

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light gray lines radiating from a central point behind the text.

Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**[®]
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 77: Minimalism with a Family to Decrease
Stress and Clutter with Joshua Becker

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast.

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And now, onto the episode.

Welcome to the Healthy Moms podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com. Today, I'm here with Joshua Becker who is an awesome guy. He is a blogger and he has a really important message, which is why I wanted to talk to him today. So he was introduced to the concept of minimalism about eight years ago when talking to his neighbor, and since then, he has become a voice for this movement in the world and he's inspired millions of people to simplify their lives but to become richer in the process, and he has a ton of awards related to his blog and his work. He was named by "Success Magazine" as one of the top 10 personal development websites in 2015. He's been in the "Wall Street Journal," "The USA Today" and he also has an amazing blog called, *Becoming Minimalist*.

He's the founder of The Hope Effect which is an awesome non-profit organization that is changing how the world cares for orphans and it has such an important purpose. So, Joshua, thank you so much for being here. I'm so excited to talk today.

Joshua: Well, the pleasure is entirely mine. Thank you for the invitation, Katie.

Katie: Of course. And I think that you are such an important voice in this movement and I think that especially for moms, you're going to be able to offer a lot of hope and clarity today, because you're known for the minimalism lifestyle, of course, and you have a motto to own less, live more. So can you talk first a little bit about your own journey and what inspired you to make that jump yourself?

Joshua: Yeah. I'll start with the story, which I guess was eight and a half years ago, now. Prior to this conversation with my neighbor that you briefly mentioned, I was, I don't know, pretty typical middle-class American suburban lifestyle, number of pay increases over the years which seemed to lead to just a bigger house filled with more and more stuff. Everything changed eight years ago on a Saturday morning. My wife and I were spring cleaning the house. I had offered to clean out the garage. It was going to be this nice spring day. My son, Salem, was five years old at the time, and I think in the back of my mind I pictured this magical day, me and my son cleaning out the garage, right? Because that's gonna work out.

We go out to the garage and start just pulling everything out into the driveway. My son lasts, I don't know,

about 30 seconds and wants to be in the backyard playing rather than working. He runs to the backyard. I'm working on the garage. One thing leads to another. Hours later, I'm still working on my garage, just cleaning it out, trying to organize and clean it out after the winter. My neighbor, her name is June, she's about 80 years old. She's been doing the yard work in her house right next door to us, and I think she was kind of watching this scenario take place on my side of the hedge where my son was running up every 20 or 30 minutes asking if I was done, and I just kept pushing him off and pushing him off.

At one point, I strike up a conversation with her, a little bit complaining about all the work that I had to do that day and she complaining about the work that she had to do in her yard, and she made this really life-changing sentence. She said to me, you know, that's why my daughter is a minimalist. She keeps telling me I don't need to own all this stuff. And I remember looking over my driveway with this pile of dirty, dusty things I've been taking care of all morning piled up, knowing full well that my possessions weren't making me happy, of course. But out of the corner of my eye in the backyard, I noticed my son swinging alone on the swing set, and suddenly had this realization that everything I owned wasn't making me happy but even worse, everything I owned was actually taking me away from the very thing that did bring me happiness, and purpose, and fulfillment in life. And that was the moment where I think I finally realized that the burden that our physical possessions become in our life, and all that might be gained and benefited from deciding to live with a smaller amount of things rather than constantly accumulating more and more.

Katie: That's a really cool story. So since that day, was it an overnight process that you started getting rid of things or how long did that actually becoming minimalist take, to use your blog name?

Joshua: Yeah, sure. Yeah. There is probably a short-term and a long-term answer to that. I started that night, getting rid of things. I actually started in my car of all places. I pulled my car out of the driveway and I pulled it in that evening and I just remember looking around my car and seeing all these things, maybe I was a little more hypersensitive to physical possessions than ever before. And I just noticed, I don't know: old maps, and sunglasses, and CDs, and ketchup packets, and happy meal toys, then books, and like just a whole bunch of stuff in my car that didn't need to be there. And so it all started that night. I just grabbed a bag and I took everything out of my car that didn't need to be there. I think I left like the owner's manual, and, you know, the license, and maybe a pair of sunglasses and got rid of everything else.

But the whole process of going through our home and removing, we probably got rid of 60-70% of our things, eventually. I would say that was a process where it took about nine or ten months of going through our home. A couple years later, we ended up moving into a smaller house and even got rid of...even purged some more things during then. So, certainly there was a short term where I got started right away, but a long-term answer of what it actually looked like in my life and how long it took to actually get there.

Katie: Gotcha. And so, now, would you say it's just like a natural everyday part of your life where you're able to maintain that without really any work at this point?

