

## 8 Key Lessons for Living a Simple Life

For the last dozen years, I've been living a (relatively) simple life. At times, the complexity of my life grows, and I renew my commitment to living simply.

Living a simple life is about paring back, so that you have space to breathe. It's about doing with less, because you realize that having more and doing more doesn't lead to happiness. It's about finding joys in the simple things, and being content with solitude, quiet, contemplation and savoring the moment.

I've learned some key lessons for living a simple life, and I thought I'd share a few with you.

1. **We create our own struggles.** All the stress, all the frustrations and disappointments, all the busyness and rushing ... we create these with attachments in our heads. By letting go, we can relax and live more simply.
2. **Become mindful of attachments that lead to clutter and complexity.** For example, if you are attached to sentimental items, you won't be able to let go of clutter. If you are attached to living a certain way, you will not be able to let go of a lot of stuff. If you are attached to doing a lot of activities and messaging everyone, your life will be complex.
3. **Distraction, busyness and constant switching are mental habits.** We don't need any of these habits, but they build up over the years because they comfort us. We can live more simply by letting go of these mental habits. What would life be like without constant switching, distraction and busyness?
4. **Single-task by putting your life in full-screen mode.** Imagine that everything you do — a work task, answering an email or message, washing a dish, reading an article — goes into full-screen mode, so that you don't do or look at anything else. You just inhabit that task fully, and are fully present as you do it. What would your life be like? In my experience, it's much less stressful when you work and live this way. Things get your full attention, and you do them much better. And you can even savor them.
5. **Create space between things.** Add padding to everything. Do half of what you imagine you can do. We tend to cram as much as possible into our days. And this becomes stressful, because we always underestimate how long things will take, and we forget about maintenance tasks like putting on clothes and brushing teeth and preparing meals. We never feel like we have enough time because we try to do too much. But what would it be like if we did less? What would it be like if we padded how long things took, so that we have the space to actually do them well, with full attention? What would it be like if we took a few minutes' pause between tasks, to savor the accomplishment of the last task, to savor the space between things, to savor being

alive?

6. **Find joy in a few simple things.** For me, those include writing, reading/learning, walking and doing other active things, eating simple food, meditating, spending quality time with people I care about. Most of that doesn't cost anything or require any possessions (especially if you use the library for books!). I'm not saying I have zero possessions, nor that I only do these few things. But to the extent that I remember the simple things I love doing, my life suddenly becomes simpler. When I remember, I can let go of everything else my mind has fixated on, and just find the simple joy of doing simple activities.
7. **Get clear about what you want, and say no to more things.** We are rarely very clear on what we want. When we see someone post a photo of something cool, we might all of a sudden get fixed on doing that too, and suddenly the course of our lives veer off in a new direction. Same thing if we read about something cool, or watch a video of a new destination or hobby. When someone invites us to something cool, we instantly want to say yes, because our minds love saying yes to everything, to all the shiny new toys. What if we became crystal clear on what we wanted in life? If we knew what we wanted to create, how we wanted to live ... we could say yes to these things, and no to everything else. Saying no to more things would simplify our lives.
8. **Practice doing nothing, exquisitely.** How often do we actually do nothing? OK, technically we're always "doing something," but you know what I mean — just sit there and do nothing. No need to plan, no need to read, no need to watch something, no need to do a chore or eat while you do nothing. Just don't do anything. Don't accomplish anything, don't take care of anything. What happens is you will start to notice your brain's habit of wanting to get something done — it will almost *itch* to do something. This exposes our mental habits, which is a good thing. However, keep doing nothing. Just sit for awhile, resisting the urge to do something. After some practice, you can get good at doing nothing. And this leads to the mental habit of contentment, gratitude without complaining.

Of course, these are not the only lessons you'll need for living a simple life. But the best ones are the ones you discover yourself. Try these and see what happens — I think you'll find out something beautiful about yourself, and about life.

The best kind of simplicity is that which exposes the raw beauty, joy and heartbreak of life as it is.