TRANSCRIPT

Sonja van Rossen & Lexy Bourne, *Hosts*

Episode 13: "Interview with Sal Huckel on A Lifestyle of Simplicity and Minimalism"

Sal Huckel is a pastor's wife and mum of 6 children from Melbourne, Victoria. She is a UK qualified Corporate & Commercial solicitor (currently non-practising). She's been married to her husband Matthew for 23 years and they have home educated their children for the past 15 years. Sal is passionate about God's Word, discipleship, and loves to write devotions and Bible studies. Sal and her family have embraced minimalism and enjoy the freedom it brings to focus on what's important to the family.

Tuesday, 14th November, 2023

Lexy: In today's episode, we are chatting with Sal Huckel. Sal is a pastor's wife in Melbourne and she is also the mother of six children, of whom four are still being homeschooled. Sal, welcome to our podcast and thank you for actually being willing to

come on here and talk about yourself and to talk a bit about minimalism.
Sal: Thanks so much, it's good to be here!

Lexy: And of course, I'm also joined by Sonja.

Sonja: Hello, nice to be here also, and it's nice to chat with you again, Sal. It's been a while.

Sal: I know, it's great to talk to you today Sonja, thanks so much.

Sonja: Yes! So we would love to start off with hearing a little bit about you and your story, your family. So: where are you currently based and what do you do? Who's in your family? Tell us a bit about yourself.

Sal: Yes, sure! We relatively recently (in the past year) moved to Melbourne, so that's where I live with my husband Matthew and we have six children and they range from just turned 10 to nearly 21 now. Matthew is the pastor at Moorabbin-Dandenong Lutheran Church, which is where we're currently called. So he's originally from Adelaide and as you can tell, I'm not Australian. Well, I actually am, but I don't sound it! I'm from Coventry in the UK. We met in Norwich where I lived when he was traveling in his early twenties and then we moved with our family back to Australia and that was actually 15 years ago this week, so we had a bit of an anniversary and a memory lane journey this week. I don't actually work outside the house these days, although I don't rule it out. I originally qualified and worked as a corporate lawyer in the UK where I grew up Anglican. But when I was twelve I began to explore other churches with friends from school. I went to a Church of England school and had a lot of friends who were Baptist or Pentecostal. My family didn't continue going to church, so I've had to find and explore my own relationship with God through those school friendships and actually, in particular, the very rich and privileged experience I had as a member of the Blue Coat School Choir. With them I sang countless evensongs, services and concerts in many places like Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's, Wells Cathedral, York Minster, lots of places. So although I didn't have a strong background in Scripture or doctrine like my husband did, it's amazed me ever since, as we've explored what the discipleship of our children would look like, just how much of the Bible I actually knew from all of those anthems, psalms and liturgical prayers. So I really actually very much treasure that period of my life, and I consider myself to have been very privileged to have that. So I didn't grow up Lutheran, and I didn't actually become Lutheran until we came to Australia. And actually, it was through the baptisms of our third and fourth children that we came back as a family into the Lutheran church. There are Lutherans in England, but we didn't know any of them, or they were hard to find or whatever - we didn't think there were. My husband, Matthew, was raised and catechized in the Lutheran church, and of course, eventually he was called to ministry. So that's where we find ourselves now. So that's kind of 'how we got to here'.

Sonja: So you started your family back in England?

Sal: Yes, we had three boys that were born there. When we moved to Australia Ben was five and Zachary was under the age of two. And then obviously, we've had our three daughters since then.

Sonja: And you're quite a musical family, then.

Sal: We are, yes. And actually, as I think about minimalism and those kind of things, or what our family values are, music is a really really big part of our life, as is, of course, as you mentioned, education. So they're two things that really come into play as we think about how we run our lives and what we want in our space.

Sonja: So we have decided to chat about something a little bit different today. We are really curious about one of your passions, which is minimalism. What exactly is minimalism?

