



TiNY TWEAKS, HAPPY LiFE

SIMPLE CHANGES to CREATE
SPACE for WHAT MATTERS

ERIN PORT

 ZONDERVAN®

**Dedicated to Jesus—
my simplest and most
purposeful tweak**

ZONDERVAN

Tiny Tweaks, Happy Life

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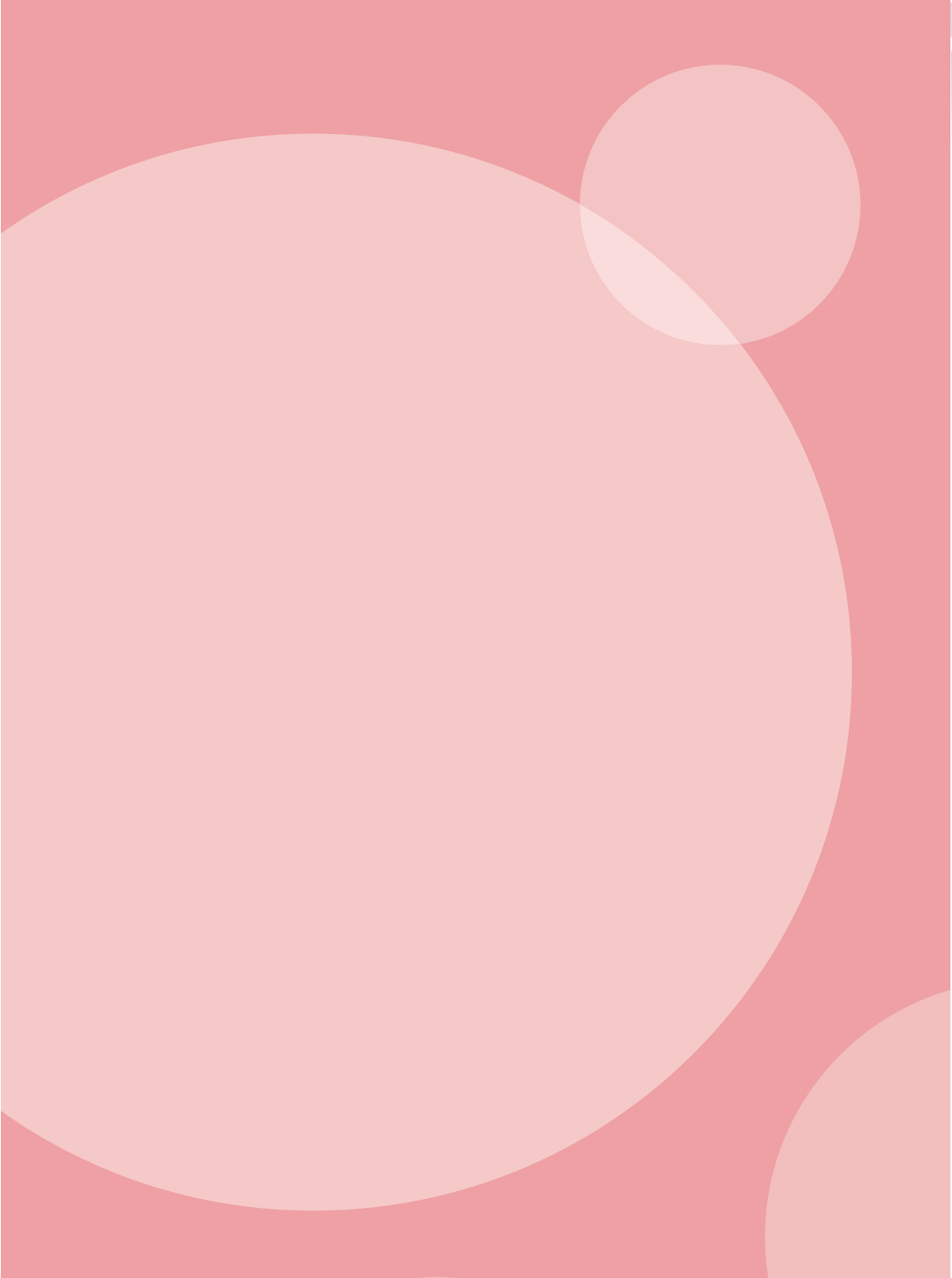
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INTRODUCTION

