



Episode 62: Sit Down On The Inside

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 62.

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

One practical way I want to help you do that during the month of December is to re-release the Christmas edition of The Quiet Collection, a 14 day audio devotional series I created to help you set your mind before you begin your day for two weeks in December.

Many of you asked if this would be returning this year and I'm so happy to announce yes, it is! And today is the day.

To anyone who has ever emailed me and said you wish you could listen to The Next Right Thing everyday? Well, this is your chance. For two weeks I will read you Scripture and offer a short prayer and reflection in less than 5 minutes, all to help you center in on what matters most during this Christmas season.

I'll tell you more about it, but I wanted to thank Ann who, after purchasing last year, said, "The Quiet Collection for Christmas is just what I need during this hectic but beautiful season. Short, peaceful & thoughtful when doing a long or difficult devotion seems like too much. It's truly helping through this busy time in our lives."

Well, I'm so glad to hear that, Ann.

If you want to have The Quiet Collection for Christmas delivered to you everyday for the next 14 days, you can find out more in the show notes or visit emilypfreeman.com/christmas or continue listening and I'll explain more at the end.

As always my goal is to help create space for your soul to breathe, especially in a month like December. Now for today's episode.

Over the next four weeks, what do you feel like you need more than anything else?

I asked that question at the end of a letter I wrote to readers about this time last year.

No one said they need stocking stuffer ideas for their teenage girls.

No one said they need inspiration for their dining room table.

Of course, those things are fantastic, and lovely and might even be really good things.

It struck me, though, that no one said they needed a bigger, better, more efficient, more impressive, more established anything.

When I asked what was needed during the Advent season *more than anything else*, the answer was nearly unanimous.

The answer was peace.

Sure, it was packaged differently. Some people said they long for connection and clarity in the midst of difficult family relationships.

Other people said they craved a quiet space and a slower pace. Some wanted Focus. Rest. Grace.

In all the answers I received to that one question, I saw the threads of longing for peace woven within all the words.

I wonder what it is for you? In the midst of Advent, what do you feel like you need more than anything else?

Words from Isaiah keep coming back to me, the ones about predator and prey living peacefully together; the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling, and a little child will lead them.

I can hardly imagine it.

Still, the idea of this kind of peace happening in nature gives me hope.

Because right now, the kingdom of earth is rife with suffering and conflict. We see it all over the world. We see it on our college campuses and inside the walls of our churches. We see it around our dinner tables and in the quiet places of our own hearts.

Sometimes it comes looking like the shocked face of tragedy and other times it just looks like low-grade anxiety of a Tuesday. But the disruption of peace always seems to come in one way or another.

And yet, Isaiah 11 says there will come a day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord *as the waters cover the sea*.

The earth was rife with suffering then as it is now. And yet. As Madeleine L'Engle says in her poem, *First Coming*:

“He did not wait till the world was ready, till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady, and prisoners cried out for release.”

In Luke 17 the Pharisees asked when the Kingdom of God would come and Jesus said *it's already here*.

“The kingdom of God is in your midst,” he said. It's among you, *within you*.

They missed it because they were looking for the wrong signs.

They were looking for a king to sit on a throne, but God sent a baby to lay in a manger.

They were looking for a warrior with a weapon, but God sent a Son to a cross.

They were looking for power, but God sent humility.

God sent Peace to live among us and now, He lives within us. Yet we look around and see evidence of struggle and we say *there is no peace to be found*.

Maybe we, too, are looking for the wrong signs.

While the kingdom of earth struggles and moans, the kingdom of God grows even in the darkness. It expands, it moves into the pain of the world not from somewhere out there but from the secret place within us. Peace came to earth, to live among us and now, He lives within us. How might He want to be born in us again today?

It's the curious paradox of humanity, we long for peace to come even as we believe and proclaim Peace has come already.

We embrace the Prince of Peace who lives within us even as we look for ways to offer his peace to others.

We wait in the darkness, holding on to the promise, believing in the hopeful vision God gave.

We believe the vision of the promise fulfilled not because it seems possible, *but because God is the one who gave it.*

When it comes to the question - *what do you need more than anything during Advent?* - most of us answer from the perspective of an everyday traveler, moving toward Christmas, and not wanting to miss it.

Some carry long to-do lists and growing expectations.

Some carry painful anniversaries.

Some carry heavy burdens of loss.

Still, others carry the joy of firsts.

As we anticipate Christmas again this year, may we allow whatever we carry to rise up to the surface, whether it be grief, indifference, joy, disappointment, heartbreak, courage, or love.

As we acknowledge the colorful mix of our own humanity, may we offer it all to Jesus, joining one another in preparing Him room.

Peace isn't dependent upon the room we're walking into. Instead, because of Immanuel, we bring Peace with us when we walk into rooms.

We can sit down on the inside even when there is a lot to do.

I would love to help.

This week was the first Sunday of Advent and maybe you have your Advent devotional picked out and you gathered your family around the fresh pink and purple candles, and you read and had meaningful conversation about the coming of Jesus.

Or maybe you had good intentions but the weather or your mood or your family's schedule already kind of messed all that up and you've already decided *next* year will be the year we make the Christmas meaningful.

When it comes to entering into Advent, there's no such thing as behind.

There's only coming as you are and being open to the story of Jesus and your place within it.

Every year December comes and though it carries all the things we've come to expect, it also brings something new. Sometimes the newness is welcome a new relationship, a new baby, a new job, a new house or trip or experience.

Other times the newness is more difficult a new diagnosis, a new disappointment, a new fear or insecurity or the first Christmas without someone you love.

