



90: Start with this Simple Rhythm

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 90. This is a podcast all about making decisions. It's also a podcast about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or even if you're great at making decisions but you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place.

Every Tuesday I'll share a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step. Today I want to tackle a question I've received from readers and listeners over the years. It's about what does it actually look like to create space for your soul to breathe? Well, let's talk about it. Listen in.

I recently read a helpful business book that I was eager to apply to my work. I liked the book a lot and I really appreciated what the author taught, but in one chapter in particular, I struggled with how to take what I read and apply it directly to my own life and work.

Upon reflection, I realize it wasn't because the content itself was insufficient. The author taught a fantastic concept but his failure to apply that concept with concrete, clear examples that I could really understand, that left me stumped. In the end, it was still a helpful book and I'm glad I read it, but in this particular chapter, I was left to fill in a lot of the gaps for myself.

I love a good example. In elementary school, if our teacher tried to explain an art project to us with words, I couldn't always picture it. But show me an example and get out of my way, it's time to create. I was never a competent test taker in school really, but if you give me an example for a story problem

in math, I could nail the practice problems beneath it in record time.

Examples help us visualize what's expected. They help us apply what we've learned and hopefully, if done well, they free us up to create something unique to our own situation. Examples aren't necessarily meant to be replicated exactly. They're simply models of what could be.

The purpose of an example, at least in the way I'm talking about now, is to provide a path to follow, not a program to implement. We see this in the life of Jesus. If you read in the Bible about the way He interacted with people, you'll see it there. He invited people to follow Him, a person, and learn His way of living. He didn't give them a manual to memorize and then to enforce. While He would tell people what to do, He didn't always tell them how to do it.

In fact, this caused no small amount of confusion for some of His hearers. He told them to seek first the kingdom of God, but He didn't tell them exactly how. He told them to be as wise as serpents, but innocent as doves. How are we supposed to do that exactly though?

When He said to love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength, soul, and mind, what exactly did He imagine that to look like? Yes, He gave directives, but He didn't often give directions. He was clear about loving children, caring for widows, honoring parents, serving one another, but He didn't always say exactly how to do those things.

I talk a lot about the importance of creating space for your soul to breathe. One question I often hear is, "How?"

What does it look like to create space for your soul, practically on a Tuesday, in the middle of your regular life?

We'll, I've been writing the answer to that question for the past 10 years, but my words don't always provide prescriptive advice. I admit that's just not my style. But having said that, I've actually written a lot about what it could look like to create space for your soul, even though my words on the subject tend to be more narrative than didactic.

For example, my book, *Simply Tuesday*, is all about finding contentment in your right now life and learning to breathe in a breathless world. This podcast is an attempt, as I said before, to offer one simple next right thing in the midst of endless possible choices. And of course the book, *The Next Right Thing*, is yet another way I've worked to provide a tangible example for what it could look like to create space for your soul the breathe so that decision making isn't so overwhelming.

Even with several books on the subject and a weekly podcast dedicated to helping to create a soulful space, I still hear from people who want even more detail.

What does it look like?

What are the steps?

What do you practically do with the actual time you have to make space for yourself, for listening, and for God?

Well, if you can't tell, part of me is resistant to those questions. For so long, I listened to people who told me there were certain rules to follow to ensure a healthy faith. I think the people meant well, but the intention didn't always translate into health for me. Instead, the rules became a burden and the steps given were often ill fitting. That's one reason why, as you may already know, I prefer to talk about our walk with God as a rhythm rather than as a rule, more like a lyric rather than a list.

There isn't one way, there are a million little ways. (P.S, I wrote a book about that, too.) And it will look different for you at 18 than it looks for you at 28 or 89, the same way it's going to look different for me. And so while part of me is resistant, I admit, to the question, another part is compelled to continue to answer it.

In fact, I see it as part of my calling, part of my responsibility to teach this practice of creating space. Because if I say it's important, and it is, and if I practice it myself, and I do, then I needed to come up with words to explain what that could look like for someone else. Maybe even for you. The answer, as it turns out is, it depends. It depends on your personality, your schedule, your season of life and a million other things.