Sal: That is a great question, because the truth is you're going to find many different takes on minimalism. So there are a number of key authors and bloggers in that space, and there are a couple I really liked as I researched how to deal with our own overwhelm and own less, because this is for us, where it came from. So for our family, when we describe ourselves as minimalist or it's a value or whatever, we simply mean: owning less, being intentional with our time, our possessions, and our money. And as I was thinking about this and thinking about the definition, I actually came across quite a fun definition from someone called Joshua Fields Milburn (he's one of 'The Minimalists') and when he was explaining his newfound happiness to his friend Ryan. Their latest documentary is really worth watching: that's called The Minimalists: Less is Now. But what he said was, "minimalism is 'the thing that gets us past the things' so we can make room for life's most important things, which aren't 'things' at all". I love that. I thought it was a really helpful description because as we remember what is the most important in our lives as Christians: it's our relationship with God and the outworkings of that. And I actually want to contrast this idea with something. I don't know if you've even heard of this, it's called "Swedish death cleaning". Have you heard of that? The Swedish author, I think it's Margarita Magnussen, she explains that the idea is to declutter your life before you die, to release the burden from your loved ones you leave behind. But you see, for most, if not all, of the minimalist writers I've benefited from looking at, this just seems to be the opposite. Because what we want, is we want to live our lives now, not spend our life now preparing for death in that way. So I don't find that 'life giving' or compatible with our Christian walk. So I really want to distance myself from anything that's like that. And I think for us, minimalism as a tool rather than a goal is something that we use as a tool in our faith journey and just in our everyday life. I also think it's probably a continuous project as needs change in our family as the children grow older. It's not really an aesthetic. We're not aiming for a particular look or style, except our own style that we found works for us. So minimalism may conjure up pictures of stark, white, designer spaces in people's minds, but for us, it's making room in our home for what's important to us. And whilst having a light, open feel in our home is important, it doesn't mean that everything is white and perfect.

Lexy: So for you, it's practicality over aesthetics.

Sal: Yes. I mean, it's nice to look around your house and appreciate what you see, or not be bogged down by visual clutter or noise in that way. Actually, for me, that's really important for my mental health. So when we change our homes in terms of having less

things around us, it is going to look different. But that's only one of the things.

Sonja: So what inspired you to become minimalist?

Sal: Yes, well, actually, I can trace it back in our values a long time before it began to actually really play out in our home, but in the end it was necessity. So when my husband was called to ministry, we had five children and we were expecting our 6th baby and we were just living in a standard four bedroom home with a couple of living spaces and the garage. But then we moved into the student accommodation on campus at Australian Lutheran College, which was great for us because that maximised our family time and it allowed our finances to go as far as possible. And actually, finances is something I do want to touch on. But it did mean that as a family of seven, soon to be eight, with all of the gear you need, or you think you need for small children - we lost a spare room, we lost a garage, we had very little outdoor space and we had no storage. So what we had to do was we had to make our life work in a much smaller house. And it didn't really. The house was quite dark and we felt very hemmed in with our possessions. And then I had a light bulb moment where I realised that we couldn't make the house any bigger, we could make ourselves smaller. And I love that thought, as it's kind of what you don't expect a large family to say, but the space that we took up didn't need to be as large as it was. So we began decluttering and we made some efforts ourselves. And then, actually, we did pay a professional organiser I knew in Adelaide to come and give us some ideas for how we could organise our space better and make the house work, because it didn't work. We just felt we were continually fighting the house rather than living our lives. And by that point, we already knew that our children and other people's, when they came to visit, responded better when the space that we were in was calm and clear and there weren't toys and clutter everywhere, but it was very hard to create those conditions after we moved. So the plan that we had for our house was that we would reduce our possessions and actually even reduce our storage, organise our things better. And because that house was dark, I also realised that anything we acquired needed to be white or light to reflect the light that there was in the house as much as possible. And so we've actually found having a lighter space really helps. And furniture can make a house or a space feel dark and small. So that's where aesthetics does come in a little bit. And we also knew that we would be going into ministry and moving around, so we wanted our furniture to be very movable for rooms and purpose. So we've moved actually twice since then and it's been a great benefit.

