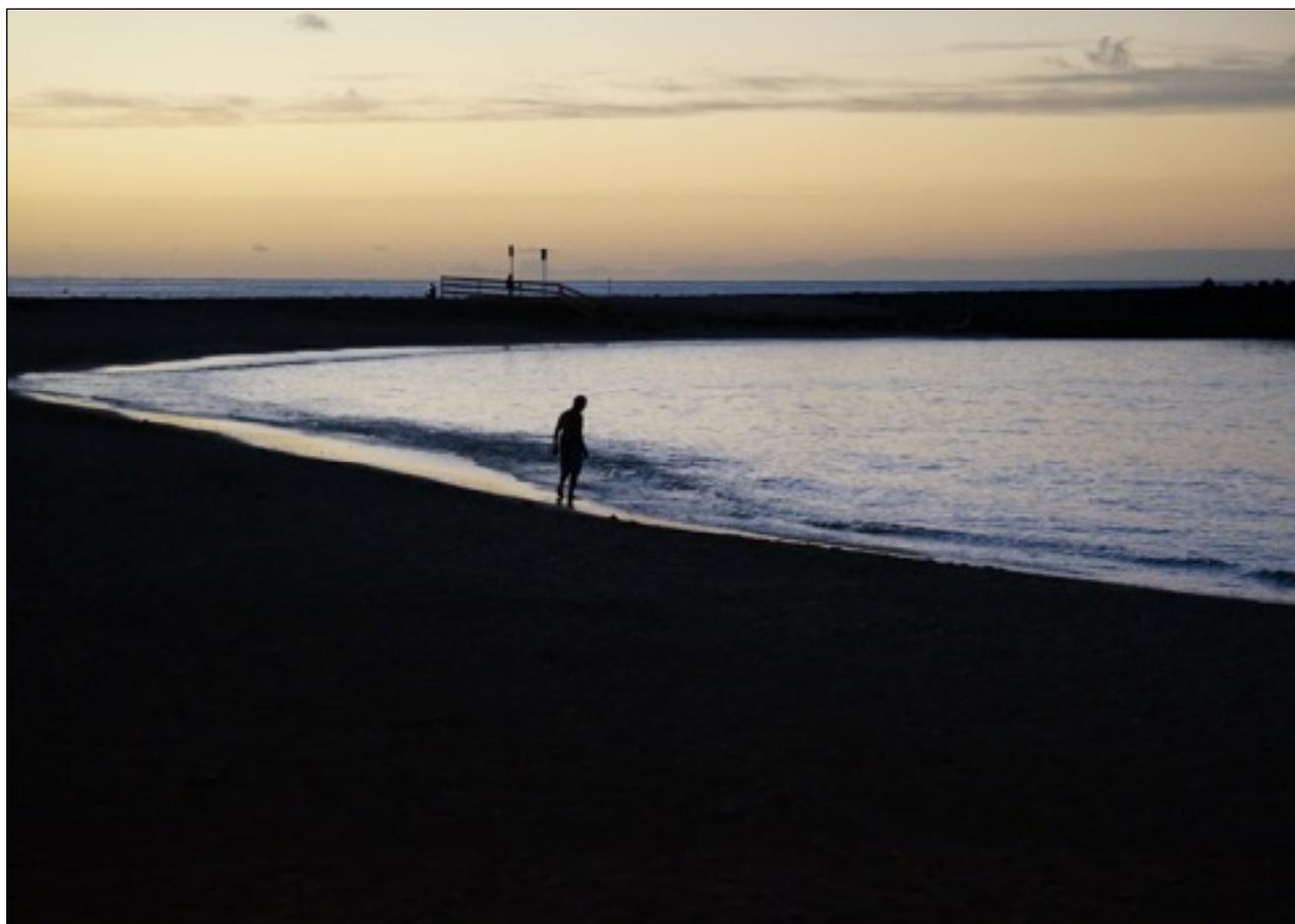

The Simple Life

How Intentionally Living With Less Is More

Cliff Hsia



How much does your life weigh?

Imagine for a second that you're carrying a backpack. I want you to pack it with all the stuff that you have in your life... you start with the little things. The shelves, the drawers, the knickknacks, then you start adding larger stuff. Clothes, tabletop appliances, lamps, your TV... the backpack should be getting pretty heavy now. You go bigger. Your couch, your car, your home... I want you to stuff it all into that backpack."

~George Clooney as Ryan Bingham, Up in the Air (Movie)

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Dedication

This little book is dedicated to all the readers of Live Family Travel.

Your stories, letters, comments, and encouragement continue to inspire me to keep traveling and writing. I hope this short and simple book can help you get back to living a simpler, healthier, happier, and more fulfilling life.

