



16: Walk Slow and Carry Questions

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 16. If this is your first time listening in, this is a podcast for the second guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. This is also a place for anyone who values margin and soul space, but needs a little help creating that in your own life. Here in the United States, it's Thanksgiving week. And for many of us, the transition from our regular weekly schedule to extended time with family and friends can be great in theory, but more difficult in practice.

The pace and activity of our normal routine can trick our souls into believing that all is well and our issues are not important enough to bring up to the surface, we've got work to do after all. But as soon as our schedules are disrupted, when we slow down and find ourselves around tables and crammed onto sofas with family for extended periods of time, well, that's when those untended and insecure places in our soul seem to work their way right up to the surface. What you hoped would be a memory-making, food-enjoying, laughter-filled holiday quickly can become a week you just wish would end, so you can get back to being productive and getting stuff done in your normal routine. If you want to know a simple, next right step to take that could help you be more present with your family this week, listen in.

After nearly 12 years of writing on the internet, after years of reading email responses from readers, and after three months of hosting this podcast, here's what I know about you. You want to be present for the people you love, but sometimes, it's hard in the midst of all there is to do. If you've listened for even five minutes to this podcast, you know there's a lot I don't love about airplane travel in particular, but one of the redeeming qualities of that whole fiasco is that airplanes are the perfect reading cocoon. Think about it. We're all locked up in there with no place else to go and nothing else to do, but either talk to one another, no, thank you, or read our respective books, magazines and newspapers.

They give you your very own seat. They face you forward towards nothing, but the seat in front of you, and then shoot you through the sky so that magic airplane force pushes you back into your seat, so you don't really even have to use your core muscles to hold yourself up. Add in some white noise in the form of a roaring engine, and you've basically got the perfect flying library. But then, they had to go and ruin all that by adding WiFi to airplanes. They advertise it in those airplane magazines and the seat-back in front of you with a headline that says, "Stay productive." And now, no one has to stop working ever, even at 30,000 feet. It's revealing, don't you think? Heaven forbid, we save our work for land. Now, we have to work in the clouds, too.

Fine, it's a smart move. I admit. I'm glad for it in many ways. I've used the airplane WiFi before, and I've been really thankful for the opportunity to get work done on my way, so I don't have to worry about

it once I get home. It's really not the airplane WiFi that bothers me, it's that headline in the seat-back magazine that says, "Stay productive." Smart marketing people write those headlines, y'all, and they do it with a lot of thought. They choose things that they know will appeal to us, and will cause us to take some kind of action. The thing is, I don't need an airplane pamphlet to remind me. That mantra whispers in my head all day, every day, "Stay productive."

I admit, I've been fighting back, but it's a more formidable enemy than I once assumed, not productivity itself, good work is good work, but it's that busy to hurry to sick cycle that I've grown weary of. "Stay productive," is starting to sound less like an invitation and more like a threat. It's like they've written, "Or else," in invisible ink underneath it. I'm learning the difference between busy and hurry. And it seems like my fear of being unproductive comes when I can't tell the difference between those two words.

Jesus Himself was busy in His ministry. You can read about it in Luke 8, when He woke up to crowds, wanting to hear Him, to see Him, to talk with Him, and He walked through all these people with His disciples. He was interrupted on His way, not once, but twice. First, by the synagogue official, Jairus, whose daughter was dying. And second, by a sick woman who had been bleeding for 12 years straight. He was busy, but He was not in a hurry. How do we know? Because He stopped for both of them, the official and the woman.

I wonder what productive looked like for Him. I wonder if He made a to-do list that morning. Was Jairus's daughter's name on it? What about that bleeding woman? Or maybe for Him, staying productive meant abiding in His Father, no matter what. Maybe He simply woke up as a child in the presence of His Father, and walked along with Him into the next ordinary moment, whether that moment was filled with crowds of people, an important official, a sick woman, or no one at all. Maybe He simply trusted that His Father understood every possible future, and His job as a Son was to simply listen, follow, and be present. That's a full job, to be sure, but it isn't a hurried one.

There's a book I quote a lot around here, maybe you've noticed, it's called *Soul Keeping*. And in it, author, John Ortberg offers a lovely definition of busy and hurry. The quote is a couple of sentences long, so I'll read it for you, and then we'll discuss it on the other side. "Being busy is an outward condition, a condition of the body. It occurs when we have many things to do. There are limits to how much busyness we can tolerate, so we wisely find ways to slow down whenever we can. By itself, busyness is not lethal. Being hurried is an inner condition, a condition of the soul. It means to be so preoccupied with myself and my life that I am unable to be fully present with God, with myself, and with other people. I'm unable to occupy this present moment. Busyness migrates to hurry when we let it squeeze God out of our lives. I cannot live in the Kingdom of God with a hurried soul. I cannot rest in God with a hurried soul."

Isn't that a helpful definition, "Busy is an outward condition of the body. Hurry is an inner condition of the soul"? I'm learning what it means to keep pace with Jesus. He walks much more slowly than I'm used to. I'm sure that was maddening for the disciples, too. That little girl died. It was a life and death situation. In the end though, Jesus made it to her side. In His timing and in His own way, He made her alive again. And He does the same for us, though it doesn't always look the way I think it should.

If you're anything like me, living at a faster pace as hard, but slowing down, can be terrifying. Frantic productivity is easy to talk yourself into when you convince yourself you're working for God. But in my experience, there's a difference between working for God and working with God. This week, if you have

become very big, and if it feels as though the world cannot rotate without you in charge, you may wonder how to embrace rest without everything crumbling at your feet, oh, to learn what it means to release the management of life out of our small hands, and into the hands of God. Maybe you can't shake the feeling that you're trying to catch up to something, but you aren't quite sure exactly what that is. You spin, and you worry, and you're swept away in the current of activity. We're often tricked into believing that the only relief from feeling behind is to catch up, but this is war, and the enemy is an elusive and foggy expectation.