Sonja: So you've touched on it a little bit, but what does minimalism look like in your family?

Sal: Yes, so for us, it's a home that suits the way we want to live our life and works with it and not against it. So we were always fighting the house, figuratively speaking. And I've been thinking recently about our main family values as a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces all need to fit together, and some of these values can compete with each other, and in particular, they can work against minimalism or vice versa. And I think we're pretty happy with the picture they assemble for us. So our family values include faith and discipleship (and for us, of course, that includes home education and a large dose of music making), mission, living out the Great Commission, hospitality and having a life giving home is

really important to us. As part of those things, I suppose food and healthy eating. Stewardship is a big one as well and that does involve also being a 'budget geek' with a side of frugality and generosity. So I'm not actually sure whether I describe minimalism as a value in itself; rather a tool that we find helpful as we live out our lives.

So I've mentioned that we want our space to work for us. We like to have a calm home with little visual clutter and a lot of space for living. I mean, as a home educating family, we obviously really value having space for learning, materials to use for that purpose. And of course, we love books. And this is where looking at your values is really important. We're going to need more room for books and educational resources than a family whose children go to school. So our home is more likely to have more of those things. And of course, desks and office space are important. The number of musicians in our home is outnumbered by far by the number of musical instruments we own. And I think it's helpful for us all to remember that we act towards our values. If you look at your bank account, you can see where you're spending your money. That could be intentional, or it might not be - the same with our space. So we've made a decision to use our space intentionally in line with our values, and that's one of the principles that we might say we use. Some people count their possessions or their wardrobe items. We don't. We haven't found that necessary. Although when we reduced our possessions, and we think that we got rid of about a third of our possessions, one thing that really helped us as a guideline was to just have one of most things. So we started with the easiest things and we just continually collected bootfulls of stuff and donated it. We probably could have sold more than we did, but we wanted and needed quick results. So when we had got rid of some things, we were able to then start listing and selling some items of value, some higher, some lower. We knew we were in that house for five years, so there wasn't any point in keeping something that we might need in our next house because it would be taking up 'prime real estate' for five years until then. So we got rid of anything that we were keeping 'just in case' or for 'one day' And I want to say it was important, we had to allow ourselves permission, really, I think it was, to buy again anything that we regretted selling or donating. That was one of the ways that we got over the hurdle of releasing some of the harder things. Actually, there's only one thing that has ever come into that category, and it was just when a friend from the UK visited, brought me a bunch of flowers. And then we realised for some reason we just didn't have a vase. And I didn't know why we didn't have one. It didn't matter. I walked down the street to Salvos, bought one for $2 and it was easily fixed. I might still be short on vases, but most of the time I don't notice. But I was actually saying to Matthew today that he just picked some flowers from the garden on the weekend and brought them into the kitchen and they look really nice. But that's our one vase. But I always think it's a bit of a waste know, you're given an amazing bouquet of flowers and then it's just got to fit somewhere in your messy home. And I always think the flowers are wasted when they're just in this mess, really! I love flowers but I always just feel a bit weird when the house is a mess and then you've got lovely flowers sitting there!

Sonja: Well, yeah, that's true. Don't come into my house right now. I have a mess. And flowers!

Sal: You can come here and judge me if you want!! It's not perfect - I want to make sure I say that! But one thing that we can do is we can pretty much, especially because there's eight of us, we can tidy our house in half an hour if we had half an hour's notice that you wanted to come and take photos of everything for your podcast. We could do it. Might have to call them home from the shops, but there you go.