Thank you.

About the Author

Cliff Hsia is a writer, marketer, traveler, husband, and father who is determined to live a better than normal life by traveling the world, slowly and purposefully, with his wife and two young daughters. He is the creator and author of Live Family Travel. He is also a contributing writer to *The Huffington Post*, *The Good Men Project*, and other publications. He writes about travel, family, love, happiness, faith, and everything else that life throws at him.

Introduction

“Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it’s worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.”

~Steve Jobs

Living a simple life isn’t easy. In fact, it’s extremely difficult because we live in a consumer culture that encourages endless buying, splurging, and collecting. Separating our needs from our wants becomes increasingly difficult in a society constantly encouraging us to increase, super-size, and upgrade everything.

So we end up spending all of our time, energy, and money collecting and storing all these things in our life, which are supposed to bring us happiness. But is this continuous consumption really worth it all?

I believe our endless consumption isn’t worth any of it. We don’t need more. We need less, and we need simple.

Examples of Excessive Consumption

Let's take a look at some examples of how overconsumption of things can create more harm than good:

Food: A piece of chocolate cake would be enticing, but what if you had to eat the entire cake in one sitting? Not as enticing anymore, right? A delicious bowl of salad with organic fruits and vegetables sounds healthy and tasty. But what if you had to eat that bowl of salad every day at dinner for an entire year? You'd get bored with that bowl of salad pretty quickly. There's certainly enjoyment in good food and cooking, but food doesn't provide you authentic happiness. Food is merely a source of nourishment.

Drinks: Fine wines, good beers, coffees, smoothies, sodas, and fruit juices can all satisfy our needs when we're thirsty. These drinks give us temporary enjoyment. But what happens when you start abusing these drinks? If it's alcohol, you might cause suffering to your body by drinking too much and you may even hurt others when you drink and drive. If it's sodas and juices, the excess sugar of the drinks will cause you to gain

unwanted weight and make you unhappy with your body. Drinks provide hydration, but aren't a true source of happiness.

Clothes: Ever have that feeling when you open your closet and think that you have too much clothes? Buying, storing, washing, choosing, and wearing clothes becomes a stressful part of your life. Trying to live to an ideal of beauty and style in a world that judges how you look is a daunting task. Steve Jobs became infamous for wearing the outfit of a black long-sleeve turtleneck, blue jeans, and New Balance running shoes almost every day of his life as CEO of Apple. He did that to eliminate the unhappiness associated with trying to keep up with the ideals of fashion, so he could focus on his creative ideas that have changed the world.

Toys: Kids have dolls, stuffed animals, cars, planes, balls, kitchens, and almost anything imaginable these days as toys. Adults have smartphones, tablets, watches, jewelry, and TVs as toys, to name a few. You toil at work, scrimp, and save so you can have these fleeting moments of enjoyment with your toys. Eventually the toys get old and out-of-date, you lose

interest in them and set your sights on the newest toys available. You keep wanting to acquire more in this endless cycle of sacrifice for pleasure, but in the end, the toys cannot provide real happiness.

Cars: A car is one of the biggest liabilities you can acquire in your life. The initial satisfaction of the “new car smell” quickly fades away when you are confronted with the massive burdens of monthly car payments, insurance, registration fees, gas, maintenance and repair costs, and car washes. Driving the car can also be stressful when you’re stuck in traffic during your daily commute or when you get stopped for a traffic violation. The car that you worked so hard for is now the source of your frustration and unhappiness.

Houses: Almost everyone in this world wants to own their house. It represents a home where you can put your roots down and provide secure shelter for you and your family. A house will most likely be the biggest purchase of one’s adult life. Getting the keys to your new house is exciting and a joyful moment. But soon you will have the big task of filling up this house with furniture, clothes, cars, toys, etc. Then

you're faced with the reality of maintaining your house with home repairs, yard work, cleaning, and remodeling. And the bills keep coming every month with payments for mortgage, insurance, and property tax. You have a house but after a while you're unhappy with the constant burden of maintaining and paying for it.

These are just some of the most common examples of external sources of happiness. Although these things initially give you pleasure and satisfaction when you acquire or consume them, you eventually feel the heavy burden of those things, which results in displeasure, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness.

Sacrificing your time and freedom for more money and material possessions never ends well. In the end, money won't ever buy your true happiness. You only have one shot at living your life, so why waste the most precious thing you have in the world—your time—on things that do not give you true happiness?

