



Episode 20: Ignore With Intention

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 20.

If this is your first time joining me here, this is a podcast for the second-guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who is currently suffering from decision fatigue. This is also a place for those of you who may just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information or the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment.

You long for thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

In last week's episode, Episode 19, we slowed to consider what's really going on when we are presented with a "great opportunity". Sometimes requests and invitations to be part of things sound great in the moment, but if we force ourselves to pause and consider them, they may reveal something else just beneath the surface.

If you're curious what it means to choose your absence from great opportunities on purpose so that you can be present to your next right thing, be sure to listen to episode 19: Choose Your Absence.

This week we are continuing our conversation about time and how to move through our days in a way that is good for both our schedule and for our soul.

Author Joshua Becker says, "The first step to crafting a life you want is to get rid of everything you don't." He would admit that's easier said than done, especially when the stuff we don't want tends to be easier to access than the stuff we do.

Today we'll explore one specific way to begin to eliminate some of the stuff we don't

want. Listen in.

We've all heard Dr. Oz tell us it's better to say no once to the junk food at the grocery store than to have to say no every time we walk into our kitchen. It might be hard to pass up the Oreos in the snack aisle of the Kroger, but if we can resist them there, it might be easier to ignore the Oreos at our house (because we won't have any Oreos at our house).

The concept applies to other areas of life as well.

When I have writing to finish or any other kind of desk type work, especially if my time is limited which is basically always, I do better when I sit in a spot that faces away from the majority of the room, so I'll face a window ideally or a wall if that's all I can get.

Otherwise, I will either be tempted to put my work off until I can "just tidy up the living room real quick" and before I know it, I'm cleaning out closets.

And so if the room where I'm working is not exactly straight and I need to get my work done anyway, the easiest solution I've found to keep this from happening is to work in a spot where I can see as little of the room as possible.

Decide against those Oreos once at the store instead of a hundred times a day at my house.

Face the window and work instead of a hundred temptations to just do one more thing in the kitchen.

We all only have a certain amount of energy for each day. I know some of us have more energy than others of us. But even those of us with a lot of energy are still limited by something and so we want our choices to at least be about the stuff that really matters.

You know those dreams you have well okay they are dreams that I have that are recurring? For me, it is always I've missed the bus and this causes me to miss a math class and I not only just miss my math class one time, but oops I have forgotten to go the

whole year and now I can't pass the test or graduate and be a person. Someone once told me that the dreams we have aren't so much about every detail of those dreams, but more about the overall feeling that we have when we wake up from the dream.

And for me that overall feeling of those types of panicky dreams is being behind, overwhelmed, overcome, and undone.

That's the feeling that we want to begin to minimize in our days. That feeling of hurry, of activity that doesn't really lead anywhere.

So what if we took that same 'decide once' principle to the work we're doing on the level of our soul?

Because that's what this is, you know. This entire podcast, every episode, is dedicated to helping you create space for your soul to breathe — not just for the sake of a rest, although that's really nice. But this is work, hard work, and intentional work, to help you move through your days freely, fully, and finally as yourself.

Too often we think the only harm that busy-ness does is that it keeps us from the things that really matter — home, family, presence. And that is absolutely true. But it also keeps us from remembering who we really are and how we're made to move into the world.

So, today, let's remember.

Today, let's choose to identify those soul distractions and then ignore them on purpose with intention so that we can be fully ourselves for the people we are called to love, called to serve, and live with in the world.

First, we have to know what the distraction is. For example, earlier I talked about a messy house. We'll call that identify the trigger.

Next, I had to come up with a way to ignore with intention the things that keep me from what I really want to do. So in that earlier example, I chose to sit in a seat facing away from the room so I could focus.

As you go through your day, identify your own anxiety triggers.

Now when I use the word anxiety here, I'm not speaking of it in a clinical sense it's more just sort of what are those things that bring up a sense of urgency or a minor sense of panic within you, and maybe cause you to start to shake on the inside.

If we were sitting in a room together, I would ask you a bunch of questions and we could figure out your own patterns — which I would actually love by the way. That would be Super Fun.

But since I'm the only one here with a voice, I'll share one of my own anxiety triggers and maybe as you listen, you can find your own too.

I would say in my season of life right now, the anxiety triggers that cause the most frustration in my life come mostly from a screen either a computer screen like something I read in my email inbox, or on a blog or on Facebook, a TV screen, something I see on the news, or a phone screen like instagram, voxer, or a text message.

Most likely you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Maybe for you that part is obvious.

But this next part might not be as much.

Maybe you feel your soul start to shake on the inside from a low-grade scattered panic, and maybe your instinct is to blame the screen — well I just need to get offline, delete Twitter, shut down instagram, turn off the TV.

Yes, yes. Absolutely, all of those things could be true, and smart and healthy.

But they aren't necessarily long term solutions.

For those of us who work online for example like I do, turning off the computer completely isn't always an option.

So I'm trying not to only pay attention to the triggers themselves like the screens, the feeds, the threads, but I'm also forcing myself to go one step further by scanning my mind backwards in time and identifying the exact post, the very word, the specific comment, conversation, thread, feed, or headline that caused the anxiety in the first place.

When I do this I can almost always find it.

There are a lot of things in the world that we can't control. But our Instagram feed is not one of them.

So in our exercise of beginning to ignore things with intention, we'll start easy and move to the more difficult.

This next series of assignments is for anyone who has a similar trigger as I do for example, screens. So, I'm going to give you a few things you can do that will help you ignore those things with intention. So that maybe it can reduce the anxiety, the needless anxiety in your life.

So I told you the first assignment would be easy — turn off all notifications. You do not need to know when someone else burps or hits a heart on a post or says a couple of words in response to something you wrote on Facebook. That means anything that comes up automatically on your phone that notifies you of an action that someone else has taken.