Joshua: It's interesting. It is the life that I want. We've just discovered so many benefits to it and so it's something that I certainly always want to be true of me. The reality is that we live in a very consumer-driven world, and so things seem to constantly always kind of creep into our homes. So there is, I think kind of a constant vigilance. It's not like every day I'm going to the house and purging things but it feels like every three to four months, especially with kids, right? The things just seem to accumulate and so, okay, let's...like what do we have around here that we don't need to have and let's make the, you know, the decision to not keep those things around.

Katie: That's really interesting that you said that and I'm curious what the criteria is for, if something stays or if it goes. I'm sure you're very...you know, the life-changing magic of tidying up which has gotten extremely popular lately, and I read it and definitely felt like some of the parts, I don't think she was a mom, I don't think it was geared towards families but I also personally didn't just relate to the idea, which was very Japanese, but the idea of does this bring you joy and talking to you clothes. I just couldn't never quite get in that mode. So what

are your criteria to decide if something fits in the lifestyle or not?

Joshua: Yeah. It's actually a very interesting...and, you know, does it spark joy? You know, I think it's her specific words and we find it a lot on t-shirts, and coffee mugs, and stuff now, which is interesting. But I would say that my criteria or my thinking is a little less happiness-based and more purpose-based, if that makes sense. And so, what I would say is what is your purpose in life? What do you want to accomplish in life? What do you want to fulfill? Who do you want to be? What do you want to do? And then, you know, whether you have those specific answers or not before you begin the process, I think that the idea of possession should be, "What do I need to own in order to become what I want to be?" And then, what is everything I've accumulated that's just kind of distracting me from it?

And so, for example, in my life at the time, I was a pastor, I was working at a church. And I remember reading about some of these people online and they got down to like two cups and two plates, and, you know, they moved into, you know, really tiny homes. And I looked at my life and I said, "Look, I want to be involved in my community. I want to be involved in my neighborhood." We had two or three different small groups that were meeting in our house during the week. We enjoyed having people over. I was doing some premarital counseling. We loved having, you know, the guy and the girl over before the wedding just for dinner. We liked being hospitable in that way. We felt that, that was something that was important to us and a value to us. And so we began to say, you know, what kind of things do I need to keep in my house, or even what kind of house do I need to have in order to be that type of person, right?

I probably need more than two plates and need more than two cups. I probably need, you know, an area in my home where we can sit, and we can talk, and we can meet. So those are things that I wanted to hold on to. It was all the other stuff, the extra televisions, all the clothes that had accumulated in our closet, all the stuff and the tools in the kitchen that we've gathered. Like all those things were actually getting in the way of the things that we actually wanted to do and be with our lives. So that's kind of how I changed the question a little bit. Not necessarily does it bring me happiness or does it spark joy, but does it help me fulfill my purpose? And if it does, that's ultimately where we're going to find happiness and joy.

Katie: I like that. I think that really, that can apply to anybody. And, definitely, it seems much more to me, something much more doable, and also because I think some people hear the word minimalist and they get a picture of like a white room with just a single bed in it, and like maybe a nice armour where all the clothes are but nothing on top of it, and like this very sparse view. But if you're obviously entertaining and have people over, you probably even have like family pictures, or, you know, things that do fit with your lifestyle and that you love to look at and then inspire you, but that you've gotten rid of the things that don't. I think that's an amazing kind of litmus test for that.

Joshua: It's a far more rational approach to minimalism, I think. And I didn't actually coin that term but when I started writing, I started that website, *Becoming Minimalist*, just as an online journal more than anything else, and I was writing about what we were getting rid of and what we were keeping. And, you know, there were people living with less than 100 things and people doing all these challenges. I'm like I was never drawn to that sparse of a lifestyle. But as I was writing about it, someone else had written on their blog, they actually coined the term for me, and they just had a link over to my website and it said, "I really like this guy's approach to minimalism. It seems so rational."

And I said, "That is a perfect phrase for what I'm talking about." That it's thoughtful and it's intentional. The goal isn't to own the fewest amount of things as possible. The goal is to be thoughtful and intentional about the way we're living and what we want to be. You know, a minimalist writer like myself is going to own something very different than a minimalist farmer is going to own, or a minimalist teacher, or a minimalist mechanic, or a minimalist artist, right? We're all going to own different things, we're all going to need different tools to live the life that we want to live.