I ripped open the foil-covered gift with the eager hands of childhood, the anticipation of Christmas morning buzzing around me. I was in middle school, and my grandparents were visiting for the holidays. Inside, I found a stack of personalized notepads with my name printed boldly at the top, the blank pages ready to capture my thoughts. I squealed with delight, throwing my arms around my grandfather in gratitude.

I carefully stored those notepads with my collection of brightly colored Lisa Frank paper goods in my bedroom, determined to use every last page. My grandfather must have noticed how my sister, Ellen, and I would sneak into his home office years before to swipe similar notepads—freebies he kept for his customers. We'd spent a couple of summers living with our grandparents, and those simple pads of paper became a small yet meaningful connection between us. In fact, I would later start my own stationery company, with a few notepads inspired by the ones my grandfather had gifted me.

During those summers, we'd spend hours in their backyard, helping them tend their large garden. It's where my grandfather taught me to drive the rusty John Deere garden tractor, his hands

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gently over mine, guiding us as we mowed the horse pasture. My sister and I would sit together on their screened-in porch, coloring while our grandfather sipped his Diet Coke, one leg casually swung over the other, bouncing to his favorite big band music, his tube socks pulled halfway up to his knees. These moments, while simple, were the building blocks of a life filled with meaning and connection—and they deeply shaped who I would become.

Beyond the coveted notepads I received that Christmas, my grandparents rarely bought us gifts. Instead, they gave us the gifts of their time and presence. When my parents needed them to babysit, they wouldn't just stay home; they'd pack us up in their white Taurus, ready for adventure. When my grandfather's brother died in a military training accident, he stepped in as a surrogate father, paving the way for my dad to play a similar role in my cousins' lives (and planting the seeds in my own heart for adoption). When we were grown with families of our own, we'd spend every Thanksgiving in Florida with them, creating traditions of quality time together: collecting seashells, walking the beach, sharing stories, and laughing over french fries and mai tais. My grandparents gave us a legacy of moments that matter.

Years later, we found ourselves gathered around my grandfather's hospital bed, the antiseptic scent sharp in our noses, with wet tissues in hand as we dabbed at our tears. In his last moments on earth, the steady tone of the heart monitor beeped and whirled in the background, mingling with the familiar big band music we'd turned on—the same tunes we'd listened to as kids on the screened-in porch, now playing softly as we reminisced about all the happy, joyful moments of a life well lived. We took turns holding my grandfather's frail, wrinkled hand—the very one that had held

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mine so tenderly as he taught me to drive the tractor, the same hand I had grasped as we walked on the beach.

You know what we never talked about? How much money he had in the bank, whom he voted for in the last election, the size of his house, the car he drove, or the millions of other things that plague our minds and hearts daily. The hearse wasn't taking a bunch of his things or accomplishments to heaven with him. Most of those items would be packed into boxes, donated, or sold.

The end of life has a way of clarifying the truth of what really matters. As a young adult sitting through my aunt's memorial service, I wrestled with the realization that life was short. My grandfather's death years later reinforced the point. Both were catalysts that started my journey toward intentional living, ultimately leading me to embrace a life of purpose and simplicity. I wanted to figure out how to live meaningfully, how to find happiness and joy, and, eventually, how to show others how to do the same.

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THE PURSUIT OF A HAPPY LIFE

I once overheard a lady at the DMV share that she was waiting for the day she could retire, get her pension, and live happily ever after. "I'm biding my time," she said. Is that really what life is all about? Grin and bear it in this season, hoping the next season will bring happiness? Wait for retirement to be happy, instead of looking for happiness now? Assume that job or that thing we're waiting for will

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bring us a happy life? Do we shuffle along, sad and without purpose, just biding our time?

