



## Episode 40: Keep Your Rest

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 40.

We made it to 40 episodes and I can't stop being surprised about this whole thing.

That means for 40 weeks we've been meeting together on Tuesdays, to honor our vulnerable humanity, to remember who we are, to get in touch with what we most long for and make our decisions from love, not fear.

I'm all about helping create space for your soul to breathe so you can take your next right step in love and it's an honor to join you each week in this space.

If you want to help support me in creating the next 40 episodes, one simple and free way to do that is to leave a review in iTunes.

It can be short, for example, Christin says she loves the next right thing and it's like "the auditory version of your mama rubbing your back."

Well, Christin, your review proves something I'm convinced of, that beneath our hectic schedules, our proud accomplishments, and our self-sufficiencies, we simply long to be loved and cared for right where we are, no strings attached.

Maybe in these few minutes we have together, our God will father and mother us in all the ways we need the most.

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"Blessed are the busy, for they will inherit the earth. That's our American gospel."

Those are words from author and pastor, A.J. Swoboda, from his book, *The Dusty Ones*. Currently, I have the pleasure of learning from Dr. Swoboda directly. This summer I'm taking one of his classes for my Master's degree program. It's called *History and Traditions of Christian Spiritual Formation*.

Dr. Swoboda has some beautiful things to say about living a sabbath keeping life, pointing out that rest is not something "that comes with getting our lives in order. Rest is something God finds on our behalf."

He mentions that no where in the Bible are we asked to create or make Sabbath. Instead, we protect it and enter into it. It's not something we make up, it's something we've been asked to take care of.

He points out how the Jews knew this and they spoke of *keeping* Sabbath, not creating it. They would understand the difference. It isn't something they decided to do because they were really tired and needed a break. No, Sabbath is a gift, and they were wise to receive it.

Walking through the marketplace on Friday afternoon in Jerusalem, you can feel the hustle to finish before sundown. It's the summer of 2016 and Jerusalem feels like the center of the world.

I'm visiting Israel for the first time in my life and the energy here is electric. They told us it would be, but I didn't fully understand until this moment, as we walk through the crowded pathways, past booths of fruits and vegetables, mothers with strollers, families with bags full, all trying to finish up in time for Shabbat.

Later that night, we will climb a flight of steps and sit in the small living room of a family home. They will clear away their furniture, bring in extra long tables to form a U shape, and welcome us as guests at their table.

I will have to use the bathroom so badly my eyes will water, but I will hold it for hours because the only bathroom is right there beside the room where we're all meeting and I just don't like the idea of using the bathroom with a crowd on the other side of the door. I will wait until dessert is served and this will feel like the right choice.

We will sit for hours with our phones turned off, tucked deep into our bags. We will pray and laugh and look into the eyes of our hosts and one another. We will eat and hear stories and when we leave, we will be unaware of ourselves, of how much our voices carry in the alleyway.

And the neighbors will shush us from their windows overhead because we are too loud and too American and it's Friday night and we know but we don't know, that it's the Sabbath and it must be kept.

On the way back to our hotel that night, we will pass the marketplace where we had lunch, where we had to split up into smaller groups because it was too crowded to sit together, where, like toddlers on a field trip, we had to hang on to the backpack of the person in front of us so we wouldn't lose track of each other.

But after that Friday night dinner, the marketplace will be quiet and it will be still. Not one person in the street, evidence of the busyness scattered on the concrete, any paper, trash, or rotted fruit that didn't make it into bags or bins are left there for later.

The sun is down. It's time to keep the Sabbath.

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It won't look the same for all of us.

It hasn't looked the same for me in my own life.

I guess the point is this: for those of us who have grown up with the American gospel - *blessed are the busy* — we tend to roll our eyes at anyone who implies there is any limitation to our humanity.

Tell the self-sufficient we need to keep the Sabbath and we don't see the point. *What a waste of a good, productive day.*

And we wonder why we feel overwhelmed.

We wonder why we don't have the brain space to make simple choices at a restaurant.

We wonder why we struggle with decision fatigue.

Add in a major life transition like a job loss, a marriage proposal, a pregnancy, an unexpected move and our ability to discern our next right thing is dim at best.

Sabbath is not a punishment or a dare. It's a gift. It's taking a day to open your hands toward heaven and acknowledging that you don't make the world go around.

When I am able-bodied, alert, and otherwise healthy, rest doesn't look like a requirement. It looks like an option.

Several years ago, I became increasingly more open to practicing an intentional Sabbath.

Because most of my work is done on a computer or on the Internet, a big part of Sabbath for me means turning all that off.

