



01: Become A Soul Minimalist

When I have a lot to do or an important decision to make, my tendency is to get more input, not less. But what if we approached our daily decisions and our plans for the future, less like a hoarder and more like a minimalist, would it make a difference?

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing podcast where we'll talk about the things that really matter but rarely make the headlines. You're listening to Episode 01: Become a Soul Minimalist. And since we're all new around here, I'll give you a hint as to where we're headed together. I'll start things off with a short reflection, then move into a simple action you could take today, and finally, of course, a benediction, to help you create a little more space for your soul to breathe. Want to know what your next right thing is? Well, listen in.

I recently watched a documentary on Netflix called *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things*. In it, a woman named Courtney Carver shared her story of being diagnosed with MS. She was scared and her new husband was scared. Her instinct during that difficult time was to work harder to prove she was okay, overworking over exercising and basically overextending herself. But she ended up feeling terrible. The advice she got from people who knew about MS was that she had to start listening to her body. "Listen to my body?" she asked, "I can't even listen to my family. I don't know how I'm going to hear my body." She went on to explain how her journey of simplifying her schedule and her home began to reduce the stress in her life, and conversely, began to provide her with the space she needed to begin to listen to her body.

Courtney Carver segment in that documentary stuck with me because I can relate to her even without the diagnosis. If we struggle to listen to our family, the people we see and love every single day, and the body we live in and have since the day we were born, how much more, I wonder, do we all have trouble listening to what's happening on the level of our soul, the part of us we can't see at all? The world is run by worn out people, and our soul is often lost beneath the piles of our everyday life. And so, this idea of becoming a soul minimalist is not so different from being an actual minimalist.

I first thought about this while I was at the gym actually, listening to an interview between my friend, Tsh Oxenreider, and author and blogger, Joshua Becker. Now, I've enjoyed Joshua's blog becoming minimalist for a while now, but at that time, I had never heard an interview with him. He and Tsh had an easy conversation about stuff, about simplicity, and the difference between too much and enough. I immediately warmed to Joshua's perspective of becoming minimalist, emphasizing how the journey is important even if we never quite arrive at the destination, something he's careful to acknowledge. At some point in their conversation, Joshua pointed out that we all have regular seasonal input of stuff into our

homes, Christmas and birthday gifts, school papers, various decorations depending on the celebration, but we don't often have regular output. As a result, the clutter builds up inside our houses. When he said this, a thought started to fill out in my mind. Just like my home, my soul receives frequent input with infrequent output.

In that very moment, I was listening to that interview while walking on the treadmill in a crowded gym, with not just one TV in front of me but eight of them all in a row, Fox News, NBC QVC, The Works. Meanwhile, a woman in front of me pedaled fast on her stationary bike. There were two guys to my left who were working with those giant rubber band things I never quite know what to do with. And behind me, I was aware of movement in the pool on the other side of the glass. Input was everywhere. In the midst of this highly stimulating exterior world, I made a discovery about my interior world. The input is automatic. So where's the output? How am I regularly getting rid of the soul clutter I no longer need? All the things that come in, the difficult conversations, the suspicious glance that someone might give us, the thing we said that we wish that we could take back, all of those things are constantly happening every day, all day. Where's the output? Those things are sticky and they stick in our souls. How are we letting them go?

Now, I don't know if it's realistic to live in a constant state of simplicity. We are naturally complex creatures. Think of our nervous system, circulatory system, digestive system, all the systems, not to mention relationships, emotions, dreams, hurts and desires, all of these are part of our human existence, and not one of them are simple. Complexity has its place, to be sure. But when our souls are filled with clutter, what is meant to be complex and awe inspiring can become complicated and exhausting. When that happens, I crave simple.

One of my favorite things Joshua Becker says about minimalism, is that it's not enough just to declutter. We have to de-own. He takes it a step further and says this, "Minimalism is not that you should own nothing but that nothing should own you." When we apply that to the soul, well, now that is a profound statement. When my soul feels like that crowded gym, lots of movement, hurry and input, perhaps it will bring a bit of peace to embrace the spirit of minimalism when I become overwhelmed the inside. I can't say what the result of this might be for you, but I can tell you for me, the best way to uncover a bit of white space in my own soul is to be still.

Stillness is to my soul, as decluttering is to my home. Silence and stillness is how the soul sifts through the day's input. The silence serves as a colander, helping us to discern what we need to hold on to and allowing what we don't need to fall gently away, making space to access courage and creativity, quieting to hear the voice of God. There is no wrong with this. Simply find a few minutes to sit, close your eyes, and listen. When I do that, here's what tends to happen.