Katie: Yeah. Such a good point. And I think that's what my hang-up was with the whole idea of, "does it spark

joy?" Is, as a mom, I could hold up most things in my house especially things that are like necessary for children, like diapers, and they don't spark joy, but they're necessary. And if I threw away all the diapers and wipes and baby clothes, I would have trouble. And if I threw away the laundry instead of doing it, I would have trouble. So, I think your approach is much more rational. It makes so much sense. And, you know, there is something appealing about the idea like I've seen those people too who have gotten rid of almost everything. I follow a blog from someone who travels, and all of his possessions fit in one carry-on. And even locally, a friend of mine, recently just...they sold their house, they have five children and they bought a trailer, and they're going to be traveling the country pulling everything they own behind them in a trailer.

So, of course, they had to really, like you, figure out what was actually necessary. And I think there's something beautiful about that but even for those of us who are just living in a normal lifestyle in a normal home, we can still learn from those principles, and I think that's so awesome.

Joshua: I think that those stories have always been very inspirational to me and helpful for me to say, "Okay, gosh, if this family of seven can, you know, live out of an RV, if this guy can live, you know, and travel with everything in his carry-on, then I probably don't need nearly as much stuff as I think I need in my house." And just because I'm not going to move out of my neighborhood doesn't mean that I still can't learn a lot from those people, and how they're living, and what they're teaching me.

Katie: Absolutely. And I think the question maybe a lot of listeners have in their head at this point is, what about with kids, because that almost seems a little bit in conflict. Like can you actually be a minimalist with children because there is some amount of things that are required when they're especially young, and then, of course, children want to have toys. So how do you guys navigate that in your home?

Joshua: Sure. And yeah, we should probably spend a little time here because there is a lot of conversation to be had about this. But let me begin by saying children make minimalism more difficult, for sure, but in my opinion, children make minimalism even more important. This was how I was introduced to it, right? It was the idea that, "Hey, I'm spending time taking care of stuff, I'm too busy managing my stuff to be spending time parenting my child." And so that was the trigger for me. And I think that when, you know, as we're raising children or even in, you know, a committed relationship of some sort, I think there needs to be, "Hey, am I making space for what's most important and what my greatest responsibilities are in life?" Certainly kids make it more difficult.

There are certain things that the kids need, you're balancing different personalities, and so there's a lot of factors that go into it and we can talk specifics. But I would just begin by saying, you know, kids don't make minimalism impossible. I think that kids make minimalism even more important in our life. I mean, just the fact that they're watching us, right? I mean, they're watching what are we chasing with our lives, and what are we pursuing, and what are we leaving them for.

Katie: Yeah, for sure. So how does it play out in your home? Do your children, I would guess they still have some toys or they have things that they love and play with, how does it work for you guys?

Joshua: Sure. So I have two kids. My son, Salem, is 14 and my daughter, Alexa, is 10. When we began the process, my son was five, and interestingly enough, my son has always been pretty minimalist. He's been pretty easy. When we got to the point of decluttering the toy room and getting into his stuff, which, by the way, we didn't do first, we did last. But when we got into the part of decluttering his toy room, it was pretty funny because he was like getting rid of all sorts of stuff, and we were kind of pushing back like, are you sure you want to get rid of that? We spent, you know, a lot of money on this and we were almost asking him to keep some things at the time. But he's always been pretty happy with a soccer ball, and a video game system, and a bicycle, and his friends. Like that's about all he needs.

My daughter is now 10 and she has always been the exact opposite. She's been the collector. She's been the one who wants more clothes, and wants more toys, and wants more dolls, wants to keep all the artwork that

she creates, wants to, you know, keep everything and collect rocks and sticks, and just about anything that you can collect. And so, so she's the one where we've had to learn, you know, compromise, and boundaries, and how are we going to make this work in our home. And I'll say this just as one practical thing that we've done that we have found to be very applicable to almost every area of physical possessions in her life or with our son. I've always been a big like physical boundary guy. Like I find that to be very helpful with children.

And so, toys, for example, we'll say, "So Alexa, you can keep as many toys as you want as long as they fit in your closet. You can have whatever you want, you can make the decisions but once they...once your toy collection no longer fits in your closet, begins to spill out into the floor, then, you know, there is a time come and where we're going to ask you to go through it and get rid of the things that you don't play with anymore." And that can look very different, right? When we first did it with my son, it was a wall in the toy room. We were like, "You can have as many toys as you want that fit against this wall." And then empower them to make the decisions about what they're going to keep and what they're going to get rid of. But we found that worked for her.

For her artwork, "You can keep as much artwork as you want that fits in this plastic bin that we put under your bed. You can keep as many clothes as you want that fit in the drawers. You can keep the, you know, the collections as long as they fit in this bottom drawer." We found that to be pretty helpful in a variety of different ways.

Katie: That's a really cool tip and that's very tangible for kids. They can see the boundaries. That teaches them boundaries but in a way that's not depriving them either. That's an awesome compromise.

