1-Page Summary 1-Page Book Summary of Minimalism

Minimalism: Live a Meaningful Life, by Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, recounts how the authors found happiness and a meaningful life after rejecting the “American dream” of wealth and success, and instead embracing minimalism.

Based on their experiences, they offer a formula for living a meaningful life by eliminating extraneous possessions and entanglements, and instead focusing on living by a specific set of personal values.

Minimalism is a tool to eliminate clutter in your life and focus on essentials.

The Authors’ Path to Minimalism

Both men, who were boyhood friends, achieved success by conventional standards in their twenties — they worked 70-hour weeks and were star salesmen for their company, winning praise, awards, and promotions. But they didn't feel fulfilled and so, following the dictates of consumer culture, they sought happiness by buying things — big houses, fancy cars, clothes, furniture, and the latest electronics. This left them feeling just as empty and depressed as before, with the added burden of a mountain of debt.

They knew something had to change, and undertook an intense re-examination of their lives. They systematically examined their lives to figure out why they were unhappy, and what needed to change.

First, they identified dozens of “anchors” — things or situations that made them feel stuck. Next, they prioritized by categorizing their anchors as major or minor. Major anchors were mortgages, certain relationships, car payments, major debts, and their careers. Minor anchors included cable and internet bills, smaller debts, and unneeded possessions.

They got rid of as many anchors as possible, starting with their debts, which ran into the six-figure range. They cut spending on trips, expensive dinners, and vacations, and traded in their expensive cars and houses for cheaper ones. They also sorted through and sold unneeded possessions. They used the savings to pay off their debts over two years.

After clearing the clutter in their lives, they focused on “Five Values” that they determined were necessary for a meaningful life: health, relationships, passions, growth, and contributing to others.

Five Values to Focus On

The rest of the book explores why these five areas are key, and recounts how the authors transformed their lives over time by making small daily improvements in each of these areas.

Based on their experiences, they recommend:

- **Health**: Eat a healthy diet (avoid processed foods and sugar), and exercise daily (choose exercises you enjoy so you’ll stick with them). To enjoy life, you need to maintain your best possible level of health (levels will vary among individuals).
- **Relationships**: Inventory your relationships — get rid of unproductive relationships and focus on the most important ones going forward.
- **Passions**: Reject your career identity and status, and...

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Here’s a preview of the rest of Shortform’s Minimalism summary:

Minimalism Summary Introduction

Minimalism: Live a Meaningful Life by Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus offers a formula for how to live a meaningful life, based on their personal journey.

The coauthors achieved success by conventional standards in their twenties — corporate success, money, and possessions. They
expected this to make them happy but it didn't.

They realized that they and many others pursuing the so-called American dream were deeply unhappy. They were exhausted from overwork and heavily in debt. Their lives felt empty and unfulfilled. This book and a website, TheMinimalists.com, grew out of their determination to understand why they were unhappy, what it would take to be happy, and how to change.

They discovered a lifestyle — minimalism — that enabled them to:

- Reject consumer culture and society's definition of success.
- Systematically re-examine and reflect on their lives.
- Inventory their possessions and emotional lives, and get rid of the things making them unhappy or holding them back.
- After ridding themselves of clutter, focus on "Five Values" that they determined were essential for a meaningful life: health, relationships, passions, growth, and contributing to others.

This book, along with several others they've written, and their website are intended to help you similarly examine your life, so you can reshape it to be more meaningful and be...

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Minimalism Summary Chapter 1: Striving (Unsuccessfully) for Happiness

Society tells us that working hard, climbing the corporate ladder, acquiring material things like a big house and fancy car, and taking expensive vacations is the American dream, and will make you happy.

Co-authors Joshua and Ryan achieved those things. In 2009, they both worked for a telecommunications corporation and attained the career successes and lavish lifestyle that many aspire to.

But they weren't happy, fulfilled, or content — in fact, they felt empty and depressed. Together they examined their lives (they were longtime friends) to determine what was missing and how to achieve happiness and meaning.