The truth is that the lady in the DMV isn't alone. People aren't happy. American happiness has hit a fifty-year low, with only 14 percent of Americans reporting being very happy, the lowest level since this data was first tracked in 1972.¹ My heart ached when I read these numbers. I told my husband, "I want to help these unhappy people live well right where their feet are planted. Right here and now." Life is meant to be lived, loved, and enjoyed. Happiness isn't reserved for the occasional once-in-a-lifetime trip to Paris or some elusive future season. I had found the heartbeat of happiness and joy in my everyday life, and I wanted others to as well.

My mission became clearer everywhere I looked. Other parents at my kids' school and friends online asked me how I pulled it off with kids and a busy life. Their need to know how to live that meaningful life became the heartbeat of Simple Purposeful Living (SPL), the business I created in 2018. After years of working in education as a teacher and administrator, I made the decision to stay home to be a full-time mom and run SPL. In all my different jobs, I'd met women in every stage of life: single women, married women, moms, and women on the verge of retirement. No matter their life stage or experience, all had this one thing in common: They were overwhelmed by the complexities of life and bogged down by the day-to-day. Some were simply going through the motions, trying to keep their heads above water.

I've seen so many women wanting a simpler, happier life, but they were paralyzed by making a change. As we journey together through this book, I want you to keep one thing in mind: This isn't about striving for some unattainable ideal. It's about making small,

INTRODUCTION

intentional changes that lead to a more purposeful and joyful life that you love. We're going to dive into practical tips, personal stories, and simple tweaks that you can start applying today. By the end of this book, my hope is that you'll not only have a clearer sense of what brings you happiness but also the tools to create space for it in your everyday life.

CREATING A LIFE YOU LOVE

Who doesn't want small changes that create more space for happiness and fulfillment? I know it's tempting to dive in and try to make big changes all at once, but lasting change happens with steady, manageable steps. These tiny tweaks, done bit by bit, will add up over time to craft a life of joy without overwhelm.

This book is divided into four parts:

Part 1: The Pursuit of Happiness

We'll begin by helping you uncover what truly makes you happy. You'll explore what brings lasting joy and learn the power of tiny tweaks—small changes that align your life with your values. We'll also talk about flexing your fear muscle, because real change requires stepping out of your comfort zone.

Part 2: Minimize to Maximize

With the right mindset in place, we'll clear the clutter—both physical and digital. You'll learn how to minimize distractions and use time-trimming exercises to create space for happiness. The goal is to make room for what really matters, one small step at a time.

Part 3: Maximize the Moments

Now that you've created space, we'll focus on planning for what matters most. You'll build routines that help you show up with intention and maximize the moments that bring joy. These tweaks will reclaim your time so you can live more purposefully.

Part 4: Maintain the Momentum

In this final section, we'll address the sneaky obstacles that can derail your progress. You'll discover how tiny, consistent actions can keep you moving forward, even when life tries to stall your momentum. It doesn't have to be fancy to be effective. Small actions, done consistently, fuel progress and help you build a life you love, one simple step at a time.

Each chapter includes a tweak to try and a practical takeaway. I encourage you to work through them slowly. Small, steady steps lead to lasting change.

Ultimately, the goal of this book is to help you live a life you love right now. I want you to look back with pride, knowing you lived fully and purposefully. A life of connection, fulfillment, and happiness is available to us all. You have more control over this than you think. Now, let's get started.