Joshua: Like that's an important principle for kids to learn, that life is always about boundaries, right? We have limited money, we have limited time, we have limited space, we have limited energy, and helping them learn that you can't have everything, you can't buy everything, you can't keep everything, you can't spend your time doing everything. You have to make those decisions, and I fear that it's kids who don't learn boundaries that become adults who haven't learned how to set them and ultimately get themselves in all sorts of unfortunate troubles.

Katie: I agree a hundred percent and I think that's a beautiful way that you guys do it, that you're providing the boundaries but you're not being very like a dictator about what goes in those boxes. You're giving them choices but in a healthy way where they can learn that within, like you said, boundaries. And I think also the beauty of that is if you're a child, you actually, even without any toys, you have so much in the world to explore. I know as a kid, we spent hours and hours and hours outside in our yard playing in the creek and there were no toys needed. We didn't bring anything inside from that, but it was one of the fondest memories of my childhood. And I think a lot of the modern generation has lost some of that because they have so many things, so many distractions. So maybe have you seen that in your children as well, that by removing the focus on just the stuff that they tend to have better relationships, and they want to be outside, and they want to explore the world more?

Joshua: Yeah. Let me tell you two different stories related to that. There was a couple German psychologists and I forget when the study was done. I've been quoting it for a number of years. But they did a pretty interesting study where they went into two different pre-schools, and in one pre-school, they took away every single toy. And in the other pre-school, they left the toys, and then they just kind of observed. And it was interesting because they said after...certainly the kids were in shock and it took a, you know, a one or two-day period of adjustment for the children when they took away all their toys, they said. But it didn't take long for children with the no toys to become more creative. They began to explore more, they began to cooperate more, they started to use their imagination a little bit more.

And when you think about it, right? Like that's what you're saying. And that's not even much of a stretch for us to imagine that, that would be the case, that the kids will learn to become, you know, more self-motivated and, you know, take initiative. And even, you know, I think even become more generous with the toys they do have,

and learn to share, and learn to cooperate a little bit more. But beyond that, there is, I think, even a sense of contentment that our kids can learn by having fewer toys. I was talking to a friend of mine years ago over lunch and he was kind of lamenting his son, situation a little bit, and he said, "Joshua, I don't know what it is but it seems like my son is never happy and he's never content."

He says he's got a room full of toys, he's got a drawer full of video games, him and his sister share an entire...another room full of toys, and yet whenever there's something new on television, whenever we're at the store, whenever his friends get something new, he's always begging me and asking me to get whatever the newest and latest toy is. He said it's completely opposite of the way I was. He said, "I grew pretty poor. We had three toys growing up. Like between me and my three brothers, we had like three things. And I don't ever remember begging my parents for more stuff." And I said, "I don't know if you're asking for parenting advice or not, but I've got some thoughts."

And my thought was that when my friend was young, he was forced to learn contentment, right? He was forced to learn that what we have is what we have, we're not getting more, and so we have to learn to find happiness in this place. I said, "Your son has never been forced to do that. Your son, whenever he thinks he's going to find happiness in the next toy or the next thing that you buy him, you do it. And so he thinks he's going to find happiness and contentment there but it never satisfies and so he's always looking for the next toy and the next thing." And so, I think the lessons that we're teaching our children about, you can be happy with what you have already. You don't need more. You do have enough. You can't find contentment there, that that's an important lesson that our kids need to be learning from us.

Katie: I agree. And that's why I was so excited to talk to you and I've been reading your blog actually, quite a bit lately because we've tried to be as minimal as possible with our kids and have definitely not done the best job over the years. And especially with gifts that come from relatives and things that they even save their own money and buy, and I love your physical boundaries suggestion for that reason. And that story you've just told, my husband says all the time, he's like, "When I was a kid, I don't ever remember saying I was bored, or like wanting to hang out by my parents, or like needing entertainment." He's like, "We wanted to be outside in the tree house, in the tree, in the mud, wherever, all day long and our mom had to like threaten us with our lives to come inside and get ready for bed."

And I think that's an amazing point is teaching the contentment at a young age, and society definitely does not naturally kind of guide us in that direction. So I think it does take being a lot more intentional with kids. And how you said it is more important with kids. I love that point as well.

Joshua: Yeah. I think we think that we're doing them a favor by buying them a whole bunch of stuff when maybe we're actually doing them a disservice by it.

Katie: Yeah. So I know one thing that we struggle with and I know from talking to friends, a lot of families have this trouble as well, is, how do you do this? How do you balance it with the holidays and especially with relatives outside the family, because we have relatives especially whose love language is gift giving and who love to give gifts, and who also get offended if those gifts disappear? So how does your family navigate that, and do you put boundaries in place with extended family as well? And also, what is your gift strategy with your own kids?

