



## Episode 59: Find a Quiet Space

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 59.

I'm here to help create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing in love.

Maybe you're chronically hesitant and have always been prone to indecision or perhaps you're simply in a season of life that requires more from you than usual, like a job transition, a cross-country move, or a weird new family dynamic.

All of these are normal causes of decision fatigue. But it's also possible that you feel stuck or uncertain for a reason you can't name, much less prevent.

No matter the cause or the onset, my hope always in these few minutes together, that you'll discover ways to create space for your own soul to breathe even in the midst of your busy life so that you can make decisions with confidence and hope.

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The coffee is ready, thanks to my husband who makes it and sets a timer before we go to bed at night. It's a small thing in practice, but monumental in my experience. On cold mornings like this one, love is a hot cup of coffee.

I gather my books and duck out the back door into the dark of morning. Staring into the early sky, a project from grade school comes to mind. Black construction paper stretched over a light source. Small hands taking turns poking holes with a sharp yellow pencil.

I don't know what that project was or what the end result was. But it comes to mind now as I stand in my backyard, arms full of books, nose cold in the wind.

Pausing on my way to the small building behind our house, I get lost for a moment in the black paper sky boasting a handful of poked out wonder, the tiniest dots of twinkling white made with a sharp point from the other side.

I imagine God holding a giant number two pencil.

The screen door creaks as I open it and walk into our make-shift study, turn on the heat, light a candle. It's a small room connected to our one car garage. We call it The Man Room but today it's a sanctuary.

Quietness sings praise and still hands are my sacrifice.

Just like any ordinary practice can be a spiritual discipline if it brings us into the presence of God, so can any ordinary place be a sanctuary if we will to see it so.

Last week I invited you to welcome silence and so many of you did. In fact, it was one of the highlights of my week to hear from you on Instagram and in email. I read from you about all the ways that simple one minute of silence that we had together in that episode, well how it slowed time and created space for your soul to breathe. If you haven't listened to that episode, it's Episode 58: Welcome Silence. It's a good companion to this one.

For all the ways I truly believe silence can cultivate good space in our lives, for all the ways I sing its quiet praises, I'm also here to be a witness being quiet is hard work.

If we finally get in a space where we've intentionally surrounded ourselves with silence, it can be tempting to have high expectations. Alright God, I'm here. Now move because I don't have a lot of time and it took a lot of work to get here.

But like I've said before just because we make space it doesn't always mean we will see God, at least not in the ways we expect.

Instead, what I'm learning is more along the lines of something I read from Brennan Manning - he said "In the act of silence you're not waiting for God to make a move. You're becoming aware of the moves he is making."

It's the difference between *waiting for* and *being with*; between a huffy exhale and a slow inhale.

It's the difference between tapping my foot and closing my eyes.

How can we become people who pay closer attention?

I used to think and sometimes still do if I'm honest, that I'll cultivate quiet better once my kids are all grown and out of the house, but I'm learning holding space for silence has less to do with stage of life and more to do with state of mind.

Because I also believe it's possible to be surrounded by silence every single day and completely miss the point.

It's also possible to lead a full, loud life and still receive the gifts God has to offer us in the pockets of silent time we can find.

You can be busy and soulful at the same time. The key is in paying attention.

By the way, I wrote an essay about this in my monthly letter to my readers last month if you want to receive those monthly letters I write, simply visit [emilypfreeman.com/letter](http://emilypfreeman.com/letter) and you'll get the next one at the end of this month.

In last month's letter, I mentioned how for years I've romanticized quitting everything so I can read fiction and take naps. But that's not a life, that's a vacation.

It's tempting to think we have two choices be busy and scattered or slow and soulful. Might I submit a third option?

If your schedule is full and your life is busy, know this: your schedule isn't the point.

Because I have known people and I bet you have too who have all the time in the world and they are the most anxious people I've ever met. I have also known people who live extremely active lives and they bring peace along with them every time they walk into the room.

Creating space for your soul is available to each of us, and it doesn't depend on our planner. It depends on our heart.

Soul space is not an end in itself, it's a way to place us in the presence of God. And we can find him anywhere, even beneath the piles of busy, everyday life.