During that period of my life, from Sunday morning when I woke up until Sunday night after our small group left, I didn't check my email, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

I didn't try to tap out one more chapter for my work or finish one more task in my house.

Once a week, I was completely cut off from the internet, from anything that didn't bring life into our home, and if I could help it, from any person who wasn't right in front of me.

We went to church together. When we came home, we would eat something simple. I read fiction. I watched the kids play outside. I closed my eyes on the sofa. I drank coffee after lunch.

It didn't have to be Sunday and it didn't always look the same. But keeping Sabbath once a week saved my life.

That was about 5 years ago. Want to hear something true and sad? I don't have a day that looks like that in my life right now.

Personally, I'm in the midst of one of the busiest seasons of my life that I can remember. I'll spare you the details as I know you have your own long lists, but I will say the busyness itself is only part of it.

It's the grief that surprises me the most. I didn't expect to feel so sad about being so busy.

It could be because this busy season for me comes right here at the start of our summer while my family is stretching out, I feel tight and closed in.

I want to enter into their rhythm but for me right now, that's not realistic.

It could also be that I am a person who places a high value on margin, silence, solitude, and space. But those things are not mine in abundance right now. I catch them only in slivers.

And it's kind of breaking my heart. I'm sharing it here with you in case you can relate.

I'm sharing it here because maybe you have heard me talk about creating space for your soul to breathe and you wonder what that looks like in the midst of your busiest season of the year.

If you're anything like me, the temptation could be to get out your calendar and try to find a time to take a Sabbath.

That's half-way right, but not really. Because a Sabbath is not something you take, it's something you keep.

Sabbath is already yours. The work is not in finding it, the work is in keeping it, protecting it, not giving it away.

I'm becoming curious about Dr. Swoboda's point that rest is not something we carve out but something God finds on our behalf.

What might that look like? God knows. And so I've started to ask him.

As believers, we are invited to not only keep the Sabbath on our calendar but to be kept by Sabbath rest in our heart.

This is, for now, my next right thing to discern the difference between taking a break and keeping the Sabbath.

Just because you take a break doesn't mean you're resting.

What I need more than a break is the kind of rest that sticks around even after all the sand and chlorine is washed out of my bathing suit, the kind that softens the shadows of my soul even after I return to the dishes, the kind that comforts and sings in the midst of the same old routines and the brand new busyness that I didn't expect.

If you haven't yet bought into the value of keeping Sabbath as a way of life, maybe you could start with taking a break. It might not be the end all solution, but it could be a good next right step.

If you believe you would be too behind if you took some time off or if you imagine all those other productive people out there shipping and working and getting things done and it makes you feel frantic, that's when you know you need to take a rest on purpose.

When the work other people do discourages you rather than motivates you, when their art furrows your brow and stands heavy on your chest while you breathe shallow and quick because you didn't think of it first, then you know you need to take a rest on purpose.

When you begin to fill empty hours of weekends and holidays with one more productive idea, or list, or email, then you may not know it's time to take a day off yet, but your spouse does.

And so do your kids.

And maybe so do your arteries.

I'll admit I'm still learning the difference between taking a break and keeping the Sabbath. I know one is out of necessity and the other one is a way of life.

But, I'll end with a story you already know, about a Father who doesn't leave his children to figure out rest all on their own. It's about a Father who works to find rest on their behalf, rest for *all* his children, not just the ones with time, money, status, or a pool membership. Not just the ones with disposable income, childcare, or a spa gift certificate. Not just some, but all.

This is a story about that kind of Father and it goes like this:

The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.

He restores my soul;  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil, for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You have anointed my head with oil;  
My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

This is the Word of the Lord. It is absolutely true and it is given to us in love.

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Thanks for listening to Episode 40 of The Next Right Thing.

If you haven't yet figured this out yet, it takes more work to create margin than it does to stay busy.

Busy is the default. Margin takes intention.

If you want more help to keep Sabbath in your own life, here are a few books I've read and would recommend:

*Choosing Rest* by Sally Breedlove

*Soul Keeping* by John Ortberg

*Rhythms of Rest* by Shelly Miller

and chapter 8 of *The Dusty Ones* by AJ Swoboda

If you would like to connect with me beyond the podcast, I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman) and you can also find me over at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com)

As I've asked our friend Jesus what a bit of margin would look like for me in the coming weeks, he's been whispering an answer and I'll tell you more about that next week. The good news is we'll still have a podcast episode on Tuesdays this summer. The regular news is they might look a little bit different than you're used to.

So, stay tuned.

Now lets heed together these wise words from a book simply called *Sabbath*:

“If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath — our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents create Sabbath for us.”