Part 1

The Pursuit of Happiness



1

MIND YOUR MINDSET

We had waited more than two years for this moment—the day we would meet our youngest child, our son Quincy. We were huddled around a table with two other families in a stuffy boardroom on the tenth floor of an office building in Hefei, China. We watched as the other families were united with their children. A ten-year-old daughter would go home with her family to Tennessee, and a seven-year-old son would head off to Spain with his forever family. I cried tears of joy for them as we waited, looking up at the clock above the door every few minutes. We had already waited twenty-five months for our son, and every tick of the clock felt like another month as we held our breath.

When he finally came into the room, I reached out my hands. The nanny placed his fragile, listless body in my arms. He was so light, his eyes so hollow. As I held him, my heart felt like it would beat out of my chest. I whispered, “I love you,” as I leaned in and he leaned away. Out of the corner of my eye, I happened to see

MIND YOUR MINDSET

another nanny laying a large pile of medications on the boardroom table. I thought to myself, *Someone's child is really sick*. Little did I know, those medications were for our child, and that moment marked the beginning of a long journey of finding help and healing for our son.

What we didn't know then was that our son had never eaten solid food. Although he'd already passed his second birthday, he weighed a whopping nineteen pounds, the average weight of a six-month-old in the United States. He could barely walk and spoke no words, not even in Mandarin.

When we arrived back in the United States, we tried to acclimate Quincy to life at "home"—a home where everyone and everything looked different—while simultaneously taking him to medical appointment after medical appointment. We'd spend an hour each meal trying to get him to eat solid foods, and he would often vomit it all back up. Because he was severely underweight, each day was literally a matter of life and death. I longed for him to gain a little weight, and I felt alone and so underqualified for this job of keeping him alive.

IN THE MIDST OF THE OVERWHELM

I was drowning, trying to care for Quincy's needs while also managing everything else life was throwing at me. I was treading water, gasping for air, and sinking fast. I eventually hit rock bottom after a difficult round of feeding and vomiting. After cleaning up Quincy and putting him in his crib for a nap, I closed his door and fell to my knees in the dark hallway. Tears trickled down my face. Exhausted

and burned-out, I desperately wanted to escape from this season, but I was stuck, alone, with no way out.

Even if you haven't walked this exact road, I'm guessing you've had a moment when life felt like too much—whether it was the weight of a burden too heavy to bear, the exhaustion of juggling it all, or simply feeling stuck and unsure of the next step. In that moment for me, I felt paralyzed by overwhelm.

Have you ever seen those shows where crews of people come in, clear the clutter, and leave the house spotless, with happy homeowners waving as the credits roll? I wanted that—not just for my home but also for my schedule, my responsibilities, my problems, my fears. Where were Marie Kondo and that HGTV show when I needed them? How I longed to hear a knock on my door from a crew ready to help me overhaul my life.

No crew would come. But I didn't want this burned-out, drowning, overwhelmed existence. It wasn't serving me, and it wasn't serving my family. As tears streamed down my face in the dark hallway, a question popped into my head. It came from Emily P.

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Freeman's podcast that I listened to on our frequent trips to doctors' appointments: "What is the next right thing?"¹ Such a simple question, but instantly grounding when overwhelm had me in its grip.

I went downstairs, brewed myself a cup of coffee, opened the sliding glass door, and stepped outside. The warmth of the sun on my skin felt like a small miracle, a little hug from heaven. I took

a deep breath in and let the breath out slowly, and after several sips of coffee, I asked myself, *What is the next right thing?* That question became a tiny tweak to help me keep going.

WHAT IS A TWEAK?

Merriam-Webster defines a tweak as a small adjustment to something.² When we apply tiny tweaks to create a happier life, we're talking about making small adjustments to our mindsets, schedules, and households. We experiment, adjust, and improve, coming closer to what we want with a tweak here and there. Those small adjustments will then lead to big changes. What does that look like?