Seeds of Discontent

Their problems didn't develop overnight but started with unhappy childhoods.

Joshua and Ryan, who knew each other as kids, both grew up in dysfunctional households. Their parents divorced, and their mothers suffered substance abuse issues.

At age 12, they were both overweight, unhappy misfits. They tried un成功地 to escape through the instant gratification of overeating but it made things worse.

As they talked and compared their lives to others’, they concluded that poverty was the reason for their unhappiness — therefore they'd be happy if they made money as adults (they set a goal of a $50,000 annual salary) and could afford whatever material things they wanted.

Ryan's Story

Ryan eventually moved in with his father, who had a stable job as the owner of a wallpaper company. Ryan's father was a devout Jehovah's Witness who genuinely cared for his son, but the change was too big and unsettling for Ryan and he rebelled, using alcohol and drugs.

After graduating from high school, Ryan joined his father's company. He made enough money to meet his basic needs, but not enough to afford the luxuries he thought he needed to be happy. So he searched for contentment in other ways.

He sought happiness through his father's religion. He married and became a devout Jehovah's Witness. He and his wife bought a house and planned to start a family, but the couple didn't get along and the marriage ended badly. Ryan turned...

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Shortform Exercise: Anchors Away

Your anchors are things or conditions that make you feel stuck or trapped, and stand in the way of your happiness and freedom. They may include debts, problem relationships, a job you dislike, negative habits, or things that waste too much of your time.

What are two or three major anchors in your life? (These are things that make you feel the most stressed, unhappy, and stuck.)

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Minimalism Summary Chapter 2: Health

Health is the first of the Five Values because living a healthy lifestyle puts you in the best position to enjoy and improve your life.

Few people have perfect health. Health is a continuum, and each of us falls in a different place. It's not constructive to compare our health with others'. To be happy, we must be as healthy as we can be, given our circumstances.

For example, Joshua broke his back while playing basketball in school. The injury limits his flexibility, but he still strives to be as healthy as he can be given his constraints. There are many examples of people living meaningful lives with diseases, disabilities, and other problems — because they live as healthfully as they can based on their individual situations.

When we talk about health we're not talking about competing with others, building impressive muscles, or bragging about our stats. Those are destinations. But health isn't a destination, it's a vehicle to take us where we want to go.

To enjoy life, we need to take care of the vehicle we have, which may include getting rid of harmful habits, getting regular exercise and check-ups, maintaining a good diet, getting adequate sleep, and reducing stress through daily meditation.

Although some people adopt diets and exercise in order to look better, the point of improving your health is to feel better — if you feel better, you'll enjoy every other aspect of your life more. Of course, when you start living a healthier lifestyle you start looking better, which is a bonus but, again, not the main objective.

The keys to a healthy life are eating and exercising — controlling what we put into our bodies, and what we do with them. While this sounds simplistic, these are the two things that affect our health the most, yet people often ignore them.

What You Put into Your Body

The term "diet" is typically used to mean a temporary change in what you eat to achieve a specific weight-loss goal. A temporary diet almost always fails when you resume your pre-diet behavior.

However, this book uses the term diet to...

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Shortform Exercise: A Step Toward Health

Striving to be as healthy as you can be given your unique circumstances puts you in the best position to enjoy life. Yet many people neglect their health.
Minimalism Summary Chapter 3: Relationships

Relationships are the second of the Five Values because without successful relationships (someone to share your life with), you can’t live a meaningful life.

Your relationships are the people around you with whom you have frequent contact: spouses, lovers, friends, roommates, coworkers, acquaintances, and anyone else you interact with regularly.

Extroverts need the love and attention of many relationships, while introverts seek fewer relationships. People have different needs and preferences but we all need at least some personal relationships. And we have to tend them or they won’t thrive.

There are three ways to have stronger relationships:

1. Seek out valuable new relationships
2. Improve your current relationships
3. Change yourself

Examining your personal relationships, past and present, is the first step.

Past Relationships

You can learn from past relationships, good or bad, and apply the lessons to improve current and future relationships.