The truth is, there is no rest right around the corner. As it turns out, there are no corners, there's only one big circle. So we have to find rest, and witness, and presence in the midst of it. I don't think we pay enough attention to the silent cares of the soul. We ignore her for long periods of time, and then when she starts to flail within us by becoming overly emotional, getting frustrated too easily, or being bothered in an otherwise neutral interaction, we try to shame her into better behavior. It never works. I'm not saying we should allow ourselves the bad behavior. I'm just saying, we need to pay closer attention. It may be true that in comparison to the heartbreak in the whole world, the things cluttering up your soul might not be a very big deal, but every heart knows its own sorrow. And it's important to admit what they are in the presence of Jesus.

This week, your schedule will probably look different than normal. Things that feel like footnotes on regular days can morph into headlines during the holidays. When we ignore those minor daily irritants, insecurities, fears, and questions in our daily life, the chances of them showing up unwelcome on the holidays is high. Small, hidden irritants of the soul have a way of turning into loud, hurtful family arguments if left unchecked. But when you develop a regular practice of being with Jesus in the midst of what is, when it feels small, it can reduce the chances of it turning into something big around the Thanksgiving or Christmas table. That's why it's so important to create space for your soul to breathe. A spacious soul makes room for others. So what can you do to create space in your soul this week? Well, of course, I have one simple idea for your next right thing. Here it is.

At some point this week, find 15 minutes to take a walk alone, preferably outside, but there's no wrong here, whether you live on a busy city street, a neighborhood filled with kids, or a quiet country lane, a 15-minute walk can do your soul a lot of good. There are no rules for this, but here are a few suggestions as you practice moving at a walking pace. First, walk without an agenda. Don't expect to come back from a short walk with new perspective, magic peace, answers, or a plan. Simply, let it be a time to walk with your friend, Jesus, and to remember, as my friend, James Bryan Smith so eloquently says, that you are one in whom Christ delights and dwells. You live in the strong and unshakable Kingdom of God.

Second tip, leave those earbuds behind. There is not a thing wrong with walking with music or a podcast in your ears, I do it all the time. But maybe, for this, just this once, it could be good to walk slow and listen to the world around you rather than letting music or a podcast carry you somewhere else. Let the rhythm of your feet on pavement, or grass, or gravel pound out a melody of peace. Let the neighborhood noises preach the sermon for once. Listen for what you can hear, a distant car, a singing bird, a barking dog, an airplane overhead. Give yourself the gift of being with what is, all the ordinary sounds of this, your everyday space, all the things that happen, whether you are there to hear them or not.

Finally, replace anxiety with a question. Sometimes when I take a solitude walk like this, I get frustrated quick because the undistracted time highlights the anxieties lurking just beneath the surface. It feels like

there's a motor in my chest that won't stop. My breathing can feel shallow. My mind might feel foggy. If you've experienced this, you may agree that your instinct is to avoid that feeling at all costs, to push down anxiety, or reach for something that will distract you from it, and quick. What would it look like for you to embrace the unveiling of these anxieties instead? Allow them to surface, but don't give them a place to land. Don't rehearse them. Acknowledge them as they reveal themselves to you. Hold them for a moment, and then imagine releasing them into God's care. Ask Him to hold them for you as you walk. Instead of trying to untangle your concerns, consider carrying a question with you instead.

For now, I'll give you a few ideas for practice. You can choose a question to take with you as you go. I'll say them for you here, and then I'll give you a few minutes to consider them. If one resonates, maybe write it down to carry with you into the week, or on your own solitude walk. Take a moment to set your internal clock. It might feel weird at first, but just go with it. What is the day, the month, the year? Name it, and be where you are. As you walk, pay attention to your surroundings. What do you see and hear around you? What do you see in here within you? What is something you long for today? Is there a person who continues to come to your mind? Why do you think that is? In this moment, what is the truest thing about you?

The following questions may not have any answer right now, and that's okay. You can ask them in the quietness of your own soul and carry them with you as you go. Is there something my Father wants me to know today? What issue has to be tied up in knots that I could ask Jesus to untangle? What is the next right step I can take today in His name, and by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Oh, God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me. Even as I may be busy on the outside, don't let hurry overwhelm me on the inside. Remind me to move at a walking pace. Let your peace rule within me. Quiet me in the midst of the chaos in your name.

Thanks for listening to episode 16 of *The Next Right Thing*. This week, let's remember together that busy is a condition of the body, but hurry is a condition of the soul. I wrote a whole book about what it means to embrace small-moment living in a fast-moving world. You can grab a copy of *Simply Tuesday*, wherever books are sold. If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, the best way to do that is to join my email list at emilypfreeman.com/join, where you'll receive my monthly letter that's always 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.

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. As always, find me on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman. As you may be gathering with friends and family for the holiday, know that you aren't alone in fighting for soul space in the midst of your busyness. We'll fight off hurry together. Remember, there's a whole tribe of us living in the strong and unshakable Kingdom of God, holding onto hope one small moment at a time.

In closing, listen to these words taken from the message version of Matthew 6. "Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God." If God gives such attention to the appearance of wild flowers, most of which are never even seen, don't you think He'll attend to

you, take pride in you, do His best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving.

People who don't know God and the way He works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how He works. Steep your life in God reality, God initiative, God provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. This is the word of the Lord.