



## 204: A Soul Minimalist's Guide to Christmas

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 204. 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. Today, I'd love to help reduce some of that decision fatigue that can come along, especially this time of year, by giving you another soul minimalist guide, this one specifically for Christmas. Listen in.

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You may remember the episode at the beginning of this summer to help us get into the summer state of mind, and then there was another one at the beginning of autumn. Both of those had a similar structure, and this one will as well, but instead of talking about a whole season, we're just going to focus on December. If you've been around here a while, you'll hopefully begin to recognize some of the movements of becoming a soul minimalist. The framework hasn't really changed, but I'll share a few examples and perspectives specifically for the season of Advent and Christmas. But first, let's define our terms, as always.

What is a soul minimalist? Well, if you've been here since the beginning, you may already know that our very first episode of the Next Right Thing podcast, back in 2017, 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?

Author of the book *The More of Less*, Joshua Becker, defines minimalism as "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. The final month of the year, in the days leading up to and after Christmas, is a good and beautiful time to get curious about our inner life. What do I value most for my inner life this Christmas, and what can I remove that will distract me from it? In other words, a regular minimalist asks, "What am I holding onto?" And a soul minimalist asks, "What has a hold on me?"

Chances are, your December plans are already well underway. Perhaps there are things you do, people you see, and projects you finish every Christmas season. Those things are on the calendar, and they may not be going anywhere. Well, being a soul minimalist is not necessarily about deleting things from your calendar, although it could be that. Instead, soul minimalism is about how you experience those things on your calendar. A soul minimalist looks not only at the plan itself, but the impact of the plan on your inner life.

Not only that, a soul minimalist works to focus in so that they don't spin out.

So for our soul minimalist guide to Christmas, what's the first step? Well, number one, name your holiday posture. The wording is intentional. Notice it's not "Name your Christmas goals," or "Your Christmas to-dos," or "Name your Christmas list," or "Your Christmas must-haves." No, this is a posture, and it is on purpose. This is a direction you set your face toward, not a target that you have to meet. For some of us, this idea of just facing a direction might not seem specific enough. It could go against what you've learned about SMART goals. I'm sure you know what those are, but just in case, SMART is an acronym for managing time and setting goals. SMART, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Now, these are fantastic guidelines for setting a goal, and entrepreneur Emily can talk with you all about SMART goals at some point, because I've basically done it wrong long enough to know what works for me, but that's not what we're doing here. Here, we're talking about soul minimalism, and no matter how much the lady doth protest, we cannot systemize our soul, because the soul and the schedule, they don't follow the same rules. A holiday posture for you might be choosing a word, a phrase, or a vibe, and setting your intention toward it, using that as a filter for decisions you make through the month of December.

Another way to think about your holiday posture could be this. In the words of race car driver Mario Andretti, "Don't look at the wall. Your car goes where your eyes go." Now, he said this in the context, obviously, of racing, but metaphorically, the wall could represent any number of things, or options, distractions, trouble, you name it. During the month of Advent and the season of Christmas, our wall might be concerns about money, time management, hosting, family dynamics, or even just navigating the real and present tension between what Christmas time used to feel like, with the complicated reality of what it's become.

Choosing a holiday posture doesn't mean pretending like the wall isn't there, but maybe your next right thing is to look at the road instead. The wall, it's going to be there regardless, but staring at it won't get you anywhere. Instead, maybe just turn around, face a different direction for a time. So try finishing some of these sentences. "I want this season to feel," what? Peaceful? To feel like home? To feel grounded? So that's one. Another one, "I want to have a blank Christmas." You could fill in the blank with anything. Fun, meaningful, playful, sacred.

Or maybe this, "I want this to be a season of," what? Reconnection, listening, hope? There's no wrong, but I think it's important for a soul minimalist to recognize that it can't be everything. In other words, this can't be the Christmas of peace and fun and meaning and play and listening and quiet, no. If you want to head into the season like a soul minimalist, it's important to name your holiday posture so that you can promote what you value and do your best to ignore the rest. So that's really the first step in our soul minimalist guide to Christmas, is to name your holiday posture.

Step two, create space. The question to ask yourself is this, "What is invisible that will keep me from leaning into my holiday posture?" And I say "What's invisible?" That's not to imply that the things that are visible might not also keep you, but I think those are often more obvious. And so for example, my holiday posture this year I've decided to name is slow connection, or slow and connection. Now, in order to create space for this, I have to pay attention to the things that I need to let go in order to lean into my chosen posture of slow and connection. So that means I'm paying attention to the places within me that naturally want the opposite of that, that naturally want to hurry up, to get ahead, and to take every single

sliver of margin, and fill it up with one more thing.