Be relentless and unapologetic. Notifications are interrupting your day, your concentration, your focus, and your ability to be present. So let's just ignore them on purpose.

Okay, that one was easy.

This next one is a little more difficult.

Begin to pay attention to the accounts that you follow that make you feel some kind of way and relentlessly unfollow, mute, silence, whatever you need to do.

These are the accounts, the people, the feeds, the podcasts, or email subscriptions that

linger in your inbox or in your feeds and you haven't deleted them or unsubscribed to them because they are there and they are always there and you don't think about it. But then a few minutes later, you realize something is nagging at you. You feel a little off kilter or maybe you are a little fussy. You might feel irritable or more cautious, or bothered.

This is obvious if you just take a minute to pay attention or, as my husband John says, "Pay attention to what you pay attention to."

As you do that, you may notice that the way your body responds to the tone certain people have or the photos that they always share. Instead of paying attention to their agenda, pay attention to how you're paying attention to their agenda — hold it in your hand and consider if it's causing you some anxiety in your life. If yes, you know what to do.

Now this third assignment is one layer more difficult, a little more squirmy, and potentially more personal.

Let's say there are aspects of these platforms that you truly enjoy, they bring encouragement to you in your life, they offer company, or perspective, or entertainment or education and you just don't want to get rid of them completely. Maybe following these accounts are part of your job requirement or help you do your work and to abandon them would actually make your work more difficult.

There may be some online spaces that traditionally encourage you, but when you are working on a particular project or going through a difficult breakup or grieving the loss of a parent or whatever the case might be — these places that are historically good for you could become for a time not good for you. And you want you to get honest about that.

Here are some examples of what that might look like.

- There may be a certain artist, or a certain author, or someone whom you follow that does work or has a life very similar to yours and normally you love to read her feed and you love to like her post and be encouraged there, but while you are in this particular season of your life there might be a time where you need to ignore that space with intention in order to get your own work done. Whether that it is work you are doing for an actual job or work you are doing on the level of your soul.

- Certain books, blogs, websites again similar idea. I'm not saying you should ignore these things absolutely forever, but you need to be honest with yourself about whether or not they are helping or hindering you. That's a real thing.

Muting their feed, silencing them, or even unfollowing for a time doesn't mean you are being immature or petty or anything like that. You could do this for a thousand different reasons. It doesn't mean you don't like the person, admire them, or that it's forever. You just need some help discerning your next right thing and this feed, this profile, these updates are just not helping you do that.

You know yourself better than anyone else. And maybe your next right step is simply to step away (even temporarily) from photos, headlines, images, or updates that cause anxiety in your life.

And a side-note to that on the flip side. If you are someone who notices that people are unfollowing, or unsubscribing, or aren't in your list anymore or not responding to the things that you are doing, do your best to not take it personally. The truth is even if it is personal on their end, it doesn't have to be personal on yours.

Our job is to move into the world as the people who we most fully are to offer what we have to offer to give what we hold in our hands. Our job is not to go chasing down all of the people who say no thank you. Our job is to serve who shows up to be a gracious hostess and be willing to welcome them back when they are ready and when it is time.

And so when we feel unsure, indecisive, or doubtful sometimes we're tempted to look around and call it "research". For me that nearly always leads to some form of exaggeration.

It keeps me from being able to clearly discern my next right thing. I exaggerate other people's skill, other people's success, other peoples schedules.

When I'm in that place it's easy for me to believe the myth that everyone is winning all the time. I know it's not true because I'm a grown up, but my body still responds with anxiety, even when I will it not to. And that feeling comes like I'm behind in a race I might not even want to run in, much less win.

So let's face the window together and ignore on purpose the things we can control. And let's be people who understand and who support the decision of others when they need to face their own windows for a time.

Just as we sometimes move through the world and feel misunderstood and misheard and misrepresented, other people do too. We can't always know their motivations for things. It's really not our job. In the same we want to move into the world, fully and freely, let's allow others to do that as well. And release them from the burden of making sure we are okay.

As Dallas Willard says, "You are one in whom Christ delights and dwells. You live in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God."

What are the areas in your own life where anxiety has been allowed to cause a ruckus?

Are there accounts, feeds, threads, or spaces online that feel unsafe, unwelcoming, or unhelpful?

What would it look like for you to ignore those spaces with intention? Maybe not forever, but for now?

As we face our own version of a window, we come to our Father with open hands.

What would you have us fill our hands with, Lord? And What would you have us to offer?

We want to be people of presence, we want our minds to be clear for your purpose,

Be our wisdom as we begin to discern the voices we want to listen to.

Be our confidence as we let the rest fall gently away.

Thank you for not expecting us to have a grand life plan or an air tight agenda, but for being our friend as we simply do the next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to Episode 20 of The Next Right Thing.

In his book *Tech-Wise Family*, Andy Crouch suggests a media fast an hour a day, a day a week, and a week a year. Maybe you would want to adopt something like that or pick your own version of it. I know I'm going to.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, there are several ways to do that.

I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman

To connect weekly stay right here and subscribe to the podcast if you haven't yet.

And once a month I send a letter to my innermost circle of readers — 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. There's a link right there in the show notes in whatever app you're listening in to emilypfreeman.com/letter.

You can be sure that everything I write or speak about will always have one goal in mind: to help you create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing in love.

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.

Some final thoughts from Joan Chittister, “The daily guarantee that, if we will only begin the journey and stay the road— listening to the voice of God and responding to it with all our gifts and goodness— we will find that God stands waiting to sustain us, and support us, and fulfill us at every turn. God is calling us lovingly always, if we will only stop the noise within us long enough to hear.”

Thanks for listening and I will see you next week.