



## 181: A Soul Minimalist's Guide to Summer

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing, you're listening to episode 181. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information, and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting, hum of entertainment, well, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

Before we get started, I'd like to tell you about this episode's sponsor, Ritual. I've been sharing about how I'm paying attention to what I need from an evening routine over on Instagram, but one routine that works for me well is my morning routine, and now that Ritual's a part of that, I feel like I'm starting my day off with key nutrients I might not otherwise get. Ritual offers multivitamins that are clean, vegan-friendly, and made up of high-quality nutrients that your body can put to work right away, and there are no added sugars, GMOs, synthetic fillers, or artificial colors. I personally love that the capsules are delayed-release and essenced with mint, which makes the experience so fresh and lovely that I never forget to take them. Plus, Ritual's committed to a visible supply chain, so you know exactly what's inside your capsules and where it comes from.

Ritual is the multivitamin re-imagined, and they've made it easy to integrate it into your routine. My Ritual Essentials for Women are delivered to my door every month with free shipping, and I love that I can easily snooze or cancel my subscription if I need to. Right now, you can try out Ritual vitamins with me and get 10% off your first three months, and if you don't love it within your first 30 days, their helpful customer service team will refund your first month. Visit [ritual.com/nextrightthing](https://ritual.com/nextrightthing) to order your Ritual subscription today. Now, on to today's episode. Listen in.

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Well, in our house, we've already had the family meeting where we've looked at the next several non-school months of summer, and marked days on the calendar for a few family trips, some volunteer work, and gatherings that we don't want to miss. Last summer was different for almost everyone. There were very few trips, if any, low-key plans close to home, lots of lockdowns, and a whole lot of trying to make the most of impossible situations. So I wanted to record a lighthearted guide to summer, while at the same time, I'm balancing some of the fatigue and hesitation that you might be feeling along with me.

We're all a jumble of feelings and energies, can I just say? Maybe that's why we need a soul minimalist summer more than ever before. It's barely June, and already, already I'm feeling some kind of way about this summer. It's a mix of "Yes, we can do stuff," and also, "Wait a minute, we can do stuff?" Our calendar

is creeping toward crazy, I'm here to tell you, and that is not my speed at all. So I'm all-in for creating a soul minimalist guide to summer, not because I've got it all figured out, but because I need to remember what matters most.

First thing, what is a soul minimalist? Well, if you've been here since the beginning, you might already know that our very first episode of the Next Right Thing podcast was called Become a Soul Minimalist, it's also the title of one of the first chapters of the Next Right Thing book. We know the word "Soul" and we know the word "Minimalist," so what happens when we put them together? Well, Joshua Becker, who's the author of *The More of Less* and the blog *Becoming Minimalist*, says this. He writes, "Minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things we most value, and the removal of anything that distracts us from it." We could say the same thing about soul minimalism, except instead of focusing on our external life, a soul minimalist does this for her internal life. "What do I value most for my inner life this summer, and what can I remove that will distract me from it?"

Another way to think about it, a minimalist ask, "What am I holding onto?" A soul minimalist asks, "What has a hold on me?" However you would normally make your summer plans, you can still do all of that, but a soul minimalist looks not only at the plan itself, but the impact of the plan on her inner life. She pays attention to the story that she's telling herself about that plan, and how that story might impact her experience of the plan as she moves forward. Not only that, a soul minimalist works to focus in so she doesn't spin out.

First step, name your summer posture. Your summer posture is just that, it's a posture. It's not a goal, it's an intention toward, a direction, rather than a target. So an example might be, "I want this to be a fun summer," or maybe, "I want to have a connected summer, or a summer of clarity, of joy, of rest, of adventure." There's no wrong, but I think it's important for a soul minimalist to recognize it can't be a summer of everything. It can't be a summer of travel, and rest, and clarity, and adventure, and connection. If you want to head into the summer like a soul minimalist, it's important to name your summer posture so that you can promote what you value, and do your best to ignore the rest.

So that's the first step in our soul minimalist guide to summer, name your summer posture. Now, if you have trouble doing that, here's a hint, pick what you like, then see how it grows. You might be familiar with that phrase, it's from episode 34 of this podcast, where I share all about what it means to pick what you like and see how it grows, it's a great Next Right Thing principle when it comes to decision-making. So how often should we name our summer posture? Well, hopefully just the one time, but always remember, you can revise it, because this is here to serve you and not the other way around.

Well, second step, soul minimalist guide to summer, create space. The question to ask yourself, "What is invisible that will keep me from leaning into my summer posture?" So I'll give you an example. My summer posture for this particular summer is really one of play, specifically so that I can take a break from overthinking about my next project. Now, in order to create space for this, I have to pay attention to the things I need to let go, in order to lean into my playful break. And a few of those things, for me, I need to let go of the temptation to hustle, to let go of the shame of not knowing what's next, or the fear that I'm falling behind.