One of my kids' favorite recipes is my banana bread. But before it became beloved in our household, I went through a lot of batches to get it right. Does it need a little more salt? A little more spice? A little less flour? I spent time adjusting the cinnamon, nutmeg, sugar, and oil. I analyzed every ingredient and amount, and with each tiny tweak, the recipe got better and tastier. Then one day, as the kids and I cracked the eggs and a plume of flour erupted as they went into the mix, I decided to surprise everyone with one final tweak I knew they'd love: I added chocolate chips. (When in doubt, add chocolate. It's a good life motto in general.) It took fifteen versions, hours in the kitchen, (delicious) practice, and several small tweaks (we didn't love the version with extra nutmeg), but I ended up with a recipe that my family and I adore.

How does this apply to a happy life? Think of your life as a loaf of banana bread. You're not looking for a completely new recipe or a different kind of bread; you're focused on enhancing

**YOU DON'T
NEED TO
OVERHAUL
YOUR
LIFE TO
LOVE IT.**

**START WITH ONE SMALL TWEAK TO MOVE TOWARD
A LIFE YOU LOVE.**

MIND YOUR MINDSET

the batter you already have. You want to make it richer, fuller, and more delightful—more uniquely yours. You might not have a clear vision of what makes you truly happy or what makes your life uniquely yours. You might be influenced by others' interests and experiences. But little by little, tweak by tweak, you can make small changes to shape a life that reflects what truly matters to you. Just as your banana bread might have nuts instead of chocolate chips, the beauty of tiny tweaks is that you can swap them and adjust your life into something that fits you perfectly. Each adjustment ideally adds flavor, texture, and joy, guiding you toward a more authentic and satisfying version of yourself.

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THE POWER OF A TWEAK

Out of the dark, low moments of my season caring for my new son, I discovered the true power of a tweak. I realized I had an unspoken expectation that I could handle everything the same way I did in a previous season, despite having more responsibilities and less capacity. I was trying to do too much and managing tasks that I didn't need to tackle alone.

One of the first tweaks I made was admitting I needed help—from my husband, family, and friends. When a friend asked, "Can I bring you dinner?" I said yes when I felt like I should say no. When a neighbor noticed our grass was overgrown, they mowed it and

I didn't interfere while I watched from the window, rocking Quincy and feeding him a bottle. When my husband, Scott, offered to do the laundry, I didn't view it as a slight to my abilities, as I might have before. I realized accepting help doesn't mean you've failed; it means you're not alone. Other tweaks I made at that time were adjusting my schedule to make room for simple things like writing in my gratitude journal, taking walks to enjoy the sun, establishing easy routines, and letting people in when I wanted to shut them out.

Maybe you've been in a similar place. Whether you're navigating a tough season or feeling overwhelmed by juggling the beautiful but demanding aspects of life, you're not alone. Life can be exhilarating and wonderful, but it can also stretch you to your limits and leave you feeling lost, overwhelmed, and lonely.

Even after recognizing the power of a tweak, the challenges didn't just go away. The day I fell to my knees, weeping, I understood that while my circumstances might not change, my approach to them could. A simple tweak allowed me to make tiny, manageable

changes—one step at a time—that shifted my attitude in the short term and, over time, transformed how I experience life.

In making these small adjustments, I began to notice the deeper meaning in everyday moments. I realized that what had once been automatic now needed to become purposeful. A cup of coffee became more than just caffeine; it was a moment to pause and breathe amid the chaos. A walk wasn't merely exercise; it was an opportunity to enjoy the sun and reconnect with myself. These small, meaningful actions might have

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THE IMPACT OF TINY TWEAKS

They can make things easier. Stephen Covey, in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, shared a story about a man working tirelessly to saw through a thick log. The blade grows dull, and a guy passing by suggests, “Why don’t you sharpen your saw?” The man replies, “I don’t have time; I’m too busy sawing.”³ It’s a simple picture, but we’ve all been there—so busy doing the thing, we forget to tweak how we’re doing it. But a small change can make everything run smoother. Maybe it’s cleaning up the kitchen at night so your morning starts calmly. Or letting someone else handle a task you usually take on. Tiny shifts like these make life lighter and free up space for what really matters.

