighter, more joy-filled life, then this is it! Julia's story serves as a powerful testimony that living with less can lead to a life rich in what truly matters.

ERICA LAYNE, bestselling author, *The Minimalist Way*

A profound and practical must-read! Julia understands that simplifying involves more than just decluttering our stuff—it also involves freeing our hearts, minds, and souls. Her personal story provides powerful inspiration to live a simple, more intentional life.

JOSHUA BECKER, founder, *Becoming Minimalist*

Julia invites readers to let go of their clutter and focus on what truly enriches their lives. In today's fast-paced world, this book provides a valuable guide to intentional and joyful living!

DIANE BODEN, creator and host, *Minimalist Moms Podcast*

Living in chaotic or cluttered spaces can do more than just make you feel overwhelmed or stressed; it can also affect your spiritual life. Julia does a remarkable job of showing you how to remove the mess not just within your home but also within your soul—so you can feel more present, less stressed, and further able to experience God's peace.

COURTNEY J. BURG, author, *Loyal to a Fault*

With *Declutter Your Heart and Your Home*, Julia's practical tools and thoughtful insights serve as evergreen reminders that minimalism is not only doable, it is also a lifestyle that directly reflects who we are and what matters most—living a joyful, intentional life.

CHRISTINE PLATT, author of bestseller
The Afrominimalist's Guide to Living with Less

Declutter Your Heart and Your Home is so needed in today's culture that tells us our worth is found in doing more, amassing more, and achieving more. Julia's personal stories and practical tools will help you clear your outer and inner stuff piles so you can more deeply enjoy your life.

DAWN MADSEN, founder, *The Minimal Mom*

In a world that constantly pulls us toward excess and distraction, Julia offers a refreshing and spiritually grounding perspective on minimalism. Our excess stuff clutters up more than the physical spaces within our homes; it clutters our minds and hearts as well. Julia does a masterful job of showing us how letting go of both the tangible and intangible clutter will leave us lighter, unhurried, less stressed, and free to pursue peace.

RACHELLE CRAWFORD, author, *Messy Minimalism*

Julia's passion for creating intentionally restful spaces for the soul shines through every page of this book. She beautifully demonstrates how to design peaceful environments that nurture both our mental and spiritual well-being. It's an absolute must-read for anyone who loves Christ and desires a clutter-free life anchored in him and focused on eternal things.

ANH LIN, author, *Forever Home* and
The Abundant Life Journal

Declutter Your Heart and Your Home is a breath of fresh air for anyone feeling overwhelmed by the clutter—both physical and mental—in their life. With warmth and wisdom, Julia invites readers to embrace simplicity and focus on what truly enriches their existence. In our fast-paced world, this is a powerful guide to living intentionally and finding joy in what matters most.

ANGEL CHERNOFF, *New York Times* bestselling
coauthor of *Getting Back to Happy*

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HOW A MINIMALIST LIFE YIELDS MAXIMUM JOY

JULIA UBBENGA

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*For my husband, Justin, and our children,
Eva, Elena, Ethan, Emelia,
and Evelyn
You make life rich*

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DECLUTTERING THE SOUL

CHAPTER

4

LETTING GO



Any half-awake materialist well knows —
that which you hold holds you.

—TOM ROBBINS—

As I journeyed toward minimalism, I knew rationally that my stuff wasn't what mattered most. But I wasn't yet detached from my stuff emotionally. I'd invested in accumulating my possessions. I'd earned the money to pay for them and devoted the time to search for them (and, let's be honest, I'd found some amazing deals).

I had to remind myself over and over that a possession is like a bubble, or a dandelion blown in the wind, or a fireworks show. You observe it, enjoy it, and let it go. The things I owned were good, but they weren't the ultimate good, and I wasn't meant to cling to them as though they were.

I'd seen account after account of people from the Bible where Jesus asked them to give up their possessions to follow him: the rich young man (Matthew 19:21) and the apostles

Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Mark 1:16–20). Postbiblical accounts showed the same: Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Anthony of Egypt, Mother Teresa, not to mention their thousands of followers.

To others, Jesus had simply said, “Follow me,” not “Divest yourself of everything you have and then follow me.” Take Lydia of Thyatira, for example. Lydia ran an export business dealing in purple-dyed cloths (Acts 16:14). Purple goods were costly, so Scripture implies that Lydia was wealthy. She likely had a good-sized home and a good number of possessions. She encountered Paul on the Sabbath while gathering with other women at a nearby river. The Lord opened her heart to Paul’s words, and she became a believer.

After her entire household accepted Christ as Savior and was baptized, Lydia invited Paul and Silas to stay in her home (Acts 16:15). Lydia again opened her home to Paul and Silas after their release from a Philippian prison, and her house became the meeting place of the first European church (Acts 16:40). Once a Christian, Lydia didn’t jettison a single possession, but she did renounce her ownership of them. What had been hers before her conversion—home, business, and possessions—now belonged to the Lord.

In Scripture, there is no blanket statement that says every single follower of Jesus has to give everything away. But every follower of Jesus *is* called to give him everything.

Surrendering ownership of stuff wasn’t an easy part of my journey—it felt contrary to my nature. Minimalism, I realized, would require a mindset shift. Before I pitched a single possession—outer or inner—God wanted me to give it all to him. God wanted access to everything: my stuff, my bank

account, my relationships, my calendar, my thought patterns. He was and always had been their source, but I'd been white-knuckling them. I had wrapped my fingers around what was "mine" with a grip of steel. But clenched fists aren't conducive to letting go.

Loosening my grip meant turning over not only my hands, palms open to God, but also my ownership of any possession previously deemed mine. It was all his. I was simply the steward, which gave the term "stuff manager" a much different feel.