Joshua: Sure. Let me, even before talking about gifts, let me just make mention that even within a committed relationship, even within a marriage, you know, a husband and wife might be very different about this, and it's actually, probably the most common question that I get. You know, "What am I going to do about my wife? She'll never be on board." Or, "What am I going to do with my husband?" Sometimes, it's from the same couple. Wife complains about the husband and the husband complains about the wife. This will quickly lead into, you know, how do we handle, you know, gift giving, and relatives, and that sort of stuff. I think that, you know, when we're talking about a husband or wife or, you know, any committed relationship being on different sides of this issue, to remember patience and love, and to remember that maybe this is something that you're

feeling drawn to but your partner may not be feeling drawn to it at this time.

So, you know, what changes can you make in your own life without putting that expectation on your significant other as a important thought process to be having. And then, it gets even more complicated, I think, when you extend to relatives, right? Can I expect my mom and my dad to understand everything that's going on in my life and the decision that I'm making? It's probably unreasonable for them...for me to assume they're going to understand everything the first Christmas, or the first birthday, or sometimes even the second Christmas, or the second birthday. You know, my mom knew what we were doing, and was, I think reading the blog about all the stuff that we were getting rid of, but I don't think she cared that much that first Christmas and just got, you know, whatever she was going to get for the kids and for us and, you know, whatever. It is what it is, and that's how she wants to express love. And by the second Christmas, we're able to say, "Hey, look, we're really serious about this." Like we don't want a whole bunch of stuff, we don't want a whole bunch of junk in our home. And I don't know if she made any changes the second or the third. You know, eventually, I think the fourth or fifth year, it started dawning on her that we actually mean what we're saying.

But when it comes to, you know, the language of...the love language of gift giving, I've always said I don't want to rob my parents of the ability to give my kids gifts. I want them to continue doing that. That doesn't mean it has to be the same types of gifts that they would have given in the past. And so, I always say, I say quality over quantity, needs over wants, and experiences over possessions, and then provide a gift list whenever possible.

I would much rather them give one nice \$60 gift than ten \$6 plastic toys. I would much rather that they give something that my kids need, whether it be a new hobby that they're getting into, a new sport that they're getting into, a new interest that they have, helping them understand that, that, hey, this would be really helpful for my son. He's really getting into soccer and he really likes this pair of shoes, or, you know, would really like this piece of equipment, or, this would be helpful for him to practice, helping them understand that gifts don't always have to be physical things. You know, a zoo membership might be more valuable to our family than another Barbie doll house, or something like that. So those are some of the ideas and the principles that I've tried to extend to my relatives, and sometimes they follow it and sometimes they don't.

Katie: That's a really cool perspective I think. And we actually have a post called, "46 ways to give experiences instead of things this year," and we've tried that as well. And, like you said, it's been a multi-year process, and I don't want to minimize because I know there are families where this actually creates a lot of struggle with relatives giving way too many gifts and not respecting boundaries at all. But I found, at least for us, that's been really helpful as to kind of just explain that focus slowly and repetitively, that we prefer experiences whenever possible. And you...there is really great ways you can do that as well. Like you can wrap up a zoo membership with like some snacks that will go to the zoo with you. Or like there can be a physical component that gets consumed or that's part of that that doesn't just become clutter.

And a tip I'll give from our perspective that was a big thing for us this year, there's a website called Udemy, which I'll link to in the show notes that has courses for pretty much anything imaginable. And our kids have been wanting to learn new skills and we were having trouble finding, for instance, a harmonica teacher where we live. So we bought our daughter the harmonica course and a little harmonica, which actually my mom had from when I was a kid. So it was a hand-me-down harmonica, but that's an experience. And it's something she's learning and she loves, but it's very low clutter and she's loving that experience. And also, like I've been trying to learn with her a little bit. So it's kind of a bonding thing as well.

And I think when you remove this stuff, you actually open the door for so many other fun moments like that which you talk so much about on your blog, like all the benefits that have come to your family from removing the stuff and focusing on the people and the time instead.

Joshua: I think that your...that, that post you wrote is so important, and people should go find it if they haven't seen it all already. Because that...I just kind of mentioned in passing but I shouldn't have, like that gift list idea

is so important, especially around the holidays and getting it to them well in advance, right? Saying, "Hey, these are some things that we would love for you to give us this year." Because when you just say experiences over things, you know, some people understand what you mean but not everyone, and not everyone is creative enough to think, you know, let's wrap up some snacks to go with them to the zoo. But providing those ideas for people is so good. Like you mentioned, and it shouldn't be minimized but most people don't want to burden you with the gifts that they're giving, right? Most people want to give gifts that are going to benefit you and make you happier. It's just that we're, you know, in this world where we're told the newest toy is what's going to make us happy, and if people haven't really thought if that's actually accomplishing that or not, they just tend to fall into the trap that so many people do.