Often we obsess over past relationships, particularly those that went wrong. However this doesn’t get you anywhere. Living in the past is like trying to use your rearview mirror to drive — you won’t see where you’re going and you’ll crash.

Fortunately, however, past problematic relationships aren’t necessarily indicative of future relationships. You can create better new relationships by analyzing (not obsessing over) past relationships.

The good times can tell you what worked and give you a strategy for the future, while bad times tell you what went wrong, and suggest how to avoid the same problems in the future.

Current Relationships

Next, consider your current relationships. Overall, do they make you happy? Are your relationships positive, supportive, and helpful?

Here’s an exercise to help you answer these questions, and evaluate your current relationships. Make a list of every relationship — include every person with whom you interact regularly — in which you’re currently involved. Add two more columns and fill it them in as follows:

- Name: Put names...

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Shortform Exercise: Building Relationships

You need successful relationships in order to have a meaningful life. Your primary or most important relationships should get most of your attention — you need to nourish them so they grow. But people often spend less time on these relationships than on peripheral relationships such as coworkers, neighbors, community members, and acquaintances.

What are the two most important relationships in your life? How much time do you devote to them per week, compared to your peripheral relationships?
Minimalism Summary Chapter 4: Passions

You won't feel fulfilled if your life lacks passion. This is often the root cause of the empty feeling many people experience. But there are things that get in the way of discovering and pursuing your passions — starting with your work.

Work vs. Passions

How do you characterize your work? Typically people call it a job, career, or mission. A job is a daily grind, while a mission is something you feel passionate about. A career can be either or both.

Work that's a daily grind impedes your happiness and ability to live a meaningful life.

If you're like most people, you have a job you aren't passionate about. We're taught from an early age that that's the nature of work; it's about simply making a living, which we have a responsibility to do.

We're taught to work hard in high school and college, doing stuff we don't care about, so we'll find a “good job” with reliable pay and benefits, so we can go into debt purchasing a house, car, consumer goods, etc. This process is touted as the American dream.

We're to keep our nose to the grindstone, so one day we can retire and enjoy our lives for a few years before dying (the average lifespan of a retiree is often only three years after retirement). For 40 years or so, we trade our most precious commodity (our time) for a paycheck.

It's true that we all need money to live — for shelter, food, clothing, medical care, etc. But beyond that, attaining the American dream won't make you happy. For many, pursuing it saps joy and meaning from life.

The Truth About A Career

Many people expect a career to be more fulfilling than a job. They believe it's the ticket to a meaningful life.

However, having a career often sidetracks you from that goal. The reason is that people invest in their careers to the point of assuming an identity and social status based on their job title.

Our cultural norms aid and abet this tendency. One of the first things people ask when getting acquainted is, “What do you do?” This seems innocuous, but the implied question is, “What do you do for a living?” — and...

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Shortform Exercise: You May Not Be Your Career

Many people invest themselves in their careers to the point of assuming an identity and social status based on their job title. When their career ends, they lack a sense of purpose.

How do you define yourself, or what is your identity?

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Shortform Exercise: Pursuing Your Passion

You won’t feel fulfilled if your life lacks passion. However, many things can keep you from discovering and pursuing your passions, including work and other daily priorities.

What passion do you have that you have regrets about not pursuing?

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Shortform Exercise: Gaining Financial Freedom

Money problems can strain relationships, tie you to a job that you dislike, and keep you from pursuing your passions. But money concerns can be eliminated by taking five steps: creating a written monthly budget, eliminating debt, investing in your future, minimizing possessions, and contributing to others.

What is the biggest money concern impacting your life, and what would you do differently if you didn’t have this worry?

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Minimalism Summary Chapter 5: Growth

The last two of the five values — growth and contributing to others — work hand in hand to create the meaning in our lives: We need to grow as individuals and to contribute to improve others’ lives.

Growth is an ongoing process. You’re not finished after you make a change in your life. You have to keep making changes in order to grow.

The way to make changes is either by taking a leap, or taking baby steps.