As I considered letting go, the question wasn't, "How do I give everything away?" but rather "How do I follow Jesus with everything?" Jesus was showing me that to follow him, for me, would mean to live with much less. That would require detaching from my things and also giving him access to everything—what I would declutter *and* what I would keep. If I wanted to build an inner home foundation cemented in Christ, I had to renounce my ownership before rolling up my sleeves and pitching my possessions.

Living with the End in Mind

A powerful personal experience finally made my detachment concrete. One December evening, while sitting in my car outside my favorite coffee shop—the one nestled on the corner of our town square, facade adorned with white globe lights—I had an overwhelming urge to call my grandma. (This was my paternal grandma, not my maternal one mentioned in the introduction.) I was new to these intuition-filled calls to action, but I was noticing them more now that I was focused less on stuff and more on God.

Eager to unload my daughters, sink into my favorite booth, and wrap my hands around a large, café-au-lait-filled mug, I tried to shake the feeling. My fingers grazed the car door's handle, but the voice telling me to call Grandma became deafening, so I grabbed the phone and dialed.

The conversation, as always, was soul-filling. I asked her questions about how in the world she managed raising nine kids. She shared a parenting tip, or at least some general encouragement, which I always welcomed. I promised to visit her in the not-too-distant future. She smiled—I could hear it in her voice—and said, “Oh, wouldn’t that be nice. But a phone call is wonderful too.”

After I had talked for twenty minutes, restless voices from the back seat cued the conversation’s end. Eva requested a turn to talk, and in true five-year-old fashion, she excitedly spoke of the present moment and her long-awaited hot chocolate. Grandma said the call had meant so much and thanked me for it. I told her I loved her. And I told her goodbye.

Five days later, Grandma passed away unexpectedly. Nothing could have prepared us for the timing of her passing, and nothing could have left me more grateful for the evening when I postponed coffee to make that call.

As I placed a long-stemmed red rose on her casket one snowy December day, I was reminded again of the brevity of our time here on earth. I watched my warm breath form a white cloud as I exhaled into the frigid cemetery air. Then I watched it vanish.

Our journey through life is like that—transitory, fleeting, temporary. There is power in this perspective. Remembering death, living with the end in mind, propels us to use the time

we have on earth to be less focused on inner and outer clutter and more focused on what truly matters.

The bottom line is this: You can't take your stuff with you. And chances are, when you come to the end of your life, you're not going to wish you had more of it. Moments of connection, beauty, and generosity are the "things" worth collecting as we journey through life.

Saint Francis of Assisi said, "When you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received—only what you have given." Love is what we've given, and love is what remains (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Keeping our own mortality in mind naturally shifts our focus away from our stuff. It increases our detachment and our propensity to let go.

In her book *Slow: Simple Living for a Frantic World*, Brooke McAlary explains how a simple writing prompt changed her life.¹ The prompt? Write your own three-sentence eulogy. The result? Amazing clarity on what truly matters in life.

In her eulogy, McAlary describes herself as a quick-to-laugh, creative, loyal, spontaneous person; a firm believer that we're all responsible to leave the world a better place than we found it; and a mom who raised daughters with both "roots and wings."

"I looked at my kids and husband and tried to imagine no longer being with them," McAlary writes. "The thought was painful, and I felt guilty. But what I also realized as I struggled to get the words on paper is that a eulogy doesn't leave any room for the unimportant things. The stuff we own, social media statistics, work success, having a nice home—I discovered that none of it really mattered."²

“The truth is none of us has any idea what the future holds,” she continues. “I (now) knew what the most important, eulogy-worthy parts of my life were—family, adventure, having a positive impact in the world—I realized I wasn’t living that life.”³

While I wasn’t scared of death, I was scared of leaving too much of my life un-lived. I was terrified of having a legacy of tedious existence—being known for doing, amassing, and striving, but never really living. I feared living a life incongruent with what I’d want in my eulogy, which, I decided, included faith, family, presence, and adventure. I wanted to be remembered for beach trips where I ran through the waves barefoot and bedtime stories that ended in tears of laughter, for lingering on summer nights to gaze at stars and being present to the people I was blessed to be doing life with.

After that December, my view of possessions finally shifted.

Yours can too. The things to hold close, to be remembered for, aren’t things at all.

Fixing your eyes on Christ (Hebrews 12:2) and thinking of things above (Colossians 3:2) creates space to declutter your soul and align your life with your desired legacy.

Observe each possession, enjoy it, then let it go. Because none of it is ever really ours in the first place.



Inner Decluttering Tool: Shift Your Possessions Perspective

How do you view possessions? As permanent, defining pieces of your life, or as ephemeral objects? While the things of the world may be good and beautiful, the truly good, the truly beautiful, belong to a higher world. We can sense goodness and beauty in worldly things, but none of them last.

Which of the transient objects listed below can you most relate your possessions to?

- fireworks
- dandelions
- bubbles
- ocean waves

Take time today to pray with this visual in mind, and remind yourself that possessions are passing. Consider praying Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6:7—"We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it"—to remind you that possessions are to be enjoyed in the moment but then released into God's hands.



Outer Decluttering Tool: Write Your Three-Sentence Eulogy

An anonymous quote I love reads, “No one is going to stand up at your funeral and say, ‘She had a really expensive couch and great shoes.’ Don’t make life about stuff.”

If you were to write your own three-sentence eulogy, would your possessions be included? Take time today to write it out and see. What is it that you want to be remembered for? Here are some possibilities:

- your personality
- your presence
- your faith
- your sense of adventure

A eulogy only leaves room for what’s most important. Center your life on these “things,” not your stuff.