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And now, back to the episode.

Katie: Another thing I think that, honestly, if I had to choose for someone as a starting point, I would probably pick it, you may have a different view but you have an amazing article called "A Helpful Guide to Becoming Unbusy." And I think that is the part of minimalism that anybody, no matter what walk of life or what their job is, they can all learn from this, because I know so many people and I'm guilty of it too, when someone asks how you are, they say, "Oh my gosh! So busy," or "so stressed," or "so, whatever". And as much as we clutter our lives with stuff, I think in today's world, we clutter our time even more. And so talk about that. How have you applied minimalism to your schedule as well?

Joshua: So I think minimalism is intent...is ultimately about intentionality. As we began removing things from our home, I don't know, like three or four minivan loads of things, I remember taking to local charities and dropping off at any number of different places. And I, you know, by about the third minivan load full of stuff that I'm taking to drop off, like I was confronted with some pretty difficult questions starting with, why in the world do I have three minivan loads full of things in my house that don't need to be there? Like, why do I buy all this stuff that I don't actually need anyway? And when you start kind of asking that question and running down that road, first of all, I don't think we usually like what we find in our hearts necessarily.

You know, some things about jealousy and greed that probably popped up while going through this self-reflection process. But one of the, kind of the reoccurring themes was, I was just so unintentional with my life. I was just so unintentional with my money. Best Buy was having a sale on this item this week so I decided to buy it, whether it truly benefited me or not. And so, we found greater intentionality in the things that we owned, in the things that we were ultimately buying later, the way that we were spending our money.

And then that idea of intentionality couldn't help but start seeping into other areas of our lives. And so, rather than just saying, you know, "Do I really need to own this? Is this item helping me fulfill my purpose?" You start looking at your calendar and you start saying, "Okay, is this appointment, is this commitment, is this really helping me accomplish what I want to accomplish? Is this thing making me a better parent? Is this making me better at the work that I'm doing? Is this making me a better spouse? Is this making me a better friend?" And if it's not, then how did it get there and how can I get rid of it as soon as possible? And some of those, I think some of those trappings that trap us into accumulating more than we need, right, kind of the pursuit of money, the pursuit of things, the pursuit of impressing other people. You know, the pursuit of just societal expectations, right? Some of those things that lead us to buy more than we need often lead us to living busier lives than we need to as well. And so, I forget all the specifics on that post that you site, but that's kind of the trajectory of thought, is to how minimalism and possessions ultimately led us to minimalism in our schedule and rethinking if, you know, the value of busy as opposed to the value of focus.

Katie: That makes sense. So do you with your children provide kind of how you do the physical boundaries with their possessions? Do you kind of give guidance as far as for them not taking on too many activities? And I know you said your son loves soccer, so I'm assuming he probably plays soccer but he probably doesn't also have like nine other activities that he's trying to do at the same time?

Joshua: You know, there are busy seasons, I think. He actually stopped playing soccer this year but played soccer for many years leading up to it. And so, he was passionate about soccer. He loves band, and so he's involved in that. But I've never put any external pressure on him to say, "Hey you, you need to be involved in this, and you need to be involved in this, and you need to be involved in that." It's more like, "Hey, you need to be involved somewhere," right? There should be some skill, something that you're pursuing with your life, but, you know, school is very important so let's make sure you have time to focus on what's most important in your life as well as complementing it. And so, for us, it's probably a...probably kind of a general feeling of, you know, does he have time to focus on what's most important?

The same with my daughter, right? Is there time and is there space in her calendar to be doing what she needs to be doing right now, or if we feel that it's so full of things that she's not, you know, growing in any of them. And so there aren't any necessarily hard and fast rules, I think that we have, but it's more of an intentional evaluation of what our kids are involved in, what we're asking them to do, what they want to do, and finding a balance between them.

Katie: Gotcha. That's awesome. And so I would guess a lot of the people listening are probably a lot like me and especially like I was when I first considered this concept of minimalism, and in full disclosure, we are definitely not anywhere as far down this journey as you are but it's something we're striving toward. But if moms are listening and especially families, and this just seemed overwhelming. I know you said that you started slow. Can you give a little bit of guidance on, for just a family who's starting from scratch and this is a totally new concept? Where do they start and how do they do this without adding more overwhelm?