Sonja: Wow! I am very curious as to how you home educate and a lot of you would spend a lot of time at home and how you manage to have a home school, I guess, while being minimalist, I feel like homeschooling alone there's just so many things!, right?
Sal: Right! I know, there are. And actually, I am in a Facebook group that I help moderate, and it's minimalist homeschoolers. Minimalist Homeschooling, I think that's called. But we do exist! You know, I think this is why it's important to realise that we can make room in our homes for what is important to us. So education is important to us so of course we are going to have spaces that we need to use for educational materials that most people don't need to own. There's a saying, "a homeschooler and their money are easily parted" and we've done it on a shoestring. And I don't buy every single thing that everyone's talking about. Or sometimes I occasionally bought a curriculum that I didn't love. Or I think, "oh, well, that's okay, haven't used it with that child. I'll try again with the next one". And then it didn't work with that one. There's a phonics program that I bought when I first started, and in the end, you know what that program was? It was a 'comfort blanket' for me. It helped me get started, helped me feel good about our decision but I didn't actually ever really teach a kid to read with it. And so I made the really brave decision just to sell it. In that period of time, we were looking at everything. I just thought, "I'm never going to use this. I don't even like it. Two children have taught themselves to read before I even opened it. It's not working with this other child. I'm just going to get rid of it. I don't need to keep it". And so if there's something on the shelf that isn't working for you, that's okay. It'll work for someone else. You may as well get $80 or $100 for it and put that into something else. So I sell curriculum I don't like.

Lexy: I suppose, just changing the topic slightly, that being minimalist also comes with, well, you as a Lutheran and your family as a Christian family, that there is this aspect of trust in God that he will provide for you in the future if you need it.

Sal: Absolutely.
Lexy: And therefore you can get rid of this clutter today because your father will care for you.

Sal: Right, absolutely! And that is absolutely true. And I have never personally found that stockpiling is a thing that God wants for me to do. We've always got what we need, but we haven't often got a surplus. Not food, not money. It just doesn't work. And actually, we'll get on to talking about Bible verses, I'm sure, but keeping stuff: there's a verse about. Hang on, let me find it. In Matthew 6:19 we read, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy. Where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". There have been things that we've kept for a long time. Once we had a flood in our garage and a heap of clothes

that we were storing to hand down to our younger daughter got wet in the garage. And people have stories like that. Maybe we should be releasing those things and letting other people use them or share them and bring them back to us, rather than feeling like we've got to store things up for when we might need it next. And that does also remind me of the early church, where that's what they did. They gave things to people that needed them more than they did. They sold their possessions and shared their money around. We don't have to store everything up to be self-sufficient. And sometimes we might still need that coat, but perhaps we'll meet someone who hasn't got a coat. Perhaps we've got two, and we actually only really need one. So, holding on to our things a little bit lighter, I think. And you're right. You say, "Jehovah Jireh, God our provider". We've always got what we need, and we haven't often got more than we need.

Lexy: Yes, and I did mention this to you in our pre-episode chat that I was not able to be a minimalist until I became Lutheran, simply because my theology was: materials and possessions are a symbol and a sign of God's favour upon you. So the more you had, it was the more favour you had with God. And, yes, it wasn't until I became Lutheran that I was actually able to let go of this stuff, because my theology had changed. I could see that my stuff was actually keeping me from what was most important, which was God and time with my family and serving others and hospitality

Sal: Definitely Yes. So it's not a surprise, is it, that we have similar values. And for us, I do think there's a big part of making room in our life for what we value and also decluttering the things that are getting in the way of the calling that we have on our lives and in the way of our relationship with God. It could be as simple as feeling like we've got to work all of the time and missing out on family time, because we've got to earn money to pay for the things and to pay for the bigger house or to buy the extra car or whatever it is, and taking time away from our family that way. Or it could be getting cross with our children too much because their toys are all over the floor and we haven't figured out a system that enables the house to work better, but we're just cross with the children because they've left a mess. Or it could be resenting the time that we're spending running our home to try and keep an orderly household. Maybe that's a joyful act, hopefully a joyful duty that the Lord has given me in this home to honor him with my time, for my family. But if I resent that because I'm spending all the time cleaning or I don't know how to tidy up, or I'm finding it really, really stressful, then maybe taking away some things actually makes that easier and helps me in my attitude. So I think there are a lot of ways that stuff can also just become more important than God. I think we always have to be looking at idols, that they're not always a golden calf that's really obvious.
Sonja: So how did you go with getting your family on board with this idea of minimalism? Do you find that it's easy for all of you?

