



193: A Soul Minimalist's Guide to Autumn

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 193.

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. Listen in.

We had an episode at the beginning of summer to help us get into the summer state of mind. Well, this episode will be, in some ways, a review as we prepare to enter into a new season. While the movements are similar, some details have changed, kind of like our bodies and our souls. First, by way of review, or if you're new around here, what do I mean when I say soul minimalist? This is important for you to know as we move forward. Well, you know the word soul, the simplest definition, our inner self, our mind, will and emotion, and you probably know the word minimalist. One of my favorite definitions comes from Joshua Becker in his book, *Simplify*. He says, "Minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of anything that distracts us from it." A soul minimalist is a person who looks inward and intentionally elevates what she most values and works to remove what distracts her from it.

This can never be done perfectly, nor is it meant to be. In fact, Joshua Becker himself, while he talks about minimalism more externally in our homes and in our spaces, but he talks about it using the word becoming. In fact, his website is called *Becoming Minimalist*, and that's on purpose. It's a lifestyle, an intentional posture. It's not a destination. When it comes to our homes and spaces, having a minimalist mindset begins with being honest about where you are and then imagining where you'd like to be. And then a first action in your home might be to declutter. We can apply the same principle as soul minimalists as well. Let's get honest about the state of our soul here at the beginning of a new season. And as we do, let's imagine what it might look like to move forward with a little more clarity than we have right now. A first step for a soul minimalist, same thing.

Let's declutter on the inside. I have five movements here and they all began with the letter S. You'll thank me later. First one is stance. Where are you? The optimism of the beginning of the year may have fallen away way back in the spring. Now we've got our faces set like flints to the final three months of this year. Can we do this? We can do this. Let's name where you are using the three centers of intelligence as our guide. If you remember, when it comes to making decisions, we all tend to lead with either our mind, our thinking thoughts, our hearts, our feelings, or instincts, and this could also be referred to as our gut or

our body. What is the state of your body? One word here will do, exhausted, numb, sore, disconnected, confused, energized, hungry, tense, full. One word. And then what's on your mind or what are you thinking about?

And finally, what's in your heart. How are you feeling? And then another key component to the stance, or just simply naming where you are, could be to consider what old questions are you still carrying, and what new questions have come up? Now, there are no wrong answers here. There are only helpful and not helpful. What's helpful is what's true. What's not helpful is your commentary to yourself about what is true. If you name what is true and then immediately begin to try to explain or diagnose or find reasons, that just adds more clutter. But we are working to become soul minimalists. Let this exercise simply be a way of noticing, an information-gathering posture. This is our stance. This first movement is to simply name what is without an agenda.

And then we move on to number two, and that is space or create space. What practices, rhythms or routines will help create room for you to feel like a person in autumn. Now, those last two words are key, in autumn. Something I've realized about myself is sometimes my rhythms need to change with the seasons in order to feel like I'm part of a community or part of an embodied experience of being a person at this particular time and in this particular place, both in the grand scheme of history, but also in my own home. Getting granular here, for example, in the summertime, I like to read and drink my coffee, my morning coffee, in our sunroom. The sun comes up in the back of the house and it shines in the early morning hours. So, to be there at first light is very life-giving for me. I really enjoy that. But as the days get shorter and the sun sleeps in, I've realized I don't enjoy sitting in a dark sunroom in the mornings during the fall and winter, not the way that I do in spring in summer.

So, one change I'm going to make this season is to move my morning spot into a lamp-lit corner of the living room. It's not drastic. It's not going to change the world, but it's a small way to pay attention. It's an intentional way to create some space for myself, to feel like a person in this season. Now, there are other things that I'll hold on to year round. For example, the breath prayer. I talked about this in *A Soul Minimalist's Guide to Summer*. If you don't know what a breath prayer, it's simply 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, as near as your breath. It's a non-fussy way to practice God's presence no matter where you are.

What I love about the breath prayer is, it's not fancy, it can help to untangle anxiety in really simple ways. It reminds me of God's presence with me, and it's something true that I can carry with me as I go around places in my everyday life. You could pray a short verse of scripture, a line from a poem, a lyric from a song, a simple phrase. Or a breath prayer could even just be one meaningful word. It needs to be short enough to be set in your mind with your inhale and your exhale. Name your current stance, create some seasonal space for yourself, and now, number three, see. See what needs your attention.