Joshua: By the way, that's who I would want to be talking to anyway. You know, I always say if you own 100 things and you're trying to get down to 50 things that you own, I'm probably not the guy to talk to. I much prefer to talk to someone who's never considered the idea of minimalism and introduce them to it, introduce to them the idea of having, you know, more time, and more money, and more energy, and less stress, and all the benefits that owning less provides to us. As far someone who's just starting out, yeah, I always kind of draw inspiration from my journey. I started out decluttering my car, which, in many ways, was as easy a place to start as anywhere else. I decluttered my car, it was a Saturday night. The following morning, and, literally, I just took everything out as I said.

The following morning, I got in my car to drive to work actually, and my car felt so different than it did the day before. It felt so nice to not have all that clutter around me. It's like air was able to move in my vehicle. And it's like I was able to focus on my day rather than, you know, the book that was rolling around in the back seat. And I said, "I want this to be true elsewhere in my life." And so, we went to the living room, and there was a magazine rack with magazines that no one was reading. There was old DVDs piled up by the television. There were these different decorations that we had gotten, because either they were on clearance at Michaels. They matched the couch but they didn't really mean anything to us. There was a bunch of toys that had collected in the living room as opposed to where they were supposed to be.

And so, I just got rid of everything in the living room that didn't need to be there. And the next day, I sat down in my living room I said, "This feels so good. I want this elsewhere." And so we went, you know, to the bedroom, and the closet, and the bathroom, and just kind of moved from easiest to hardest in our home. And so my advice for anyone starting out is, start in the easiest most lived in area of your home. Start in a place where you can find some quick wins, where you can accomplish getting rid of the clutter even if you're just moving it into a different room for the moment, and then notice how that makes you feel and how you'd want that to be true in other places. And eventually you get to the, you know, the sentimental stuff, and the books, and the, you know, the yarn stash, right? Like the things that are going to be pretty difficult decision-wise.

So that's my advice to people. For moms, for dads, for parents of any sort, never start with your kid's stuff. Like that's unfair. It's unfair to make your kids declutter all their things until you've done your own. So start in your own closet, start in your own bedroom, start in your own kitchen. As you do that, your kids are going to notice what you're doing, they're going to ask questions. You can explain it to them. You're going understand what emotions come up, what question is asked, what solutions are helpful, by the time you get to their stuff eventually down the road.

Katie: So you mentioned sentimental stuff. How did you guys handle that? I feel like that, especially for moms, would be the hardest kind of hurdle toward the end to get over would be, you know, the baby clothes that your children wore, or the like thousands of artworks they drew for you when they were little. How did you guys navigate that?

Joshua: Sure. So, like I mentioned, don't start there. You know, you don't have to start there. By the time we got to sentimental things, we were so convinced that owning less was better, that we were able to begin applying that principle even to sentimental things. And I should mention that less is different than none, right? So it was never, "Hey, get rid of every childhood memory," you know, "get rid of every piece of artwork that our child has ever done, get rid of every piece of clothing that they wore, get rid of every, you know, thing left over from our wedding." It was, what are the most important things from that period of our life? The kind of the classic story I tell is of my wife who her grandmother had died years before, and when her grandmother died, she was very close to her. She had gone through the apartment, and everyone had gone through the apartment and grabbed some different things just to remember her. And my wife came home with two cardboard boxes full of stuff, that eventually, you know, probably went into the basement.

When we began minimizing and eventually got to the basement, we got to those two cardboard boxes, and we realized that all these things she had gotten to remember her grandmother had just been boxed up in the

basement for years and we hadn't even looked at any of them. And she said, "This is...like, this is foolish that I would do that." And so, she went through the two boxes and she grabbed just three items that reminded her most of her grandmother.

She grabbed her grandmother's candy dish that was always in her living room when she went over, and now it's in our living room and it has candy in it for when guests come over. She grabbed kind of a pin that her grandmother had on her coat whenever she saw her, and she grabbed the pin and now it's on her coat. She wears the same one. And then her grandmother's Bible, she grabbed and put that in her nightstand. And in owning fewer things, we actually brought greater value to them. And now her grandmother plays a more prominent part in our home and in our lives because we decided to own fewer sentimental things rather than more. So, I think it's kind of a, I don't know, like a museum mentality more than anything else. You know, what makes a museum great isn't that every piece of artwork ever created is hanging on the walls, but what makes a museum great is that someone went through the boxes of things and pulled out the things that were most representative of the artists or the period of our life.

And I think that same mentality can be given to our sentimental things regardless of our personality. And realizing, if we just hold on to a few of the best items, they probably mean more than boxes and boxes of stuff that never get looked at.

Katie: I love that and it's interesting because we've lost several family members, grandparents, in the last couple of years. And thinking about it, I actually only have one thing that I kept that I remember my grandmother by, but I love it because I see it all the time and it really does remind me of her. And as a practical tip, maybe two, that what we've kind of tried to do to simplify, because as a mom, I do want to make sure I remember those things and like those memories are super important to me. So every year at Christmas, we make photo books for our kids that we use Shutterfly. They're very small, and they're only about like half an inch thick, so they can fit like all of the volumes from their entire childhood will fit in a very small section of a shelf. But I chronicle the most important memories in there.