Sal: Yes... I think I'm not going to say easy. I'd love to meet someone who finds it easy. But in terms of children, that's an interesting one, because we run their lives. The younger they are, the more decisions we make for them. And we actually felt, with regard to our decision to own less, that our children needed to make their own decisions about their possessions. So a lot of people talk about bagging up toys or boxing them up, and even without telling their children,

getting rid of stuff quietly. It's been important to us not to do that, because those things are all our children own in the world. And you can compare that to the way that adults feel when their possessions are decluttered without permission. I don't know if you know anyone who's ever had that happen to them? It's quite damaging. So let's face it, most of our problems in that house were our own issues. They weren't caused by the children! So we began with the simple stuff. I always think the kitchen is the heart of our home. It's where we make our food, it's where we enjoy food together, if it includes a dining space. And often, for home educators, it's a key learning space. So we began there and we just had the children join us. They helped us declutter our things, and then we would ask them to go and find things that they no longer needed or wanted. So we led by example. We didn't require anything of them that we weren't prepared to do ourselves, or we did it first and we would ask them to help us get rid of our stuff. So sometimes we would use opportunities like that to redistribute ownership, hand an item down to a sibling. Other times they knew they were giving items away to people who needed those things more than them. And I once did a bookcase, right in the early days with my son Jonah. He was great at this. And instead of deciding what to keep, which was the process we'd often used in the past, you look at things and think, “What can I keep?” I told him to look at every book and ask me, “Mummy, why are we keeping this?” So everything we owned literally had to earn its place in our home, as we considered different areas. And I was delighted to get rid of the children's books I hated reading, or I hoped that they would never pick off the shelf. Like, if you've got any books like that that you always hope your child won't bring to you! If there was a strong objection from someone, then we didn't push it. But next time around, when we asked them again, they usually said yes.

And I think something else I want to talk about is gifts, because that's actually my top love language. So that can be a minefield for the discussion around minimalism as people discover it and they want to go all out. They also often say “there's nowt as zealous as a convert”. So we love gift giving, but we love to give things that are meaningful and have a deliberate place in our lives. So when we were in North Adelaide and in that challenging house, we didn't need a lot for our children, but we had a wonderful gift from our family for a few years in a row, which was a joint membership to the zoo. So it was wonderful. It's wonderful to come up with suggestions for what people would love as a gift, rather than suddenly telling everyone, “No gifts!”, which I always find pretty heartbreaking because I still love gifts, but I love meaningful and well placed gifts rather than just anything wrapped up with a pretty bow. And I do often see people discussing this. So I think for the family in our home: that was a good journey that we did together. But I think also you have to consider your wider family and friends, because we have to love people. And you can't just tell people they can't give their grandchildren presents or anything like that. It can be challenging in the wider family. So dealing with that carefully, I think, is really important. And as a family as well, generosity is a value that we jointly have, and we've always considered that everything we have is from the Lord and sort of loaned to us from him. So I call that “God's economy”. So inspired, really, like I mentioned before about the early church and their sharing of wealth and possessions. So if we came across a need and had something that someone else needed more than we did, we would be prepared to

give it away. When we were in the season of babies and toddlers, we would often come across a family who had similar aged children who were struggling in some way. And we made blessing boxes, usually food, and then some gift items, and we always involved the children in that - they might do some pictures to decorate the box and things like that. But a number of times I would ask the boys to go and choose something like ten Hot Wheels cars. It was a great tactic. I basically told them to go and find ten Hot Wheels cars to give away to the children in that family. And then, of course, we were involving them in a number of values at once when we did that, but we were also reducing our possessions. So that was a nice way to involve the children.