I can't give one foolproof way to create space for your soul, because there isn't one foolproof way. But what I can do is tell you one thing I do every day to create space for my own soul to breathe, and it takes less than 30 minutes. Maybe in the listening you'll hear something that resonates and adapt it for yourself.

In her book *Invitation to Retreat*, Ruth Haley Barton points out that a little bit of structure actually helps her rest, because then, she says, "I'm not faced with decisions every minute about what to do. Rhythms give shape and structure to my desire and intention to seek God."

When people ask me that question, "What does it look like to create space for your soul to breathe?" I know that the desire buried within the question is, "I want to seek God. I want to be with Him. I want to become more fully myself, but I don't know exactly how."

Well, the problem isn't so much about what to do or not to do with the time you have. The problem for a lot of us is simply an overwhelming array of options. There are a lot of things we could do to connect with God and to create space for the soul. The problem is choosing. If you have the desire to create space in your life these days, but you don't know where to start, perhaps this short practice will help you as it's helped me.

For the past few months I've been practicing the same rhythm in the morning, and it's been life giving for me. I've shared about my morning routines and rhythms before, and they're always changing a little bit, but for the last couple of months I've stuck to one particular practice. All you have to do is remember this PRWRP. It'll make sense in a minute.

It's a five movement rhythm I do in the mornings, but you could do it anytime of the day, and it starts with prayer. And that's the first P. When I first sit down, I begin with a short prayer, the same one every time and it's short. I mean, I'm talking 15 seconds. I use a pre-written one because that helps me get into the space without being distracted by what I'm going to say.

It can be as simple as a phrase, like a favorite one of mine from Ted Loder:

"Oh God, gather me now to be with You, as You are with me."

Or you may want to use the familiar prayer of Jesus that we call the Lord's prayer, that begins with, *"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name."*

Maybe this is a space that you want to use to simply whisper a greeting to your friend Jesus as you start the day together. There's no wrong, just begin with prayer. It can be less than 30 seconds. That's the first P.

Next comes R, read. This is where I read a portion of scripture. This summer I've been in the book of John, but you can read any book you want to read. Read slowly, and don't confine yourself to a chapter at a time if you don't want to. Remember when the Bible was written, it wasn't divided into chapters. That came later.

So reading only half a chapter or even a few verses isn't cheating. Don't worry. Don't just read the text. Let the text read you, and by that I simply mean allow yourself to sit with the words as they are. If you're reading in the gospels, remember you're reading an account by a person who was there. If you're reading a Psalm, remember this is poetry, so read it like it's poetry. If you're reading Colossians or Ephesians, remember these were written as letters from a particular person to a particular group of people.

I think so often when we read scripture, we rushed quickly to application. "What's in it for me? How can I apply this to my life?" And while that's so important and an honorable desire to have, sometimes we rush to it too quickly before we really stop to consider, "Who wrote this? Who were they writing to? What was the context of these words? What might God want to say to me right now that might not require an action at all, but that might just be something that's true?"

If a passage brings up questions, let them rise. If it causes anger or confusion, tell God about it. This is where I read to be with God, to get to know Him better. That's the first R.

Next is W, and this one stands for write. This is the part I've not always had in the mornings, but recently it's been really good for me. I personally write two pages every morning with a pen and on paper.

I have a journal specifically for this, but that's not necessary. You can write it anywhere. You can ball it up and throw it away when you're done if you want. Sometimes I write reflections from the Bible reading that I just read. Sometimes I write about what's on my mind in that moment, the weather, family, questions I have, or wins or losses that I'm carrying around. Listen, there's no wrong, except I challenge myself to fill two journal pages every morning.

This is an important practice for me in my life right now, but for you it might just be you want to make sure you write one line, or a whole paragraph, or maybe you want to write more than I do. Maybe you want to write three or four pages. That's up to you. But for me it's important, this is the practice that I've identified in my life as something that's important. I want to write every day, so I've built it into this little routine that I have, PRWRP.