Some changes are huge and immediate: ending a relationship, quitting your job on the spot, moving to a new city, buying a home or a car. There’s only one way to make them: Take the leap.

However the most important changes are baby steps that allow you to eventually take the leaps.

How to Change

1) Make small changes daily

You can make small, gradual changes in your daily life that add up to huge changes over time.
Most changes build on past changes propelling you forward every day. It's like exercising — you build your strength and fitness little by little by exercising consistently over time.

Each change improves on the previous change.

Most of the changes Joshua and Ryan made — in health, jobs, relationships — started as incremental changes. Such changes may not seem like much at the time, but when you look back you can see how much you've changed in total.

2) Create leverage for change

Making the decision to change is easier if you give yourself leverage, or a convincing rationale for changing.

You have leverage when you feel the benefits of changing are so great that you have no choice but to change — or when you're so dissatisfied with the status quo that you must change. You can also use a combination of benefits and dissatisfaction as leverage.

The more leverage you have the easier it is to change something.

If a change doesn't last, it's because you didn't see enough long-term benefit from the change to stick with it. Or you weren't unhappy enough with your current conditions to change.

Joshua and Ryan wanted to make dietary and exercise changes. Their leverage was their dissatisfaction...

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Minimalism Summary Chapter 6: Contributing to Others

Personal growth feels great but reaching outward to contribute to others also is necessary for a balanced life.

Humans have a built-in need to contribute beyond themselves. Moreover, the more you help others grow, the more you grow in turn.

People often decide to write a check to charity because they don't have time to volunteer for an activity. But the personal contact and satisfaction you receive from doing a hands-on task are more rewarding than writing a check.

There are unlimited ways to contribute. Whatever way you choose to contribute is fine — all contributions have value.

Joshua and Ryan contribute locally through hands-on projects with Habitat for Humanity, soup kitchens, and charitable organizations. They've also used their website to raise money for development projects around the world.

Whatever you choose, you'll feel a level of satisfaction you don't experience in other areas of your life.

Here are some tips for getting started:

- Visit the website volunteermatch.org to see which organizations are looking for help.
- Explore different organizations until you find the one that's right for you.
- Serve in a variety of ways, so you don't get bored and lose motivation.
- Start your own thing. Some people come up with their own unique means of contributing. Joshua and Ryan created their website to share what they'd learned about life. However, if you're thinking of starting your own thing, it's useful to spend time volunteering for local organizations first to learn how you can best help.

Besides volunteering for a particular...

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Minimalism Summary Chapter 7: Tying It All Together

While contributing to others in whatever way you choose is a positive experience overall, all positive experiences aren't the same. There are two types:
Positive experiences you enjoy. For some this may include playing a sport, spending time with a friend, helping a child ride a bike, opening a door for someone, etc. They are the most effortless and rewarding experiences.

Positive experiences you dislike. They include things that are good for you but take more effort — for instance, exercising daily, eating vegetables, or taking on new challenges.

Often the reason people don't participate in a charitable activity is that they identify it as something they dislike or that requires effort, even though it's positive.

You have to fight the tendency to avoid these experiences if you are committed to finding lasting satisfaction.

The Key to Living Meaningfully

Positive experiences you dislike are the key to living a meaningful life. You need to find ways to transform the positive experiences you dislike into positive experiences you enjoy in order to change your life long term.

This strategy can be applied to every area of your life. Here are some examples of how to add enjoyment:

- **Health:** It's not easy to exercise the first thing each morning. So focus on the fact that it will give you momentum and energy for the day ahead, which will serve you better than skipping it and getting an extra half hour of sleep.
- **Relationship:** An engaged conversation with your partner or close friend may be difficult if you're tired; just watching TV is easier. But it becomes enjoyable when you focus on the satisfaction of addressing the other person's needs and strengthening your relationship.
- **Passion:** Working on your passion takes effort, compared to just going out with friends, but you can make the work enjoyable by singing, listening to music, or just appreciating the quiet time away from your phone.
- **Growth:** It's easier to keep doing the same things instead of new exercises, meeting new people, or...

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