Sonja: To someone who feels like they're drowning in toys right now and whose love language is also gift giving, that is very good advice, Thank you! I'm definitely going to be doing some of those things! So I'm sure there's man, but what differences do you see in your life now since becoming minimalist?

Sal: Yes. Okay, well, I have more time. I mentioned before that I have a better attitude towards running the home, which actually is something that I had to completely teach myself right from the start. So I spent a lot of years struggling and in overwhelm. And I think as a family, we find it much easier to stay on top of things, and we have systems of doing things that we've developed over the years to make life easier and keep costs down. I think I find it easier to focus on calling and the Great Commission because there's less in the way. Mostly, I think, because we're much more content, we're more available to other people, and we're more willing to offer hospitality or be generous. So being intentional with our possessions was the first step to something else, which became a real game changer for us. We actually moved on to being much more intentional with our time and our money. Leaving space in our diary and not scheduling every minute. Learning to be more orderly in the physical sense in our home slowed us down, but I think it was so beneficial, it left room for plot twists and emergencies that, of course, have become our life as a ministry family. You'd know that, Sonja as well. And I love how Jesus was interruptible. And if we leave enough margin for ourselves, then we can also be interruptible, either physically with the use of our home, or in our week when things change for the family because of a ministry need. So we've had some amazing encounters, including once we had a day's notice to help a friend who fled to Australia from Iran with her baby daughter and needed somewhere to stay. No one in the family batted an eyelid and we just immediately had room in our home to make that happen. So that was a really lovely thing to be able to do. And we're always a work in progress. Like just in any area of our life, weeds can creep in and start to crowd out the light and threaten the fruit that's growing in our lives. So having an outlook on that from a minimalist perspective is helpful to us. And actually, when I watched the minimalist documentary, I really love this quote from Dave Ramsey (you might know he's a money writer and lots of things) but he said, “having more stuff becomes a spiritual thing because it's in competition with the things that really matter”. Again, you know, our possessions really can get in the way of what we're here for and what we're meant to be doing and who we're meant to be worshipping. That is a continued work in progress all of the time.

Lexy: Yes, I love what you said about how minimalism helps you to be interruptible.

Sal: Yeah, definitely.

Lexy: It's crazy, that's actually something I was praying for very recently because I struggled to be interrupted and, yes, I just prayed, "Lord, please help me to be interrupted".

Sal: Right. And I think you might know I write quite a lot of devotions, and doing those has just shown one thing that's really stood out to me is the number of times Jesus was doing one thing but then was interrupted and then did another thing. So sometimes that was time by himself. So for a start, he left margin. He actually left himself time. He might have had to get up early to go and get it, but he made time for praying to God. But he also allowed himself to be interruptible in those times, or he might be going to one place and then he's interrupted. So he then goes somewhere else. And I always like to sort of think, "Okay, what can I learn from that?" And one of the things is, for a start, leaving time to spend with God, but then also not being so holy that we can't then suddenly use that for what he's calling us to do in that moment. We've had a lot of those moments recently, and as a family, I think we've become much more flexible. And I talked about ministry plot twists. The other week we thought we knew what we were doing: on Saturday night my husband got a phone call from the hospital to say (and it wasn't anyone in our congregation) but basically they needed a pastor for someone who was dying. And actually, unfortunately, he died before my husband was there, but there was pastoral care to be had. And it wasn't a funeral that he was going to conduct or anything like that, but basically he was the only available pastor to go. He dropped everything: he went, the kids and I just ran our night. We just know every now and again something will happen, there's a change of plan. He has to go and do a thing. And so now we go into our other mode, and having a life that gives us space for those things is really important to us. And of course, as well as helping and serving those people, it is teaching our children those things, too. To be interruptible, to give up the night you had planned or whatever.

Sonja: Yes. Every single thing that we as parents do leaves an impression on our children, doesn't it?

