



257: A Soul Minimalist's Guide for the End of the Year

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 257.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but it's 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 discerning your next right thing.

If you're listening in real-time, we have a little over two weeks until the end of the year. Here's the soul talk we all need for the finish line. Listen in.

"Is the life I'm living, the same life that wants to live in me? Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you."

Those are words from Parker Palmer in his book, *Let Your Life Speak*, and they're ones I've read and return to you for many years, but I admit at first read, they come with a whole handful of questions. Because it's one thing to feel the pressure of an unmade decision. It's another thing to add the abstract expectation of listening to your life. This could feel like a weight we're not able to bear just because we don't know how to do it. There's a headline you'll never see online. It's news that's never in the media. What is that news? It's the news of you.

The reality of your inner life doesn't arrive as a flashing headline or a link in your newsfeed. The life that wants to be lived in us, it exists, but we may not know what it is unless we begin to turn our ear toward it and make space for hearing the low tones of desire, gifting, community, and call.

One way to begin to listen to your life is by being a soul minimalist. Hopefully, this is a concept that rings familiar to you. The very first episode of this podcast is called *Become a Soul Minimalist*, and last year I did a seasonal series, a *Soul Minimalist Guide for Winter, Spring, Summer, and Autumn*. You can go back and find those if you'd like. We also had one specifically for Christmas last year. That's episode 204.

As always, it's important to define our terms. What is a soul minimalist? We know the word soul and we know the word minimalist, so why put them together? Author and minimalist Joshua Becker defines minimalism as, "The intentional promotion of things we most value and the removal of anything that distracts us from it."

So we could say the same thing about soul minimalism, except that instead of focusing on our external life, a soul minimalist does this for their internal life. So here, in the final month of the year, in the days leading up to and after Christmas, well, I thought it was a good and beautiful time to get curious about

our inner life. “Emily, we don’t have time.” I know, I know, but maybe that’s the reason why we need it more than ever. What do I value most for my inner life and what can I remove that will distract me from it? Even in the midst of one of the busiest times of year. A minimalist wants to get rid of the stuff they’re holding onto.

As a sole minimalist, I try to pay attention to what has a hold on me? What concerns are occupying my imagination? What old questions am I still carrying? What new questions have come up? Am I able to ask and answer these three questions without judgment, without feeling like I need to answer in a different way?

My work as a spiritual and creative director is to help create space to listen, to give ourselves our best chance to hear, to discern where God might be moving, and to normalize the reality that sometimes we don’t hear a thing, and that’s okay too.

All along, we are becoming someone. So who are we becoming? Last month I attended a retreat led by poet theologian, Pádraig Ó Tuama, who I’ve mentioned here before, and among all that we experienced in that short weekend, one of the most profound takeaways for me was his use of and reverence for the word you. His insistence on paying attention to our intuition because we might know more than we know we know.

His invitation to consider the fact that perhaps our job is to observe, not to resolve. And in all that conversation I heard a divine whisper. The presence of God spread out and simplified, but not in an irreverent way, just in a present here kind of way, and I recognize that sometimes what has a hold on me is me trying to choke out meaning and purpose, productivity and mattering, and that perhaps there is an invitation for me to be with God, with myself, with others in a minimalist sort of way. Not that something is lacking, but that something is full. So there’s no need to grasp, no need to clinch or bear down, but simply to be open and to be here.

Over time I’ve had to make peace with the reality that I’m not a practitioner in an expert sense of the word. I’m not an academic or a theologian or a historian.

I’m good in a crisis, but I’m not so great in a financial planning meeting. I’ve shared some of that here before. I believe I have the heart of an artist, the skill of a writer, the mind of a teacher, the posture of a spiritual director.

These titles were not bestowed upon me by someone else, but they have emerged from within as I’ve practiced being a sole minimalist, clearing the clutter of distraction, paying attention to what brings life, and the spaces I feel deeply called to as well as the ones I feel called away from.

There is a life that wants to be lived in you, which is a better way of saying you are some things and not other things, and all of this helps to inform our decisions.

That’s why discernment is a vital part of decision-making. There’s no pro-con list that will objectively tell all of us what to do in any given situation. There’s only the nuance of your life, the presence of God, the community of your people, and the season where you find yourself today.

And as always, if you don’t know what to do broadly, if you don’t have an answer to your question, if you’re holding a decision that seems to have no end, the most accessible resource available to you in this moment is this moment. And the simple question, what is the next tiny deeply right thing?

How do we make it until the end of the year? How will we get to there from here? Be who you are, not

who you aren't. Allow the silence to rise up and say something and then do the next right thing. Amen.

Thanks for listening to episode 257 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of being who you are 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 that all those daily decisions are actually making our lives.

If you're looking for a resource to help you create some space this season, I really hope you'll check out The Quiet Collection for Christmas. This is the 10-day audio devotional I've written and read for you. It's a daily reading and reflection to help ease seasonal anxiety, inspired and informed by the incarnation of Christ.

There are two ways to get The Quiet Collection for Christmas this year. You can listen via email, and that's also included in that is a private podcast feed if you like that way of listening, and you can get that through Purchasing The Quiet Collection for Christmas through my website, or if you have an iPhone, you can download our free app called The Quiet Collection and purchase the Christmas Collection right there inside the app.

Either way, iPhone or not, the Christmas Collection is available to gift until Friday, December 16th, so you can get it for yourself, iPhone or not, but you can gift it through our website through this Friday. I've heard from a spiritual director who bought it for all her directees. I've heard from a mom who listens with her anxious, 10-year-old, a friend who bought the Christmas Collection for a grieving widow, a family who listens every night next to the Christmas tree.

As always, this year's collection is all new and it's available for purchase right now, either through my website or in the app store for iPhone. Just search The Quiet Collection or check out the links in the show notes.

A final word from me for you at this time of year, a soul minimalist guide for the end of the year. A mantra we often hear this time of year is about finishing strong, but here's the thing. We've survived a lot this year. We've even thrived sometimes. Look at us being human and resilient and alive. If you can't finish strong this time, you're not the only one. So maybe let's just plain finish. Pace yourself, keep steady, finish regular. Amen.

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