



Episode 17: Let It Count

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 17.

If this is your first time listening in, this is a podcast where we talk about the things that really matter but will rarely make the headlines. In these few minutes, we practice, as Eugene Peterson says, *letting our souls catch up with our bodies*.

If you find yourself always rushing but never truly arriving or with list of unmade decisions causing you no small amount of panic, you're in the right place.

This year we get what feels like an extra week between Thanksgiving and the first Sunday of Advent. The last time that happened was in 2012 (trust me, I looked it up). Technically the number of days in November and December have not changed, obviously. But here in the US when Thanksgiving falls earlier in the month, it always feels like we get a little extra time to prepare our hearts for Advent.

If you're anything like me, you could use all the extra time you can possibly get. And since you're listening to this podcast, I'm going to assume you are someone who values soul space and margin but maybe you need a little extra help to find it.

Especially this week if you are an all or nothing person the idea of heading into a season with all these expectations might leave you feeling a bit stuck.

It's my honor to walk with you for a couple of minutes today I hope this short episode will help create a little more space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing in love.

Nine years ago, we bought a house that wasn't even for sale and we were more surprised than anyone.

It sat on a quiet cul-de-sac two doors down from my husband's brother and his family. And visiting their house one afternoon, he pointed across the street and said, "Hey, you should move in there."

At first we dismissed it for there wasn't a sign in the yard. It didn't look like anyone was home. We walked across the street anyway. As it turns out, the woman who owned the house had actually moved out. She left a lot of her things behind, and she was just sort of waiting to put it on the market.

I didn't really take the idea seriously until I found myself on the front porch cupping my eyes to the glass beside the door and looking inside.

There was Dining room to the right, living room to the left, and straight ahead a lovely open wooden staircase.

This place has some character. I thought. A little personality. Granted it was 1960s personality but still it had potential.

We ended up getting in touch with the owner, making her an offer, and buying the house. After months of renovations, we moved in, and that house has become a happy home for our family.

We've replaced that original front door with double wooden doors and the small foyer is only large enough for a small group of people to stand in comfortably. Our kids have found this open, furniture-free area to be the perfect spot for playing hand hockey.

They don't do it so much anymore but when they were younger they actually didn't call it hand hockey, I called it hand hockey. They actually called it just plain hockey, but they use their hands instead of sticks and a soft puck that may or may not have come in a happy meal once. And the opposite doorways to the living room and dining room serve as their goals.

So the way it works, two kids sit in front of their respective doorways or goals to guard those goals with legs sprawled and arms up while the third sibling sits on the steps to act as the

scorekeeper and referee. I let them play inside because there isn't much that can break in the foyer, and also because they love it.

But it gets loud in there, especially if there's a disagreement on whether or not the puck actually crossed the line into the "goal." The laughter and banter in the game is constantly punctured with loud, alternating protests of "That one counted!" or "No, it didn't! That one didn't count at all!" Having something count is important. If the goal counts, your team might win. If it doesn't, you might be out. It might seem childish at first glance but I can totally relate. I want my time, money, efforts, and points to count too.

Counting means something. Not counting feels like a waste.

I nearly titled this episode "Make it Count" — that's the phrase we're most familiar with, right? Make it count — don't miss the small stuff. Cherish all the moments.

Instead, I decided to trade out the word *make*, that conjures up images for me of forcing something, hard effort, and control. I traded that word out with the word *let*.

That small word *let* as it turns out has played a pivotal role in my own spiritual formation.

One of my favorite movies as a kid was *The Wizard of Oz*. It came on TV once per year and I finally realized as I got older they always played it in November. I didn't realize this when I was younger and so I would look in the TV Guide section of the newspaper every single week to see if this was perhaps the week that *The Wizard of Oz* would be played. It was a magical Friday night every year. When I knew it was coming, I couldn't sleep the night before.

I loved Dorothy. I loved the music. I loved it all.

Since it is 80 years old I hope I'm not given away a spoiler. But hopefully you know that Dorothy walked all over Oz and Munchkin Land in those ruby slippers without knowing that they were her ticket home until the end of the movie when Glinda finally told her she had the power all along to go back home.

Once she learned the truth, she realized she had a choice to make.

But simply knowing the truth wasn't enough to get her home.

She had to click her heels together and say there's no place like home.

She had to let the truth be true.

Like those optimistic voices that sing outside of Oz, she had to “march up to the gate and bid it open.”

She had the letting power.

That word *let* is more powerful than I think it seems at first glance. Colossians 3:15 says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.”

The peace of Christ is ours for the taking. But we have to let it rule. That word “rule” here literally means in the Greek “to act as umpire” — to decide a controversy between two parties.

Picture the peace of Christ standing between you and your full schedule, your family drama, your plans for Christmas, your interruptions, your sick parent, your unmade decisions — and that peace looks you in the eyes and asks to do what Peace does best — calm, comfort, and give rest.

God offers his peace to act as your umpire, to release you from having to keep it together. Your only job?

Let him.

Receive the peace that belongs to you. It is not an easy thing to do, to quiet the voices of fear and shame and hurry — but the peace of Christ will stand between you and everything else.

You have the letting power. So what difference can that make for us today?

I think it is safe to say that we want our days to count for something. We want our work to produce, we want our parenting to make a difference, we want this Advent season to be more meaningful than the last one or as meaningful. We don't want to waste our time.

But what are we really saying?