Sal: Yes absolutely. And as we walk along the road, as we go about our daily business, talking about those things with our children, that is discipleship and living it with them. And this is why we have never done minimalism to our children. We have been on this journey with them.

Sonja: So you've mentioned one verse. Are there any other Bible verses that talk about living a minimalistic life or that warns against materialism that you can share with us?
Sal: Sure thing. So, look, I mean, there's a lot in the Bible that you can find on this kind of theme. And I also think it's really important not to take Scriptures out of context. And this can often happen with something like minimalism, where people want to put their Christian take on it. I mean, obviously I've mentioned Jesus sending out the Twelve. (Mark 6:8):

'These were his instructions. Take nothing for the journey except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money in your belts, wear sandals, but not an extra shirt.'

We don't often need more than one of everything, but it's a great place to start for us

to only have one thing. And I actually once packed for an overseas emergency trip in under an hour, and I joked to my friends that I threw my five things in a bag and got on the plane. It was more than five, but the bag was the emptiest I've ever taken on an international flight. But one of the things I wanted to talk about was the parable of the rich fool, actually, and I wanted to tell it to you with just a few changes to the wording so that we can relate to it a little more closely because most of us don't have barns of grain!

“Someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Jesus replied, “Man who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you? Then he said to them, watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of stuff. (That's the bit we've changed). And he told them this parable, the ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, what shall I do? I have no place to store all my stuff. Then he said, this is what I'll do. I will sell this house and build a bigger one. And there I will store my extra stuff. And I'll say to myself, you have plenty of stuff laid up for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, you fool, this very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get all the stuff you've accumulated? This is how it will be with whoever stores up stuff for themselves, but is not rich towards God.”

And we don't have barns of grain anymore, but we do have houses full of stuff. And people do have to buy storage to store their things, or they have to buy a bigger house to store more things. And we do need to remember God, our provider and generosity and sharing our possessions and coming back to that ‘Swedish death, cleaning’ - people are wasting their time that they could be spending with their family, getting rid of their stuff so that when they die, their family don't have to get rid of their stuff. That's not life giving.

Sonja: And most people never actually make it to the point where they're happy with how much stuff they have so that they can eat drink and be merry!

Sal: Exactly right. And I think that just finding contentment and knowing that where our treasure is, that's where our heart is. And that's why maybe looking at where we're spending our money, how we're spending our time, what is in your house? Because if you look at that and that doesn't actually reflect what you believe your values to be, then it might be time to make some adjustments. And I think it's really important to remember the Ten Commandments and idolatry and covetousness that we find there. Anything can become a god or an idol if we put it before God. So even something like minimalism or a tidy, clean and organised home can become an idol. Sometimes possessions can get in the way of our relationship with God in subtle ways. They might be taking up too much of our time and simplifying makes room for more time for kingdom business. And we might need to find ourselves letting go of things that we put before God or stop us coming to him. And I also think about Matthew 18:9 “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out”. If your stuff is causing you to sin, maybe it's time to reassess what you're keeping in your home. If we're short tempered with our family, or we're finding it stressful because we've got so many things, then we can make that easier. I also think if you don't feel content, then that's what we need to look at, because we're not going to find that contentment by

accumulating stuff. And we have these messages at us all the time, don't we? Like: “If I look like that, if I look a bit more like that, I'll be happy” or “If my house looks a bit more like that Pinterest board over there, I'll be happier”. I'll be interested to see how some of these, some of the minimalists in the public sphere are Christians and some of them are not. But they all know for a starter that stuff is not meeting their needs and that they have a hole in their lives that they're trying to fill with stuff. And I find that interesting to hear that message from all of them, actually.

Lexy: So just basically rephrasing what you just said, the stuff doesn't give us the satisfaction in our lives that we're looking for. But also minimalism and the clean, open aesthetic homes also don't give us the peace that only God can give.

