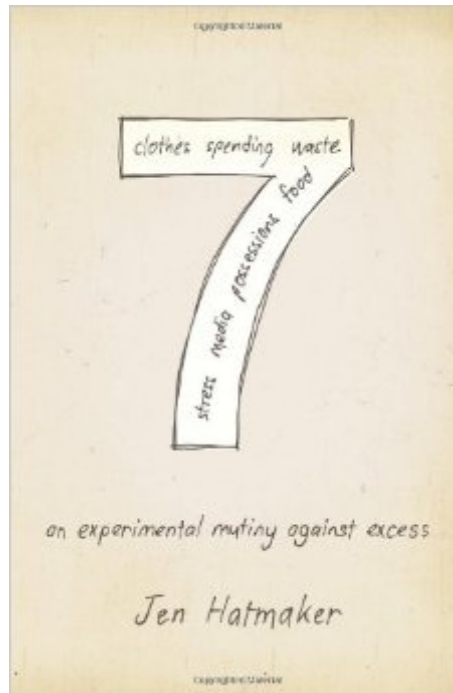


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# 7: An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess



## Synopsis

American life can be excessive, to say the least. That's what Jen Hatmaker had to admit after taking in hurricane victims who commented on the extravagance of her family's upper middle class home. She once considered herself unmotivated by the lure of prosperity, but upon being called "rich" by an undeniably poor child, evidence to the contrary mounted, and a social experiment turned spiritual was born. This is the true story of how Jen (along with her husband and her children to varying degrees) took seven months, identified seven areas of excess, and made seven simple choices to fight back against the modern-day diseases of greed, materialism, and overindulgence. Food. Clothes. Spending. Media. Possessions. Waste. Stress. They would spend thirty days on each topic, boiling it down to the number seven. Only eat seven foods, wear seven articles of clothing, and spend money in seven places. Eliminate use of seven media types, give away seven things each day for one month, adopt seven green habits, and observe seven sacred pauses. So, what's the payoff from living a deeply reduced life? It's the discovery of a greatly increased God—a call toward Christ-like simplicity and generosity that transcends social experiment to become a radically better existence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was excited to read this book, but quickly disappointed. A former church planter's wife, I no longer travel in "Christian Life" circles, largely because of my unease with this style of celebrity spiritualist. I felt uncomfortable with her talk of "The Council" which I can imagine from experience, as a euphemism for a hip, modern church gal clique who are may be well meaning but often gossip

through prayer requests and leave other women of their church feeling left out of their intimacy. That unease aside, I forged on hoping for something genuine and deeper. I did not find it. The whole book feels shallow and sophomoric in its attempt to be chatty and cool (or "weird" as she says often) and left me feeling I was listening to a teen youth group leader. I am not a young mom anymore, but by no means old and remember being turned off by this style of Faith when my own life was consumed by young kids and full time ministry. Never having heard of Mrs. Hatmaker, I explored her website and other press which left me with the same superficiality that most "look at us" faith leaders give me. Not sure TV shows and glowing webpages on humility and simplicity make sense---God seems to call us to something quieter and still. This book is a good premise for a spiritual quest but the author is not the person to lead it for me...Perhaps I need someone more experienced, whose life more solidly delivers the lessons she seeks to impart. This felt temporary and honestly, trite.

I expected a book that discussed minimalism as a way to connect with God. However, what I got was a lot of humble-bragging and complaining. The author did 7 "fasts" from things like waste, electronics, clothes, food, etc. I did not see the purpose of the fasts other than that she could write a book about them. For instance, she chose to eat 7 foods for one month. I do not see how this was supposed to help her connect with God or lead a simpler life. She spent the whole chapter complaining about the food and hardly mentions God. Moreover, she would spend a month de-cluttering her home and wearing only a few pieces of clothing. The next month she would talk about what she bought when she went shopping. She also took a month off from eating out, but spent the whole chapter talking about how she couldn't wait to eat out 4-5 times a week again. The author also spends a majority of the book talking about all of the extreme Christian things she does like feeding the poor and adopting orphans. It felt like she was wanting to sound humble, but was really just bragging (i.e. humble-bragging). Plus she seems to think that those things matter more than the day to day small things. I think that attitude affected her ability to use her fasts to truly connect with God and alter her life. She fails to recognize that some Christians make a big difference through small actions. Although it is great that she helps in big ways on occasion, it is also ok to help in small ways all the time. Finally, the author spend a very large chunk of the book talking about her thoughts on what it means to be "green". She clearly has no idea what she is talking about (e.g. when she suggests not buying GMO meat. She clearly is unaware that there is no such thing as GMO meat). Plus she contradicts her own comments with her actions all of the time. As someone who lives a simple life (eating out sparingly, limited shopping, homemade cooking,

frugal habits, minimalism), I found this book to be lacking. The author clearly did not learn from her fasts (other than how to complain), and I did not see how her fasts helped her to connect with God.

This book has been going around book clubs and blog circles for a while now with nearly unanimous positive reviews, yet I was very disappointed by what I found when I picked it up myself. Mrs. Hatmaker and her friends are clearly passionate, well-intentioned people. Their church focuses on helping the homeless and disenfranchised, many of them are adopting African orphans, and her intentions in the starting this experiment were good. But honestly I came away from the book mystified, disappointed and having failed to connect. Most of the drama that drove the book was the sole by-product of the author's refusal to plan anything (ever) and compulsive spending habits. She's sadly blasé about the simple things she doesn't know and doesn't consider important to learn (case in point, whether watermelons grow on bushes, vines or stems). It's also hard to be empathetic when so much of what she does either contradicts previous chapters or makes you question other content (if they were so desperately poor early in their marriage, why does she have so few skills in area like reducing waste, careful shopping, and basic mending of clothing in house?). It somewhat strained believability that someone who writes and researches for a living and lives in a notoriously "earthy crunchy" city was only just learning about (and terribly shocked by) the mess of industrialized food, incessant media onslaught, and the perils of vast over-consumption. Perhaps most frustrating was the reality that she didn't actually learn any new skills or make permanent lifestyle changes. She fasted from things for a set period of time, setting arbitrary rules that fit nicely with the theme of "7" but weren't necessarily related to best practices, long-term growth or sometimes even basic logic. She flexed the rules to best suit her situation, and when the book was written went back to how things were with a slightly fresher perspective and a bonus perk here or there (cleaner house, a garden completely maintained by someone else, a few pounds lost). If this book prompts you to make changes in your own life or become more aware of your own bad habits, then more power to you. If you're looking to really dig deep and make powerful changes in your life, I recommend looking elsewhere.

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