Remember, a minimalist might ask this question about overflowing closets, a messy home office, a disorganized kitchen counter, or even a too-full calendar. A soul minimalist looks at areas of her inner life or the inner life of the people whom she loves, and she asks the same question, "What needs my attention?" For example, what invisible things in my family might need my attention? What are my toddlers, my elementary-aged kids, my older kids, what are they facing, maybe from now until the end of the year or December, that might be causing excitement, anxiety or overwhelm right now today? How

can I help them navigate these next few months with that in mind? Or there may be some invisible things at work, not necessarily the things that are on your to do list or deadlines that you have to keep, but there might be some things you've been putting off, a conversation or a decision.

What is life giving and what is life draining when it comes to your work these days? Maybe there's some invisible goals that you had for the year, things that either you wrote down at the beginning of the year that were intentions that have sort of fallen by the wayside or been forgotten. Or maybe they've changed. Or maybe you had some goals for the year that you never articulated, and now as the year begins to wind down, you're starting to feel some disappointment and you don't know why. It could be because you had some things you wanted to do this year, but you didn't really have a plan to carry them out, or maybe just the state of the world got in the way. As we all know, that's happened to so many of us this year, and really always. Are their invisible dreams or desires? Are you holding onto a disappointment or a dream not yet realized or a desire that you hope to be? What are they?

See what needs your attention. And as you pay attention or see what needs your attention... One thing that I keep in mind as a soul minimalist is that decluttering is to my home as silence is to my soul. And so when I'm looking around and paying attention to what needs my attention, sometimes silence brings those things to mind. And as they come to mind out of the things that need my attention, something to ask myself is do I need to make a decision? Is there an action to take about these things that need my attention? Is there a choice to make? Maybe there is, but maybe there isn't. Another thing I'll ask is do I need to make time? Do I need to have a conversation? Or, do I need to make time for myself to understand something? Or, do I need to give quality time to a family member or a coworker? Or finally, of these things that need my attention, I might wonder, do I need to make peace here?

Do I need to grieve something or lament or offer forgiveness of someone else, or forgive myself for something? Again, do I need to make a decision, make time or make peace of these things, or when I'm looking at these things that need my attention. Moving on to number four in your Soul Minimalist's Guide to Autumn is to ask yourself the question, what can I skip? Choose your absence. Skipping something, this not to avoid responsibility, but it is an invitation to put on your soul minimalist hat and ask yourself honestly if there are things on the calendar this fall, activities you engage in or actions you take, just because of the season and it's what you've always done, that maybe cause unnecessary stress or overwhelm or anxiety for you or your family or your workmates. Is there anything you can skip on purpose?

Remember this doesn't have to be just tangible on-the-calendar events or activities. There may also include some mindsets or expectations or even things like shame that you can skip on purpose. Choose your absence. What can you skip? And then the final S word, number five, senses. Plan your presence. In other words, what would be life giving for me this autumn? I like to think of this in terms of my spirit, my soul and my body. My spirit, my life with God. My soul, my life on the inside. My mind, my will, my emotions. And then my body, or life in my skin. One way to think about this is to think about your five senses for autumn. I know I've learned so much about this from my sister, The Nester. She talks about paying attention to our five senses when it comes to living inside of our homes and bringing the outside inside and wanting our spaces, our physical spaces, where we live to reflect the seasons outside.

I think the same thing can be true for a soul minimalist, is paying attention to the things that we hear, see, feel, smell, and taste in autumn. This might include creating an autumn playlist or picking a fall movie or

show to watch as a family, having a signature scent, a way that you want your house to smell when you walk in, a go-to drink or snack. These are kind of fun things, but I think they are all ways that we can plan our presence. How do I want to be in my spaces this season? And using our five senses is a great way to consider that. Ready to review our Soul Minimalist's Guide to Autumn? We'll do it as a reflection. I'll list the questions that we've already asked and then you can maybe take a minute to consider what your answers might be. Remember, there's no wrong. There's just what's true.

Stance. Where are you? What is the state of your body? What's on your mind? What's in your heart? What old questions are you still carrying? What new questions have come up?

And then Space. What practices rhythms or routines will help create room for you to feel like a person in autumn?

See. What needs your attention? Do you need to make a decision? Do you need to make some time, or is it time to make some peace?

Skip. Where can you choose your absence? What can you skip this autumn?

And finally, Senses. How will you plan your presence? What would be life-giving for you this season?

And here's a bonus question. Where will you look for God? Remember there's no wrong way to be a person. As you enter this new season like a soul minimalist, 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.

Thanks for listening to Episode 193 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this 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 while it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, the bigger truth is our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me on instagram@emilypfreeman or online at emilypfreeman.com, where you can find a transcript copy of this and every episode. And that's for you, if you prefer reading to listening, or if you know someone who does. In closing, here's some words from Brennan Manning.

“In the act of silence, you're not waiting for God to make a move. You're becoming aware of the moves He's making.”

Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.