In light of that, I want to offer two simple steps to become aware of the moves God is making that don't require a silent retreat or a weekend away from your crazy life. They're simple, and as always, I'm risking an eye roll from you because when I share these kinds of simple steps I know you might be thinking, Oh, my goodness, can she just give us something revolutionary already.

As much as I would like to tell you something you've never heard before, I've discovered when I'm drowning in decision fatigue, simple steps are a welcome life-line. I hope it's true for you.

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Step one to finding a quiet space.

### **Simply notice.**

Notice the already quiet spaces in your current life and your current schedule. The few minutes before the house wakes up. The moment the kids get out of the car at the morning drop off and the door closes. The empty bathroom before you step into the shower. Your short, solitary walk to the mailbox. Those sacred few moments before your workmates arrive in the office.

Whatever your day, whatever your life, this first step is to change nothing except your lens. Notice the quiet spaces that already exist in your day, however small.

Make a note in your mind, write them down if it helps. No matter how busy and full your life is, chances are you have at least one naturally occurring moment of silence in your life. It's true, you may be filling that moment with some kind of noise, but still it's there, quietly waiting for you.

One thing that could happen as you pay close attention is silence hides out in places you might not think to look, like maybe even in the middle of a conversation. You might be listening to a friend tell you a difficult story and instead of jumping in with a word of advice or a joke to lighten the tension, maybe you'll be quiet instead. Maybe you'll allow her the space she might need to discover something she would be unable to find if you started talking right away.

Begin to notice the places of quiet potential.

That's step one.

### **Step two, expand.**

I'm not saying to expand your walk to the mailbox to a two mile hike in the woods or to take that morning moment and make it a whole day. I am saying if you notice you always have at least a one-way car trip alone, keep that time sacred.

Decide not to turn on a podcast or music, just for that one ride maybe even that one time a week.

If you walk out to the mailbox alone and it takes thirty seconds, see if you can double it and take a full minute instead.

If you normally spend time in morning prayer before your family wakes up, take a portion of that time to be quiet with God rather than to list out all your requests and get up quickly to start your day.

First, notice. Then, expand.

One of the biggest enemies to making simple, soulful decisions is lack of time and space to consider, to weigh decisions in our minds, to look at them from all different angles and make a clear and confident choice.

As you begin to notice the opportunities for quiet in your day and choose to expand them when you can, you may discover all the ways silence can become for you a sanctuary in any ordinary place, making room for yourself and for the Spirit of God.

In his book, *Let Your Life Speak*, that I quote literally all the time, Parker Palmer tells us this, “The soul speaks its truth only under quiet, inviting, and trustworthy conditions. The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge.”

It’s true you may not have an hour or two, but every hour begins with a minute. Maybe this week you will begin to pay attention to the minutes that you do have and then to take them and allow those minutes to be filled with silence so that you might welcome your own soul to come out into the presence of God

May this week be for you a sacred opportunity to find a quiet space in the midst of your regular life so that you your soul may begin to emerge and you can become aware of the moves God is making on your behalf.

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Thanks for listening to episode 59 of The Next Right Thing.

I’ve been asked about some of my favorite resources for cultivating quietness in your life. Rather than give you a long list of books, I’ll give you one to start with.

It is a book by Ruth Haley Barton called *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* and it serves as a guide as you seek to meet God in those quiet spaces that you begin to create in your everyday life.

The second is more ongoing, each Saturday morning I send out a mercifully short email called One Last Thing, where I share a list of things to read and listen to with one goal in mind: the health of your soul.

In that weekly curation I point you to soulful work happening around the internet - if you'd like to receive that carefully curated list at the end of your week, visit [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) and scroll all the way to the bottom, there's a sign up right there for One Last Thing. It's email that will serve as a benediction to your week. People tell me it's become a beloved part of their Saturday morning routine. I hope it's true for you.

I'll also link to it here in the show notes again you can find that at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com), scroll to the bottom and sign up in the footer. You can find me there and poke around on the website. We've given it a recent spruce up, so that's kind of fun.

You can also find me on Instagram [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). If you find your own quiet space this week, of course, I always love knowing about it use the hashtag #mynextrightthing and share it with our growing community.

In closing, here are a few lines from a blessing from John O'Donohue to send you on your way:

“As ocean dreams to the joy of dance,  
May the grace of change bring you elegance.

As clay anchors a tree in light and wind,  
May your outer life grow from peace within.”

Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.