And also, like any artwork that they did that year that was beautiful, I'll take a picture of and it ends up in the book so that they can remember it, I can remember it. It's backed up in the cloud on Shutterfly, but it's not in our house. And those are the most fun because we'll spend time before bedtime like reading the baby books from when they were little, and they don't remember some of that but they get to see themselves with those grandparents who are now not with us. And those are special ways to remember the memories without all the clutter that comes with it. So maybe that will be helpful to other families as well.

Something you've said twice now that I think I just really want to highlight is about being the example with, you know, do it yourself before you ask your kids to do this, and with the extended family, like let them see the positive benefits from you before you really like push it at the holidays and don't expect them to take on this journey just because you have. And I think that in so many aspects of life, we could all learn from. Even in health which is what I write about a lot, if maybe one spouse has this health change and wants to change their lifestyle, it almost never works to force it on the other spouse, but if you make that change and you are healthier and you're happier, they're going to be curious anyway and it's a lot more gentle way to introduce this.

So I love that you kind of took the same approach with encouraging people with minimalism is to do it yourself first and see the positive effects, and be the example before you ever push it on anyone. I love that.

Joshua: And that doesn't happen overnight. Well, I mean, it could happen overnight but usually, it doesn't. I was speaking at an event in Dallas one time and, you know, I got the question, "Hey, how am I going to convince my wife about this?" And I was answering the question, and I had a lady in the front row raise her hand and then she said, "Can I share my story?" And I'm like, "I guess. You're in the front row." And she said, "For five years, I have wanted my husband to become more minimalist, and for five years, I've just led by example. I've done what I could with my personal things, and, you know, I've kind of framed it in ways that he

would understand and in ways that would have been drawn to him but he wanted nothing to do with it."

She said, "But just last week, for the first time, he said to me, 'Hey, you know this minimalism thing that you're into, I think it's finally...I think I'm starting to see the point of it.'" And I only mentioned that to say, you know, sometimes we say, "I want to lead by example," but we expect that to make the change three months down the road or six months down the road, but sometimes it takes three years. Sometimes it takes five years. Sometimes it takes ten years. We don't ever know for sure when we're talking about our spouses in that way or even when we're talking about our children. You know, the desire to not be over consumers, and the idea of not, you know, wasting your life chasing material possessions is something that I want to pass on to my children. But I don't know for sure what they're going to do when they're 19, or 20, or 21. Maybe they understand it and they apply the principles to their life, or maybe they entirely reject it and they go chasing, you know, the bigger houses, and the nicer cars, and that's what they decide that they're going to spend their life doing.

I don't know for sure, but what I do know is that they've always got the example that they can come back to, right? Like maybe when they're 34 or 35, they finally understand and say, "Yeah, you know what? Buying all this stuff isn't making me any happier. Maybe my parents were on to something way back then." Which I, you know, in all walks of life and in any value that we want to pass on, eating healthy or, you know, not being too, you know, consumeristic or being just as minded, or being kind, or faith. You know, anything that we want to pass onto our children, ultimately what we do is we provide the best example we can and we hope for the best. And we know that they can always come back to the foundation that we laid for them when they were young.

Katie: So beautiful. And I'll make sure to link to you the articles that we've talked about on your site and also to your book and to your Facebook page so people can find more from you. But real quick, just tell everyone where to find you in case they want to start this journey themselves.

Joshua: becomingminimalist.com is the website. Everything seems to flow through there. There's two books if people are really interested. Probably the most comprehensive book that I've written on the topic of owning less is called "The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own." I think that's a pretty all-encompassing view of what we've been talking about here. There is another book called, "Clutterfree with Kids" which has 10 pretty specific chapters about, how to deal with toys, and clothes, and artwork, and there's a chapter on scheduling in there. So if you're a parent looking for specific tips on there, on those areas, "Clutterfree with Kids" might be a good route just as terms of...most of the stuff you find on the website somewhere, but the books just provide a, you know, a concise, orderly way to find all that.

Katie: Wonderful. And I'll make sure to link to those as well. Thank you so much. You are amazing and so inspirational and I hope that this has really been helpful to a lot of people. I know it has and it's always such a pleasure to talk to you.

Joshua: Well, thank you so much, again. I enjoy talking to you. Thanks for all the good you're bringing into the world and how you serve people so well.

Katie: Thanks Joshua. And thanks to all of you for listening, and I'll see you next time on the Healthy Moms podcast.

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