How I Simplified My Life

After my thirtieth birthday, I thought it was about time to finally purchase a new car for myself, and my family. So I did, and I did it in a big way. I walked into the Acura dealership, picked out my gray MDX, and signed the loan papers for an over \$700 monthly payment for five years. The SUV was everything I hoped for when I bought it—large, shiny, and expensive. I told myself I could afford this, I needed this, and I deserved this.

My car and I had been through a lot since I bought it. I had obsessed over keeping it scratch-less, parking it in my garage at home and at remote positions in parking lots. The front tire had once drove over a nail and had to be replaced. It had been stolen, then found by the police, then brought back to it's brand-new condition after weeks of repairs and cleanings. And although it costed about \$90 to fill the tank full for a measly 300 miles per full tank, I happily obliged every time. My car was worth it, even if it consumed a lot of my money, time, and energy to upkeep it.

I sold my car almost exactly three years after I purchased it. My family and I were preparing for our gap year of world travel and the

car was the first thing that needed to go. Once I sold our near mint-condition car, I felt this huge two ton burden lifted off my shoulders. No longer did I have to worry about large monthly loan payments, insurance payments, maintenance fees, and all the gas fill-ups.

We downsized to a smaller, rental car for the two months before leaving for our travels. During that time, the kids never felt any difference in comfort levels and we didn't miss our gas-guzzling SUV at all. In fact, we relished not having to constantly fill up the tank with premium gas, parking wherever we wanted, and having more space in our garage with the smaller car.

Getting rid of our biggest possession—besides our house—helped us realize that we were more emotionally attached to the car than physically attached to it. We didn't need the SUV for all its leather seats and four-wheel-drive handling, and were perfectly fine with a more compact car. After the car sold, we put everything we owned on the chopping block, including clothes, shoes, toys, furniture, books, electronics, dishes, and anything else that could be sold, given away, or donated.

As we got rid of more and more stuff, our house seemed bigger, our closets were roomier, and our kids could actually find the toys they were looking for. Initially, we were downsizing because we had to, since we were leaving for at least a year to travel the world together. But eventually, as we went through all of our stuff, we started downsizing because we *wanted* to. Things that could easily have been put in storage were sold or given away. My wardrobe was cut by 80% and my wife followed my lead by liquidating almost her entire closet, which was an entire lifetime of clothes, accessories, jewelry, and shoes.

Through the process of liquidating all of our stuff, we realized that we didn't need any of it, except the bare essentials for a few days of clothing and our Apple products, of course. Everything else was excessive. Things that we hadn't used in years had taken up space in our lives without us even knowing it. So when we released ourselves of those things and freed up that space—physically, mentally, and emotionally—we were able to focus on the things that mattered. We enjoyed more family time together, we became more charitable with our time and possessions, and we were able to concentrate on activities that we enjoyed such as exercising and spending quality time with our children.

With less stuff, we were able to rid ourselves of all the stress that the stuff had brought us. We had less bills, less upkeep, and less wasted energy. We filled the void of less stuff with more time for activities that gave us meaning. For me, I had more head space to meditate, pray, read, and write. I also became more efficient in my work and running/exercise routines.

My children were also beneficiaries of having less. They fought less over toys. They didn't fuss as much about having to clean up their toys, since they had less. They were more calm and relaxed about finding their toys or their crayons, as opposed to finding those things in the mountains of stuff they had before. They gravitated towards simple pleasures such as reading a book, coloring, and drawing a picture.

Less became more. We had a cleaner house, a more peaceful family, more time and energy to do the things we enjoyed the most, and more money through less consumption. With less stuff to buy or think about, we were able to fill up our lives with all the stuff that created balance in our lives. We weren't consumers of our lives, rather we were producers of our lives. We were creating the life we wanted to live, simply, and with less.

The Benefits of Simple Living

- 1. You let go of burdens.** Whether it's financial, physical, mental, emotional, or even spiritual burdens, when you get rid of unnecessary stuff in your life, you let go of all those burdens. You don't have to carry all that weight on your shoulders anymore and it feels amazing to carry a lighter load.
- 2. You free up necessary space.** With less stuff, you have more space to literally move around and neatly arrange the stuff that you do have. You create more head space to concentrate on things that matter to you, whether it's relationships with friends and family, work, school, or any goals that you may have. You now have the time and energy to focus on what's most important in your life.
- 3. You start enjoying life.** Because your life has been readjusted around living with less, you become grateful for what you have. You have a healthy body and mind, good relationships with your family and friends, and you have the capacity to be of service to others. You're happier now because you're living a fuller life, one of abundance, rather than scarcity. So you are more willing to share your time, energy, and resources with others.

How to Get Rid of 80% of Your Stuff

It sounds difficult, but it can be done, and should be done. Start small and work your way up to more significant things.