They can help you balance and adapt. Life’s demands can feel overwhelming—like trying to balance all the dinner plates as you carry them to the table. It’s tricky and stressful, and one wrong move could cause you to drop everything. But imagine you had a tray to carry them; suddenly the load is much more manageable. Small tweaks—like setting boundaries, creating a simple meal plan, or taking short breaks—are like that tray. They help you find balance and adapt to your season, making life easier without chasing perfection.

They can free you up to enjoy the journey. Embracing tweaks is like making tiny corrections while riding a bike—a slight tilt left, then right; pedaling faster, then slower. Small shifts can become second nature and help you navigate life’s ups and downs. By focusing on intentional tweaks—like using a timer or carving out a few minutes for self-care—you simplify your days and enjoy the ride.

slipped by unnoticed in the hustle of caring for Quincy, managing my other kids, running a business, and keeping up with the house. But by simplifying, delegating, and cherishing these occasions, I found moments of joy again, *even in the midst of a tough season*.

Though the changes were tiny and nearly imperceptible at first, they guided me from wanting to escape a life I dreaded to embracing a life I loved. Circumstances didn't change—I did. With each small tweak, I transformed my life and fell in love with it along the way. Small tweaks are like those subtle adjustments that turn a basic banana bread recipe into a family favorite. They might seem minor, but they hold the power to make significant changes in your life.

When life gets hard, our instinct might be to long for someone else's seemingly perfect life and then want to overhaul everything so our life looks like theirs, but that's not necessary. You don't need a complete life transformation to find joy and fulfillment, and that would only leave you feeling more overwhelmed than you are right now. Small tweaks are all it takes to help you appreciate and love the life you're already living.

STAND UP, SISTER!

My grandmother screamed as if her life was in danger. I came around the corner at the lake to see that her blow-up plastic float had tipped over, leaving her floundering in the water. My mom was standing nearby, trying to help, but Grandma was panic-stricken because she didn't know how to swim and kept shouting, "I'm drowning!" My mom held out her hand and called, "Stand up!"

MIND YOUR MINDSET

Grandma grabbed her hand and stood, the water lapping at her knees. She felt the stability of the lake bottom under her feet. She was okay.

Here I am telling you the same thing now: Stand up, sister! Sometimes we feel like we're drowning in the chaos of life, when all we need is a little nudge or someone to point out what we can't see for ourselves. Just like I needed Emily P. Freeman's words to help me find the next right thing, I want to help you create a life you love.

I found small tweaks that helped me wade through that tough season, moment by moment, day by day. Now I'm holding out my hand to you. Together, we're going to make tiny tweaks that will help you find solid footing again—sure and secure, no matter what you're walking through. You don't need to overhaul your whole life to love it. Sometimes a simple tweak is all it takes.

Grab my hand. We'll do it together. Are you ready? Stand up, sister—let's go!

**Sometimes we
feel like we're
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see for ourselves.**

TRY THIS
TWEAK

5 TEENY-TINY TWEAKS TO SIMPLIFY LIFE TODAY

I want you to feel firsthand how a small change can make a big difference. Choose one tiny tweak to try—maybe one that solves a nagging issue like always losing your keys or your phone running out of battery. Start small and see how even a little shift can simplify your life and create momentum.

1. **Prep coffee the night before.** Set up your coffee maker in the evening so your morning starts smoothly and stress-free.
2. **Create a drop zone for essentials.** Designate a spot for keys and sunglasses—two of the biggest “hidiers”—so you always know where to find them.
3. **Set up a charging station.** Plug in all your devices in one place before bed to ensure you and your electronics wake up fully charged and ready.
4. **Pre-pack bags.** Get work, school, or gym bags packed and ready the night before to avoid morning chaos.
5. **Run the dishwasher at night.** Load the dishwasher after dinner, run it overnight, and empty it in the morning to keep your counters and sink clutter-free all day.