There's an internal engine that comes in handy during times of hustle, and listen, that is not a bad quality, we don't want to shame ourselves for being able to get stuff done, that's a fantastic gift. It's a gift for my schedule at a lot of times in my life and work, but for this month, I've decided it's not as helpful. That hustle and rushing around right now in the month of December, that's my wall, so I don't want to be staring at all the things I could be doing, but I want to lean into what it looks like for me to embrace the slowness of Advent, the season of waiting for the light to come, and the beauty of winter sun spilling through the living room window.

Now, this is inner work. This is the work of a soul minimalist, because on the outside, it might look like, "Oh, well look Emily, you've got some margin in your calendar, you've not scheduled any work meetings after the 17th, you're great to go." Well, maybe I am, and maybe I'm not, because I have to pay attention to not only what's happening on the outside that I can see, but also what's happening on the inside, that's going to impact my experience of the things that I've planned. Creating soul space means knowing and naming the concerns, obsessions, addictions, habits, and distractions that are going to get in the way of your named holiday posture.

Step three, listen to what needs your attention. A minimalist might ask this question about overflowing closets, a messy desk, a cluttered car, or a disorganized playroom. Those are things that 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? Is my personal holiday posture the same as or really different from that of those in my family? How can I help create space for them to fully live into their own holiday posture, if they have one? Is there something I'm carrying that I keep tripping over on the inside, like unforgiveness, a lot of fear, or overwhelm about an upcoming gathering or obligation?" So creating space really is about listening to what needs my attention.

A favorite lyric of mine comes to mind, from a song called *The Lost Words Blessing*. The lyric goes, "Enter the wild with care, my love, and speak the things you see. Let new names take and root and thrive and grow." And when I think of that lyric, it feels to me, or it sounds to me like what you do and what happens as a result of listening, you're able to speak the things you see, so listen to what needs your attention. That is a wonderful way to create some space.

And then once you do that, step four, start to choose your absence, and this is a soul minimalist question, which is "What can I skip?" Now, this is not about avoiding responsibility, but it is an invitation to put on your soul minimalist hat and ask yourself honestly if there are things that you are doing this Christmas just because you do them every Christmas, activities you engage in or actions that you take just because it's that time of year, it's what you've always done. Well, maybe they're things you love, and maybe they're things your family loves, or maybe no one loves them at all, and they are causing unnecessary stress or overwhelm for you, and for everyone around you.

And so take an honest look, is there anything you can skip on purpose? See it, name it, and then skip it. Remember, these don't have to be only tangible, on the calendar events or activities, choosing your absence could also mean abandoning a particular mindset, which is not easy, but it's an option. It could be letting go of an expectation, or the smoky, spiky, grip of shame. Choose your absence so that your presence can have more impact.

Then finally, step five, plan your presence. Ask yourself, “What would be inner-life-giving for me this season? What is one action I can take on the outside to help me experience and embody my holiday posture on the inside?” And I want to keep this one really simple. You can choose many things, but I would encourage you to just choose one. What’s one thing you can do once or multiple times over over the course of the month or the week that would bring light to your inner life?

Some examples, a daily walk, a morning prayer, a hot chocolate in the afternoon with peppermint and whip cream, a candle lit on your desk. Or maybe you want to engage with a tool or a resource, not a million of them, just one. A Christmas playlist that you find, or one that you create on Spotify, an Advent book to read, a daily audio reflection to listen to, like the Quiet Collection. I made one just for you this year, and hopefully you know about it by now, and you can sign up to receive day one today. As always, the only wrong is not choosing one at all, so what is your next right thing? I hope you’ll think about that while I close by way of review.

What do you want your holiday posture to be? What invisible thoughts, beliefs, obsessions, addictions, worries, or mindsets are keeping you from leaning into your intended posture? What needs your attention? Where can you choose your absence? What’s one action you can take to plan your presence and embody your chosen posture? What would be inner-life-giving? 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 204 of The Next Right Thing. I hope the simple practice of becoming 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 that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman, and online at emilypfreeman.com. As I already mentioned, the Quiet Collection for Christmas is available now, both for just you, or for you and a friend, or a group of five or 10. To learn more and sign up for day one to be delivered to you today, visit [thequietcollection.com](http://thequietcollection.com), and we’ll make it easy.

Melissa says, “The Quiet Collection is a beautiful way to begin each day,” her body and soul came away relaxed, focused, and at peace. Amy says she looks forward to these gentle words of warmth and hope each Christmas, and Kristen gifted the Quiet Collection to her entire women’s ministry team. Well, I love that so much. Again, visit [thequietcollection.com](http://thequietcollection.com) to learn more and sign up for day one today.

In closing, a few words from Walter Wangerin Jr.’s book, *Preparing for Jesus*. “Oh Lord, you are the musician, and we are all your instruments. You breathe and we come to life. You breathe and we are horns for your glory. You blow through the world the winds of the spirit, and we, like chimes, cannot keep silent. You pluck the strings of our hearts, and we become a psalm. You come and now we must sing.” Thanks for listening, and I’ll see you next time.