Sal: No, they may not, but it’s possible that making that space and doing it with God in mind, you know really is going to help us step away from the rat race of trying to accumulate things. Keeping up with the Joneses really is covetousness, isn't it? Wanting our house to be like theirs. They've got that, we need that, their house looks like that, my house needs to look like that.

Sonja: So what encouragement would you give to women (like myself!) who are struggling with busy, messy houses and lives? Sal: I think the first thing to say is, have grace for yourself. It's a busy season and everyone finds it hard. I mean, I'm sure we've all joked, have you ever said anything like this, like we wish we could just throw away the dishes or the laundry instead of washing it and dealing with it all? We can actually make our lives easier by having less of it. And children are messy and noisy and beautiful, and they come with a lot of stuff. Accepting that and making the changes that are doable for us and leaving the things that are not doable right now is perfectly fine. You don't have to get rid of their toys, but they don't have to all be in the living room at the same time. Toys going on rotation is a solution that can help before you've even made any changes, but it can also indicate what they're never playing with or what they don't miss. And then how you then handle that has to be how your family does things. But it can be a starter. I actually loved Fly Lady's advice. I used to follow Fly Lady years ago. I have literally been trying to work out how to run a house for, well, my son Ben is nearly 21, so probably something like 21 years I have been trying to work out how to run a house. But I loved Fly Lady's advice to shine your sink before bed. We don't always have what we call a ‘zero kitchen’ at night, but the days when we do manage it are so much more productive and peaceful. So starting with the kitchen I always love, and reducing the clutter and trying to have clear counters can be a really great place to make a difference that will spur you on to other things. And honestly, children always need to eat, right? So having that organised for ourselves can make our day just feel so much better. But also, when we're thinking about owning less, starting with our own things is a great, and I would say, preferable place. And I think, like I said before, there's a balance between a Pinterest perfect house and complete overwhelm. We don't have to aim for Pinterest perfect. But there's nothing wrong with trying to make life easier, to reduce the overwhelm. I've helped friends before and I've had friends help me. It's easier when it's not your mess, actually. So enlist a friend (I'll come round your house, Sonja!), for help and ideas! But if you do ask a friend for help, choose wisely, because I have seen people loot what they want as they help

others or try and persuade a person to keep something. So what you want to find is the right kind of 'enabler' because there are people that really enable hoarding and you don't want to really ask them for help because they won't let you get rid of anything.

Sonja: Yes, choose someone who's minimalist and doesn't want your stuff!
Sal: Choose someone who's not overwhelmed by your mess and might be overwhelmed by theirs, and you can do their house next week!

Lexy: Well, Sal, thank you so much for coming on and talking about this really important topic. I feel very inspired. And, yes, thank you so much for the encouragement and the advice, but also the beautiful theological conversation that came into it as well that I partially wasn't quite expecting.

Sal: Fantastic.

Lexy: But it was brilliant. So thank you.

Sal: I've really enjoyed it. I've actually really loved thinking about our journey. And like I say, we just moved. I love moving house, by the way, because it is a time where you get to reassess what you're keeping and what you're moving with. And actually, we always find that the people who come around to estimate, you can't do much about it. But twice now, they've overestimated. And we knew they had, and it annoyed us because they were setting up too much time to move that we wanted to be gone with. But they were estimating our house based on the number of rooms rather than opening the cupboards and thinking, "okay, how many boxes do we really need?"

Sonja: They did the opposite to us in Catherine Court, they thought, oh, it's only two rooms. How much stuff can they have?!".

Sal: If there are any boxes there that you haven't yet unpacked?

Sonja: No, I have unpacked them.

Sal: Well done. Because we obviously moved from England at one point, and I think there were some boxes that moved house with us a couple of times until we eventually unpacked them and just realised that we had lived without all of those things for so long, we had to really question whether we needed to keep it any longer. And that's one thing you can do.

Sonja: No, I've definitely thought of a couple of things during this conversation that I will be getting rid of.

Sal: Yeah. Sometimes I just put a box by the front door and say, this is a donations box. Bring you things. And people always find things.