Okay. So, I realized finding a few minutes to close your eyes and be silent might sound extravagant. And I know for some of us, it might even feel impossible depending on your life stage. But I'm not talking an hour. I mean, that would be fantastic if you could get it. I'm simply talking about five minutes, just set the phone for five minutes and commit to staying still and silent in the presence of God until the timer goes off. When I started to develop a regular practice of sitting in silence for five minutes a day, what happened for me was, at first, frustrating and overwhelming because I was super distracted. And I discovered that sometimes sitting in silence can cause more anxiety, at least and especially initially, because what comes to the surface is all the things I had to do, several things I was worried about. A lot of times, regrets about

the past will come up, or fears about the future. And by the time my five minutes is up, I sometimes find myself feeling more overwhelmed than I did when I started.

So, how is this helpful? I know. Okay. So I've discovered that it's not enough to just do this once or twice. The more you do this, the more you'll be aware and become aware that all those concerns of the day are still going to be there when your five minutes is up. That means, you can afford to take five minutes off, your concerns will wait for you. So, I've started to take five minutes every day and allow the silence to settle down onto the level of my soul so that I can take my next right step with a little more confidence, a little more clarity, and if nothing else, a little more awareness that I am loved by God. It's important for me to recognize that here I am with nothing in my hands and I'm sitting in the presence of God without an agenda.

If you have trouble listening to your family, your body, or your soul, a good first step is finding a small crack of time to be silent and still. The second thing that has helped me on my journey to becoming a soul minimalist, is to recognize that I'm someone who tends to see everything at once, all of the things. I see the big picture, which can be a really good thing, but it can also make it difficult for me to take my next right step because I tend to want to know, yes, the next right step but also the next thousand steps after that. When you see everything you have to do all at once, you might tend to spin around in circles, trying to figure out what's the best thing to do first. I'm learning that I can only do one thing at a time.

Now, when I first heard someone say that, I remember thinking, "You probably never seen a woman in the kitchen." It is possible to do more than one thing at a time. Maybe multitasking is your middle name, and you are the queen of doing a lot of things at once. While it may be true that we are capable of doing more than one thing at a time, and I think that is true, but what's also true is that just because we can do something, doesn't mean we should. Now for me, that statement has changed. Instead of hearing it as a statement of fact, like it's impossible to do more than one thing at a time, now I hear it as an invitation. You have permission to only do one thing at a time.

And so, when that five minutes is up and the day comes rushing back to me, the question to answer before I get up from my chair is this: What is the next right thing for me to do right now? It might be, in that moment, go refill your coffee. It could be put in a load of laundry, maybe it's write that difficult email that you've been putting off, but I guarantee you, it's not all of those things all at once. I am allowed to do one thing at a time, and so are you. As you embrace your own version of becoming a soul minimalist, I hope you'll have the courage to move toward others in love without a complicated agenda. I hope that you'll receive the wisdom to begin to give up what you no longer need, like fear about the future or regret over the past. I hope that you'll embrace a willingness to face the silence within and not worry so much about what you may or may not hear. I hope that you'll receive the energy you need to be fully yourself in the presence of others without fear, pretense, or defensiveness.

And so we end with a simple prayer, confessing that we live distracted lives, that our insights often shake with constant activity, that we are accustomed to ignoring our low grade anxiety thinking that it's just a normal part of an active life but we struggle. This might be typical. It might be common, but let it not be normal, Lord. When you walked the earth as a man among men and women, were you ever in a hurry? Did your inside shake with chaos? Did you ever throw your hands up in overwhelm because you had just had it? We know the answer, but let it not lead us to shame.

Instead of trying to figure out how we can calm the chaos and hustle around us, we rejoice with confidence that we don't have to undo ourselves. We don't have to figure our way back to the light and easy way of Jesus, because you have already made your way to us. We have your spirit living within us, which means there's hope for us after all. Give us the wisdom to listen to your voice and to face the next moment with kindness toward others, as well as ourselves. You are the patience we need to finish each task one step at a time. You invite us into each moment to simply do the next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to the very first episode of *The Next Right Thing*. To learn more and access the show notes, visit thenextrightthingpodcast.com where I'll share resources mentioned in today's episode and other notes that might be helpful. You can find me on Instagram at [emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman), and at emilypfreeman.com. As always, I hope our time together has helped to create a little more space for your soul to breathe, so that you can discern your next right thing. If this episode has been helpful for you, go ahead and subscribe so you won't miss the next one, and be sure to leave a review so others can find their way here too.

And as a quick side note, I'm excited to be here. It's been two years since I first started thinking of creating a podcast like this, but it took that long to figure out what it would actually be. As it turns out, for a long time, my next right thing was just simply to wait, to pay attention, and take good notes. If you are in a time of transition, of waiting, of foggy ideas or unmade decisions, well, you're in the right place. We'll talk about all of that and more in the coming weeks. I hope you'll join me, and I'm so glad you're here.