



203: Introducing The Quiet Collection for 2021

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 203.

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, you're in the right place.

For the last several weeks, more and more of you have been messaging me to ask if we're doing another edition of The Quiet Collection for Christmas this year. And I'm happy to tell you that, yes, we are, and yes, we have. It's ready and available now. Don't know what The Quiet Collection is? Well, you can go directly to thequietcollection.com to learn more and sign up, or you can stay right here and listen in.

Every year, around this time, I choose a book to read from during the Advent season. One year, I made the mistake of not choosing at all, and I felt scattered the entire month, trying to piece together meaningful and reflective readings from a variety of sources in order to help set my mind for the season. I wanted to remember the why beneath all the activity. While I was grateful to have so many resources to choose from, my mistake was trying to read a little bit from all of them, instead of just picking one. In the spirit of deciding once, one of my favorite principles from my dear friend, the Lazy Genius, I now know to choose just one Advent type of reading for the season and stick with it. One year, I chose Ann Voskamp's book, *The Greatest Gift*. Another year, it was *Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas*. It had essays by Annie Dillard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton, just to name a few of them.

Some other favorite readings I've used during Advent are *Shadow and Light* by Tsh Oxenreider, *Come, Lord Jesus* by Kris Camealy, and one I just ordered for this year, *Honest Advent*, by Scott Erickson, known also as Scott, The Painter. What I'm saying is I'm a fan of aligning my reading with the season, especially this time of year, but what I'm also going to say to you is the honest truth. That often my intention for a daily reading does not live up to my reality. And despite my best efforts, I rarely get through each day of an advent devotional type of book. This is not something that causes me shame or anything like that. It's fine, we're grownups, but it can sometimes be discouraging to begin the month of December with a strong intent toward reflection only to find myself limping through the final days before Christmas, counting the days until I can just pack the decorations up already and move on into the new year. But, I don't really want it to be like that.

Every year, December comes, though it carries all the things we've come to expect, it also always seems to bring something new. Sometimes, the newness is welcomed. A new relationship, a new baby, a new job or house or trip or experience. But other times, the newness can be more difficult. A new day diagnosis or disappointment, a new fear or uncertainty, or the first Christmas without them. And so, we wait together, even as we move into all the news of December, both the kind announced and headlines of the papers and the kind that hangs like a banner over our soul. All of these changes, some expected, some not so much, while they all bring with them demands on our time, our wallets, our margin, and our attention.

Since Christmas of 2017, I've been offering my own Advent type of reflection. Only this format isn't be read, but listen to. I created the first version in 2017. I sold that same one for three years in a row, and then a pandemic happened, and it just felt like we needed a renewed version of the collection. So, last year, I created one specifically for 2020. And now, as it turns out, I'm kind of obsessed with the process, so I'm just going to create a new one every year, I guess. And I'm here to tell you, the 2021 version is done and ready to go. So, what is it? Well, if you're new here, The Quiet Collection is a 10-day audio devotional series created by me for you, to help you set your mind before you begin your day for 10 days in December, because chances are at some point during the next four weeks, you'll find yourself feeling extra frazzled, extra lonely, or a bit distracted, despite your best intentions.

And so, if every other solitary Advent intention flies out the window, all you have to do is pop in your earbuds for three to eight minutes every day, and be reminded of the story of Jesus. I'll tell you, of all the work I do, and that's here on the podcast, in my email newsletters, the courses I offer, my work with writers, the one-on-one creative direction that I provide, I'll say that there are two places where I offer the most direct expression of my Christian faith these days. One of those places is in my work at Friends University as a residency lecturer in their Spiritual Formation program. And the other place is here, in The Quiet Collection for Christmas. The daily reflections that I share come solidly from the Bible. I'll read a few lines from the gospel of John, or from Luke, or even Genesis. And then, I offer some thoughts or some questions for you to consider in light of the reading.

I feel compelled to tell you that because I know that not everyone listening shares my faith, and I want you to know what to expect from this collection. Of course, all are welcome to listen in, and I hope you do. Just know that the point for me, as I made it, was to remember the miracle of the incarnation, of God with us, of light in the darkness of time. During a year where so many of us are reexamining our own expressions of our faith, our own traditions, our own loyalties and doubts and longings for home, this practice of focusing for a few minutes every day on the story of Jesus, well, this time of year, it's a good one for me. I guess it's a good one for me anytime of year.

In this year's all new 2021 collection, I want to help you approach December with some hope to set your mind before you start your day, to find relief from seasonal anxiety and the exhaustion of 2021. If it's already feeling difficult to sit and read, to focus your eyes on the page, to still your body long enough to settle into the story, I hope you'll allow The Quiet Collection to meet you here. Maybe in this 10-day series you'll see your own experience reflected in the words and the music, music, which by the way, is original to this 2021 collection, composed and performed by none other than Caleb Peavy. In this collection, you might notice subtle themes of dark, light, courage, justice, and love. What a gift to close myself in a room again this year and to sift through the words and images of scripture, to find what I hope will be a kind offering for you.

Now, I will say, whether or not you sign up to receive The Quiet Collection this year, I hope more than anything that you'll pay attention to the places where you may need a little kindness this month, where you may need some grace, where God might be inviting you to come with your weary burden and find rest for your soul. Dare to listen in the quiet for what makes you come alive, rather than trying to fill the silence. Maybe let the silence fill you, for a change. I'm always here to help you create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing and love.

Thanks for listening to episode 203 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of quiet reflection 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 making our lives. As always, you can find me on Instagram, @emilypfreeman. And this week, I hope you'll visit thequietcollection.com and sign up for the brand new 2021 version.

We've made it easy to not only listen in three different ways, either through a daily email link, a simple login, or a private podcast feed. We've also made it easy for you to send the collection as a gift, no waste and no shipping cost. You can buy one for yourself for just \$10. You can gift one to a friend. We've also made it easy to purchase for a group of five or 10 people. Last year, one listener purchased 30 collections for her entire pastoral staff. A great idea if I do say so, and I do. The day you sign up becomes your day one, and the last day to sign up is December 15th.

In closing, I want to thank you for purchasing The Quiet Collection, as this is a major supporter of the work I do here on the podcast. Since leaving the podcast Network earlier this year, we don't have regular ad spots here on The Next Right Thing anymore. And your purchase helps to ensure this work can continue, so I thank you kindly to those of you who have already signed up and to anyone who plans to. Just visit thequietcollection.com to learn more and sign up, or just click the link in the show notes. Again, the last day to get this all new version of The Quiet Collection for only \$10 is December 15.

Well, in closing, a few words from last year's collection. Communion is a reminder of what happened on Christmas, that God hears us and came down to be with us. The company of Jesus is stunning, really. How are you keeping his company today? How might you offer his company to others? May we learn from Mary what it means to bear witness to the growing life of Christ, and to carry this life close to our hearts. As others hustle around us, may we refuse to judge, scold, or shame them. May we instead be a listening presence who has no agenda but love. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.