Now, this is inner work, this is the work of a soul minimalist, because on the outside it might look like, "Oh look, you've got some play scheduled on your calendar, you've got a trip to the beach with the

family, look at that, a summer of play, done.” No, not done. I have to pay attention not only to what is happening on the outside, but also what is going on on the inside that’s going to impact my experience of the things that I have planned.

Now, if you have trouble naming some of those invisible things that might be keeping you from leaning into your summer posture, you could do this one thing, and you’ll probably be able to find those invisible things. What is that one thing? Follow the shame. Where is shame showing up in you? That’s probably going to be the place that’s going to get you stuck. Now, how often do you need to create this space? Well, for me, daily, weekly, quarterly, all summer long.

One of my favorite ways to create space daily is to set my phone for five minutes, and just sit in five minutes of silence without an agenda. You can do this as a prayer, you can do this as a way of being with God, of just listening to yourself breathe in and breathe out, it can be a time of gratitude, but the whole goal though is to do it for five minutes without stopping, and do nothing else during that time.

Another way of creating space for me that I really enjoy is a breath prayer. This is a form of contemplative prayer, it’s also called a prayer of the heart. It’s called a breath prayer because the idea is to pray the words with the rhythm of your breathing, a reminder that God is near. It’s a non-fussy way to practice God’s presence, no matter where you are. I love breath prayers because they’re not fancy, they help to untangle anxiety that might be hanging out. Breath prayers remind me that God is with me, even as close as my very breath, and as something I can carry as I go. Now, it can be anything. Some examples could include you could pray a short verse of scripture, a line from a poem, a lyric from a song, a simply phrase that has meaning for you, even just one word. It needs to be short enough to be said in your mind with your inhale and with your exhale.

So that’s one way I practice daily creating some space on the level of my soul, and then also weekly, I try to have a couple of designated unplugged days. During the school year, or during the regular calendar year, not the summer, I try to do that on Sundays. Sometimes in the summertime, I’ll do that maybe both weekend days, or I also try to have at least two full weeks during the summer where I’m kind of unplugged, maybe even completely off of social media. There’s no hard and fast rule, and if you need to make a hard and fast rule, you go for it. I might make one this summer, I don’t know yet, I’m going to figure that out as I go, but the idea is to have some intentional time that you’re creating space daily, weekly, and then maybe even in larger chunks of time.

In fact, probably in the two and a half months of summer, I’ll schedule a two-day personal retreat, where I’ll actually leave my ZIP code and just have a couple of days completely unplugged not just from social, but from my laptop, from everything, and just have some time of rejuvenation, and maybe even play in some kind of creative way, I don’t know, haven’t figured that out yet. But the idea is simply to create space and to pay attention to what’s happening on the level of my soul that might keep me from leaning into my named summer posture.

Well, that brings us to number three, and that is listen. Listen to what? Listen to what needs your attention. A minimalist might ask this question about overflowing closets, a too-full refrigerator, a disorganized garage, or even a calendar that has too much scheduled on it. Those things need your attention, they need to be decluttered.

Well, a soul minimalist looks at areas of her inner life, or the inner life of the people whom she loves, and asks the same question, “What needs my attention? What will my toddlers, what will my elementary-age kiddos, or my older high school kids, or even my college-age kids, what will they be facing in the fall that might be causing anxiety or excitement or overwhelm in them now? How can I help them navigate these next few months with that in mind? What needs my attention? Is my personal summer posture the same as or different from that of those in my family? How can I help create space for them to fully live into their own? What about in me? Is there something I’m carrying that I keep tripping over on the inside? Unforgiveness, fear, or overwhelm about an upcoming vacation? The end of the fiscal year, a dreaded conversation with my boss or a coworker, a family get-together that I’m not looking forward to?” Listen. “What needs my attention?”

Instead of being so quick to either solve or ignore those things, listen for what really needs attention, what is really going on, and then in response to the listening and the naming what you hear, move on to number four, and that is choose your absence, and this is a soul minimalist question, which is, “What can I skip?” This is not to avoid responsibility, but it’s an invitation to put on your soul minimalist hat and ask yourself honestly if there are some things that you do every summer, activities that you engage in or actions that you take just because of the season, and because it’s what you’ve always done, maybe those things, maybe you don’t even actually like them, maybe they cause unnecessary stress or overwhelm or anxiety for you or your family or your workmates. Is there anything you can skip on purpose? Remember, these don’t have to be only tangible, on-the-calendar events or activities. Choosing your absence could also mean choosing your absence from a particular mindset, an expectation, or shame. Choose your absence so that your presence has more impact.