Here is a quote from Oswald Chambers that I think sums it up nicely. He says, "It is ingrained in us that we have to do exceptional things for God — but we do not. We have to be exceptional in the ordinary things of life, and holy on the ordinary streets, among ordinary people — and this is not learned in five minutes." (My Utmost for His Highest)

That last part is my favorite part — *and this is not learned in five minutes.*

I smile every time I read those words, because I feel like Oswald (may I call him Oswald?) is speaking like a grandfather, chin down, looking over the top of his glasses, telling me to be patient and to stop tapping my foot so much.

Let the peace of Christ rule.

As hard as it is to admit this, sometimes it's easier for me to have faith and to trust God in the midst of the big challenges of life because it is so obvious I'm not in control. In those circumstances, it feels like my only choice for comfort, peace, or sleeping even a little bit at night is an unrelenting trust in God.

Instead, it's those everyday things that are covered with my fingerprints. During the repetitive minutiae of the daily is when my trusting soul seems to fall asleep in the brush, beneath the shade of the familiar trees and the warm landscape of everyday life. It isn't that I don't believe the small things are important; it's more that I forget to care about how important they really are.

In her book *The Memoir Project*, author Marion Roach Smith said, "It's in the small moments that life is truly lived."

It's not news, we've all heard some version of this. Maybe our minds immediately go to the wink across a crowded room, the snuggles before a bedtime story, the weeknight cookouts, and

the daily dishes. But our days aren't only filled with the beautiful ordinary.

If it's true what Marion Roach Smith says, that thing that we have all heard and tend to agree with, that small moments are where life is truly lived, then we have to count all the small moments, not just the pleasant ones. The days also have small moments of rejection, humiliation, disappointment, regret, misunderstanding, heartache, and pain.

These are our moments too. What would it look like to let them count?

How we define "small moments" is crucial to seeing, embracing, and learning from our whole life, not just the pretty parts, not just the organized parts, not just the parts that we can explain. These small moments can offer hints of a greater reality just like the lovely ones do.

But in these, it can be harder to find.

The truth is it's easy to fight for a cause when the stakes are high—freedom, rights, life or death.

It's way harder to fight for the moments, to fight to see meaning on a Tuesday afternoon around the homework table. Because at the end of it you don't really have anything to show for it beyond a kid who has a finished math worksheet and let's be honest in the scope of the world, who really cares much about that?

I don't mean we have to create meaning and elevate each moment to the level of The Most Important Thing Ever. The truth is, the moments may be boring. In the scope of life, they may not have much impact on the course of things or on the decisions that we make.

But learning to live well in ordinary time isn't a call to elevate the moments; but instead it's an invitation to draw closer to Christ. What gives moments meaning is not the moments themselves but the presence of Christ with us in the midst of them. To learn to live well in ordinary time is to keep company with Christ on our simple Tuesdays and remind us how he delights in keeping company with us.

The life of Christ dwells within me as I walk into the coffee shop, the courtroom, the office, the classroom, the shed.

To let it count means to be aware that the peace of Christ stands between me and every little thing — every word spoken in love or criticism, in comfort or indifference — first it must go through my friend Jesus before it gets to me. And I can let his peace rule no matter what.

Always standing between me and others is the presence of Christ beside and within me. He packs the moments of Ordinary Time with the hope of Easter, the miracle of Advent, the light of Epiphany. But he also does this in the middle of my Tuesday, one ordinary moment at a time.

So you want this season to be different, and maybe you are making grand plans for change. There's not one thing wrong with that. But don't forget to count the small things, too.

A short walk around the block.

One exercise class per month.

Writing or reading a paragraph a day.

Choosing kindness when you could have chosen defense

It all counts.

Small movement is still movement.

Let it count.

This week before Advent officially begins, find a few quiet moments, maybe the ones we have right now together, and purpose in your heart to let it all count.

Father we aren't trying to create meaning where there isn't any.

Rather, we recognize that the presence of Christ is what makes our moments meaningful.

We don't want to wait for a big event to wake us up.

Gently poke our sleepy souls awake today.

Help us to stop running from the ordinary and instead, begin to sit in the midst of it.

We want to be people who let it all count.

Picking out the Christmas tree *and* the sibling squabbles in the back seat.

Making cookies in the kitchen *and* that last minute run for store bought ones.

The beautifully wrapped present for the teacher gift *and* that heart-felt hug in the hallway.

In all these things, we want to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

We agree and acknowledge that you hold all things together — the schedule, the diagnosis, the misunderstandings, the dreams for the future, and the carpool lines.

Most of all, in every scattered, insecure, indecisive moment, you hold us together with kind intention.

Thank you for never leaving us alone.

Thanks for listening to Episode 17 of The Next Right Thing.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, the best way to do that is to join my email list at emilypfreeman.com/join where you'll receive my monthly letter — filled with first word news, the books I'm reading now, my favorite things list of the month, and a secret post you won't find anywhere else.

Hopefully you know by now that we provide a transcript for each episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can download those transcripts at thenextrightthingpodcast.com.

If you'd like a copy of the prayer from today's episode, you can download it there as well. Just look for episode 17: Let It Count at thenextrightthingpodcast.com

If you want even more encouragement to let the small moments count, grab a copy of my book *Simply Tuesday* and the *It's Simply Tuesday* coloring book that goes a long with it. You may also want to join our community on Instagram where we practicing counting it all sacred — the small and the ordinary moments of life. We use the hashtag #itssimplytuesday to document those moments every Tuesday of the year. As always, you can find me there on Instagram @emilyfreeman

Today, perhaps your next right thing is to drawn near to a person who reminds you that everything counts in the kingdom of God. This short blessing can encourage you toward that end — from John O'Donohue in his book, *To Bless the Space Between Us* -

Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.
Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.
Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.