Start small. Try starting with your sock drawer. How many pairs of socks are in there—20, 30, 50? And how many have you actually used in the past year? If you haven't used a pair in the past year, immediately get rid of that pair. You don't need it and aren't likely to use it in the future. Then work on the rest. Which pairs do you actually use on a weekly basis? If you have 50 pairs of socks, make it a goal to get rid of 80% of those socks, which would be 40 pairs. That would still leave you with 10 pairs of socks. Ten pairs is more than enough to get you through at least a week or two until your next wash. Divide up your remaining socks into three piles. One pile for selling, one for giving away to family or friends, and one for donating to charity. Repeat the process for your other things including t-shirts, shorts, pants, skirts, shoes, belts, and everything else. And once you're done with your clothes, move on to your books, bags, electronics, etc. The goal is to get the stuff you own down to 20% because honestly, that's all you really need.

Sell it all. Electronics sell well on eBay. Furniture sells well on Craigslist. For clothing and toys, try searching for some Facebook Groups to see if there are any second-hand marketplaces. My wife found a really niche group called “Bay Area Mothers Second-Hand Goods Discussion Group,” and practically sold everything we owned through this group. There were 2,500 members who were female, spoke Mandarin, and we’re willing to come and pick up anything they bought. Best part about it was that there was no bargaining allowed.

Another option to sell clothing and toys is to do it the old-fashioned way with a garage sale on the weekend. Advertise it in your local newspaper, posts lots of signs around your area on garage sale day, and be ready to sell everything at a steep discount.

Donate the rest. Everything that you didn’t sell can be donated. Take it all to your local Goodwill, Salvation Army, or Saver’s. It’s better to have other people use your stuff than having it sit in your garage or storage forever. Plus, you get a tax deduction for your charitable donation.

Let go of the big stuff too. Sell your family's extra car. Downsize from your big car to a smaller, more energy-efficient car. How do you do this? These are a few options:

1. Tell your circle of friends in-person or via social media that you're selling your car. See if there are any takers.
2. If none of your friends are interested in buying your car, list your car on Craigslist. Price it right and you'll get plenty of people interested in buying your car.
3. If none of the above methods work, take your car to a dealership and have them make you an offer for your car. It'll be lower than what you can get selling it privately, but at least you'll be able to sell it.

How to Set a Monthly Consumption Budget

Once you've whittled your belongings down to 20% of what you had before, you need to make every effort to keep it that way. It's easy to get back in the swing of things by buying back all the things that you think you need. How do you avoid an overconsumption relapse?

Set monthly consumption budgets. If you want to go cold turkey, don't buy any new clothes for a whole year. If you can't do that, set a consumption goal, such as not spending more than \$100 per month on new clothes. Or set a goal to never buy a new book again by only borrowing books from the library. Take an inventory of everything in your pantry. Perhaps you can set a goal to eat everything in your pantry before going to Costco or Sam's Club to buy more things.

Mint is a good online resource to help you set monthly budgets for different categories. You can set budgets for travel, dining, shopping, gas, etc. If you need help tracking your spending by category, Mint would be a good place to start.

The only way you'll control your consumption is by setting parameters around how you'll consume. Set goals and stick to them.

How to Help Others Live Simply

Perhaps the most empowering thing you can do for yourself and others is to help a friend to learn to live with less. By realizing the positive change of living simply, you can teach others how to adopt this lifestyle as well.

Ever walk into a friend's house and immediately upon entry, you feel completely overwhelmed by the amount of stuff in your friend's house? Toys are spread everywhere on the floor, there's a bookshelf lined with hundreds of books, there are a few dozen wine glasses in the kitchen cabinets, and the TV stand has a Playstation, DVD player, DVR, Apple TV, and about five remote controls. Please help this person. Free this person from the burden of all this stuff. Follow a similar process that you used for yourself. Start small and work your way up. Help your friend release the burden of all this stuff and give them the freedom to live the life he/she was meant to live.

Be an ambassador for living simply because it's the only way to live meaningfully.

Conclusion

“Wealth is the ability to fully experience life.”

~Henry David Thoreau

Living a simpler life is a step-by-step process. It won't be easy at first, but once you takes steps to simplifying your life, you will start making forward progress and gaining momentum. The changes you'll make in your life will create habits that will allow you to live a healthier, happier, and more fulfilling life.

So get rid of the excess in your life, live simply, and make room for all the good stuff to come in.

Final Note

Thanks for reading!

If you've found this little book useful, please forward it on to family members, friends, and/or colleagues. Living a simple life is a process and takes consistent effort, so any support you can get along the way will help you sustain your effort.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at livefamilytravel@gmail.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

~Cliff Hsia