So pray, read, write, and then we come to our second R, read. We're being repetitive now, but this is where I read, not scripture, but I bring in a nonfiction spiritual life book that I choose. Again, this can be anything. Maybe you want to read poetry here. Maybe you want to read some kind of devotional. This will be personal to you, but the one advice that I would give is for this not to be a book that's going to really wake up your work muscles in this particular time, so I wouldn't read a business book during the second R.

I like to read something more devotional and thoughtful and reflective. For example, recently a book I just finished during my morning reading was Christie Purifoy's book, *Placemaker*. Once I finished that book, which by the way I'm going to talk about in a later episode, it's a fantastic book. I loved it. Now I've picked up Frederick Beachner's book, *Whistling in the Dark*, which is a really great read and it's divided up nicely so that I can read it in small chunks in the morning.

Now with the writing part of this morning rhythm, I place a limit of two pages on myself, like I said before. This reading part I also have a limit, but instead of a number of pages, I just use a timer. So for this part of my rhythm in the morning, I set my timer for 15 minutes. If I'm crunched for time, sometimes, honestly, I will set my timer for five minutes. It's just a little bit of reading someone else's words that I want to be sure to get in.

Well, number five and finally, I end again with prayer. This is the final P. This one is sometimes

extemporaneous and other times it's more liturgical where I'll read a prayer written by someone else. Either way, this simple morning rhythm begins and ends with prayer, the foundation of any spiritual practice.

So how can we create space for the soul to breathe? This is one way.

One way to enter into a regular rhythm of creating space for your soul is to practice this, pray, read, write, read, pray cycle. Again, this entire cycle can take as little as 20 minutes, depending on how long I give myself to read. It doesn't have to be fancy. It simply has to be. Jesus didn't give examples. Jesus is the example. His very life, the way He interacted with His disciples, with women, with children, with those in charge and with those in the margins, and with His Father in heaven.

All of these interactions were and are all the example we need to learn what it looks like to walk by faith. Creating space for the soul to breathe isn't the answer to our problem, not by itself. It's simply a way of setting the stage so that we can better see the answer who is Jesus Himself in whom all our hope is found. We don't have to try hard to copy Him by mustering up a brilliant plan. We are simply invited to trust Him as we do our next right thing, with Him along the way.

The point, and I hope you're hearing it, is that life with God is an invitation to communion. The invitation is one to be together. What you do once you get there might depend on the day, but you can create a rhythm to count on so that being in God's presence is part of your daily life and not just a nice idea.

All of this can be summarized in one of Jesus' kindest invitations when He said the words recorded in Matthew 11: 28-30:

"Come to Me all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear and the burden I give you is light."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thanks for listening to Episode 90 of *The Next Right Thing*. Here at the end of the episode, I like to mention more time-sensitive offerings and things of that nature. And today we've got two. First, if you go to christianaudio.com during the month of August, you can get the audio version of my book, *Simply Tuesday*, for completely free.

Spoiler alert, I did not narrate this particular book of mine, which you'll quickly realize as soon as you hear the narrator's rich alto voice, but I did write it. Second, if you don't already have a copy of *The Next Right Thing* book, today's your lucky day my friend, because today, August 20th, 2019, our friends at Barnes & Noble are running a 50% off special. So you can get the hardcover book for half off the retail price.

So again, if you go to barnesandnoble.com, you can get *The Next Right Thing*, the hardcover, for 50% off today only, August 20th. That's online only. Hurry up y'all because the offer expires tonight.

Well, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman, or you can visit emilypfreeman.com, where you can also find a written transcript of every single episode, written down for your convenience.

All you have to do is click on, "podcast," in the top navigation, and choose the episode that you want from that page. Well, if you're hoping for a rhythm you can count on, I do hope this episode's been helpful for you. If you want even more guidance on what a morning routine could look like, check out Episode 76: Create a Simple Morning Routine.

In closing, a reminder from actress Emma Stone. When she accepted her Golden Globe for best actress in 2017 she said,

"Hope and creativity are two of the most important things in the world."

May we be people who create space for our souls to commune with God so that we can help make way for beauty in the world.

As always, thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.