And that leads to number five, plan your presence. “What would be inner-life-giving for me this summer?” And the way I choose to look at this is I think in three categories. What would be life-giving in my spirit, in my life with God? What would be life-giving in my soul, which is what I’m calling for these purposes my mind and my emotional wellbeing? And what’s life-giving in my body, or life in my skin? For me, in my spirit, I’m really hanging onto my morning and evening prayer liturgies.

They’re very simple, I’ve talked about my morning routine before, how I practice a simple pattern of pray, read, write, read, pray in the morning. And I share all about it in episode 90 if you want to learn more about that morning rhythm, and also if you follow me on Instagram at all, you know I’ve been talking more about an evening shutdown routine, which is a evening routine just after I finish work for the day, but then I also practice an evening routine, a 10-minute evening routine before I go to bed, and that’s another something that I’m wanting to hold onto throughout the summer, lightly, not being rigid about it, but just these rhythms or practices that can help me plan my presence, no matter where I am, who I’m with, or what’s gone wrong.

Another thing I’m paying attention to, planning my presence in my body, and we learned from the Nester the importance of paying attention to our five senses, especially as it comes to the seasons. So what does it mean for me to be in my body and to experience summer with all of my senses, what I’m hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, and tasting? For me, that’s going to look like building out my summer playlist so that the songs I’m listening to really feel like summer to me. Maybe we want to have a family show to watch, something that we can enjoy together. I like to pull out my summer shoes. Listen, I want to create a Next Right Thing episode all about shoes. I haven’t figured out an angle yet, but it’s coming, stay tuned, because it’s just such fun, such a fun decision to make is about shoes. I’m getting off-track, I’m going to

go back.

Having a summer signature scent, something that you bring into the house from outside that reminds you of summer, planning your presence in the season we're in. For example, for me, gardenias are my absolute favorite. Our first gardenia just bloomed, the first bud on the gardenia bush just bloomed this week, and it takes me back to my childhood summers. I love it so much, and I'm doing everything I can to bring those into the house so I'm smelling those gardenias all day long.

And then finally, the level of my soul. How can I be present, what does it look like to plan my presence in my soul for me, my mind, and my emotional wellbeing? For me, a lot of that has to do with what I'm reading, and so I love to have at least one fiction book that I for sure want to read in summer. I know a lot of you read like five fiction books a month, or one a week or whatever, and that's just not my life, Emily P. Freeman does not read super fast, but I definitely want to have at least one fiction book I read this year, hopefully a couple in the summer.

But I've also recognized in myself, I like to have kind of one summer obsession when it comes to reading. A couple of years ago, I read a lot of Madeleine L'Engle, and this summer, I don't know yet, but I think I might read several of Parker Palmer's books. I'm reading one right now, A Hidden Wholeness is the name of it, and I realize there's several Parker Palmer books I've not read, and I might just have to fix that this summer.

Well, I've allowed myself to ramble just a bit, I hope you forgive me for that, but I hope that you'll see the whole idea of having a guide to summer in a soul minimalist way is really all about listening, it's about paying attention, it's about not letting summer carry you along without your participation. Ready to review our soul minimalist guide to summer? We'll do it now as our reflection.

What do you want your summer posture to be? What invisible thoughts, beliefs, obsessions, addictions, or mindsets will keep you from leaning into your intended summer posture? What needs your attention? This summer, where can you choose your absence, what can you skip? How do you want to plan your presence in your body, in your soul, and in your spirit? What would be inner-life-giving? Where will you look for God? May you have the courage to pick what you like, and the patience to see how it grows, as you do your next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 181. I hope the simple practice of being a soul minimalist can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow, because it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, but the bigger truth is our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman, and online at emilypfreeman.com. A lot of the daily/weekly conversation that I'm having happens on Instagram. If we aren't friends there yet, I hope you do find me @emilypfreeman, it's where we often take the topic of the podcast episode that week and expand it in conversation, photos, videos, and more.

As you hopefully know, I'm all about helping you create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing. One way to take a deep breath for your inner life is to surround yourself with beauty. Each Saturday morning, I send out a mercifully short email called One Last Thing, with a link to the weekly podcast episode that we do here, as well as five to eight finds from around the internet,

*The Next Right Thing with Emily P. Freeman*

highlighting artists, writers, and makers who are creating beauty that you may have missed. To have One Last Thing delivered to your inbox, visit [emilypfreeman.com/one-last-thing](http://emilypfreeman.com/one-last-thing). We'll also include a direct link in the show notes.

Well, in closing, here's one of my favorite lines from a book by Eugene Peterson called *The Jesus Way*. "We stop, whether by choice or through circumstance, so that we can be alert and attentive and receptive to what God is doing in and for us, in and for others, on the way. We wait for our souls to catch up with our bodies." Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.