And so we wait together even as we move into all the new things of December, both the kind announced in the headlines of the papers and the kind that hangs like a banner over our soul.

Every year I personally choose to read an Advent devotional and it's become a sacred part of my December. But, I will tell you this, there has not been one single year yet where I have read every single day.

I always mean to, but every year without fail, I find myself at some point during the month feeling extra frazzled, distracted, and flustered even despite my best intentions.

When I get this way, it can be difficult to physically sit and read something, to read and focus my eyes on the page, to still my body long enough to settle in to the story of Jesus. That's why last year I worked hard and read and prayed and wrote and prayed and read about the story of Jesus in order to create something for people like me.

As you may already know, audio has become a beloved format for me. It's unique because, unlike reading or watching, you can listen while you're engaged in something else like walking, cooking, driving, or closing your eyes.

Because when it's hard to read, closing my eyes and listening is a way to help calm the chaos around me.

So, I wanted to design something that you could count on for December so that if every other solitary intention flies out the window, all you have to do is pop in your earbuds on the way to the grocery store and be reminded of the story of Jesus.

There are some things we do on the regular because we have to, make dinner, feed pets, pay the bills, go to work, take a shower. On bad days they are annoying and on good days maybe even a joy but one way or another, these become a liturgy, ways we observe and practice our own lives.

Other things we do special, just every now and then the season finale party, a girls night for your birthday, movie night with the family, or the get together with neighbors and friends.

But there are still other things we do, or at least we are learning to do because they feel like us. It's not because you have to, it's not because it's a special occasion, and if you didn't think of it or work on it or initiate it, it wouldn't get done at all.

That's what The Quiet Collection for Christmas is for me.

Last year I couldn't ignore the pull, the challenge, and the invitation to go deeper into the lives of Zechariah, Mary, and Jesus and to let their lives sink deeper into me.

Much like this podcast, writing, recording, and editing these 3-5 minute reflections for Christmas, well, I felt most like myself. It's weird to say it, I don't fully understand it, and I certainly can't explain it, but creating this for you felt right.

In the end, I made this for you but also made it for me. You can hear my voice is an octave deeper than normal because of a cold I had at the time. I had to do extra editing to cut out the coughing, and more than once I had to stop recording to cry like a baby over the true good news of Jesus.

Whether or not you sign up to receive this collection, I hope more than anything that you'll pay attention to the things that feel like *you*. If there is a pull, a challenge, or an invitation happening in you today, maybe this is the season to start to look it in the face and see what it has to say to you.

Dare to listen in the quiet for what makes you come alive.
Rather than trying to fill the silence, let the silence fill you for a change.
Be willing to sit down on the inside even when there's a lot happening on the outside.

I am always here for it, here to help you create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern *your next right thing in love*. No matter what you're carrying today, I hope you aren't afraid to sift through your desire and your gifting and uncover the shape of your own soul.

And so we want this season to be different, simple, *meaningful*.
But we have our doubts.
Though we admit we don't yet feel joy or gladness, we refuse to shake the *I told you so* at our own soul.

Like God's people did for 400 years of silence, *we wait*.
We obey the calendar and wait, not with tapping foot and huffy breath. But we wait with hands open and willing hearts to experience the truth of the gospel in our everyday lives.

We will fight this year not for meaning, for magic, for perfection, or even for simplicity.
Rather we will fight to remember He has come, He is here, and He will come again.

Father, may we hear Your silence as kind company rather than as rejection. May we see our sorrow, our grief, and our difficulties as they are without trying to extract meaning or closure before their time has come. May we give sadness room to breathe even as we wait for the joy to come.

The world was broken and You could have sent a doctor, a soldier, or a king. Instead, You sent a baby. You arrived small. You looked different than we thought You should look. But still, You came!

Help us to remember that in Your kingdom, the answers we think we want don't always show up in ways we expect. Our Doctor, our Soldier, our King came disguised as a baby. May we behold the mystery of Your birth with resurrection eyes. What we need more than anything is You.

Thanks for listening to Episode 62 of The Next Right Thing.

During this season of Advent, maybe it's more important than ever to crane our necks away from distraction and find things that help us sit down on the inside and learn what it means to wait with great hope.

The music you heard during the prayer is the same music I used in The Quiet Collection for Christmas.

When you purchase The Quiet Collection, you'll receive each day of the collection in your inbox over the next two weeks, starting with Day One today.

While December 11th is the last day to sign up, once you do you'll have lifetime access to listen as many times as you want. This is the same collection as last year so if you bought it then, you still have access to it now.

If you're getting it this year for the first time, the day you sign up is your day one anytime between now and December 11th, that day will be your day one, and you will receive each subsequent day after that through email.

Visit emilypfreeman.com/christmas to learn more. We will hopefully answer all your questions there but if not, you can email us and we will get you all set up.

Finally, although it is an audio devotional, each day will also have a complete transcript so if you prefer reading to listening, you can enjoy it as well.

Just click the link in the show notes or visit emilypfreeman.com/christmas. You can find me there as well as on Instagram @emilypfreeman.

As you practice sitting down on the inside this week, I'll leave you with vs. 1-6 of Isaiah 11.

1

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.

2

And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

3

He will delight in obeying the Lord.
He will not judge by appearance
nor make a decision based on hearsay.

4

He will give justice to the poor
and make fair decisions for the exploited.
The earth will shake at the force of his word,
and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked.

5

He will wear righteousness like a belt

and truth like an undergarment.

6

In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together;
the leopard will lie down with the baby goat.
The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion,
and a little child will lead them all.

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