



## 272: The Next Right Thing For Your Birthday

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 272.

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 discerning your next right thing.

Today's conversation is something I've never talked about here before, but it comes around every single year, it's your birthday. How can we approach our birthday like a soul minimalist, and why would we want to? Well, birthdays can be fun and lovely, but also sometimes a source of our own chronic hesitation or decision fatigue. And this can add stress because we want to enjoy it or celebrate it, but we also may wonder how can we do that well as grownups? Well, here's an episode to help you answer that question. Listen in.

\*\*\*

Well, it's my birthday week, so it seemed appropriate to release a birthday episode for all of us about how to celebrate like a soul minimalist. Now, do not confuse this with how to have a minimalist birthday. Absolutely not. Instead, this is what does it look like for you to celebrate another year of your one beautiful life in a way that feels like you, without the clutter of doing it in a way that you think you should or the way you've done it before or the way someone else expects that you ought to do it. Now, I recognize it is not all of our birthday this week, but sometime this year it's going to be yours, so maybe you can mark this episode and come back for when your birthday comes around.

Well, if you've been listening for a while, you might remember last year I had an informal seasonal series here called the Soul Minimalist Guide to The Season, so I had one for spring, summer, fall, winter, and then also one for Christmas. It actually might have been 2021, but these last three years have just been a vortex of time and space. Do you agree, disagree? Regardless, we have done a lot of soul minimalist guides in the past. Once a quarter I was set an intention for the season in order to approach it like a soul minimalist, and so now during my own birthday week is that approaches. Soon I thought it would be fun to pull out our soul minimalist guides again, but this time apply it specifically to our birthday.

Well, what is a soul minimalist? Our very first episode of The Next Right Thing podcast 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, we know the word minimalist, so why put them together? The author of the More of Less Joshua Becker defines minimalism as the intentional promotion of 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 inner life. While a minimalist may ask, "What am I holding onto?" A soul minimalist asked, "What has a hold on me?"

The first step toward elevating what you value most is to name your birthday posture. This is not a goal, it is an intention toward. It's a direction rather than a target, and there isn't a right or wrong or a once and for all. It's this year for this particular age that you might be turning what is a word or a phrase that embodies what you want your birthday posture to be? So it could be lighthearted or I want to have a super fun birthday or I need this birthday to be reflective or it could involve family. You might want it to be super meaningful. You might want it to be more of a quiet birthday. There is no wrong. But I think it's important for a soul minimalist to recognize it cannot be the year of everything. And you'll need to pay attention to what your life looks like right now and let that inform your posture for this particular birthday.

If you want to have a relaxed birthday, but this is the literal busiest season of the year in your work, then having a relaxed birthday is not a wrong choice, it just means your level of intentionality will need to be heightened in order for you to make that a reality if you have the luxury to do so. The more distance there is between what you name as your birthday posture and the events on your calendar and the season of your current life, the more distance there is between those two things, the more intention and planning you will need to employ this posture in order to make that a reality. The reason we name our birthday posture is so we can promote what we value this year and do our best to ignore the rest.

So that's the first step in our soul minimalist guide to your birthday. If you have trouble doing that, I'll repeat an often loved mantra of mine, which is, pick what you like, then see how it grows. You might be familiar with this phrase, it's from episode 34. If you don't like how it grows, pick something else. That's a little bit easier to do when we're talking about an entire season because a season lasts several months and a birthday is just one day. But I think the same principle can apply, is just pick something and pick something that as far as you know at this particular time that you think you might like as far as a posture goes, and then let's just see how it grows. Pay attention. You might learn something lovely about yourself.

The second movement in our soul minimalist guide to your birthday is to create space. What rhythms or choices can you make, maybe the weeks leading up to your birthday if you have the luxury to do that or even just on the day itself, that will help create room for you to feel like a person on your birthday this year? Those last two words are key, this year. Not every year, not forever, not what you did last year, but for this particular birthday what needs to be true in order for you to feel like a person to the degree that you have a choice in the matter. And I recognize by the way that this whole conversation is a super luxurious, indulgent conversation. But I think sometimes as grownups, maybe we don't give ourselves permission to actually think about our own birthdays and what we want those days to look like. So that's what I'm attempting to do here, I haven't always done it well. But, that's kind of what this is about, is to the degree that we have a choice, what are some things, some rhythms, some choices that I can make on the very day that will help me feel like a person, my person, me, my own self, whatever it is for you. Again, there's no wrong create space to experience that on this particular day or on the day surrounding it.

So you're naming your posture, you're creating some birthday space or some seasonal space, this birthday, and now third is listen for what needs your attention. Remember, a minimalist might ask this question about their outer life, their overflowing closets or their messy home office or whatever the case might be. So a soul minimalist. Ask this question for the level of her inner life, what needs my attention on the inside?

I think our birthday is a good time of year as a yearly practice to take a small bit of time for some self-reflection. It doesn't have to be long, it doesn't have to be fancy, and it doesn't even have to be super deep. But just the simple question about your inner life, where you are right now as you begin another year of your life. What needs my attention? What's happening in my life this birthday and the days surrounding it that have changed since my last birthday? Is there an anxiety I've been living with that I can't place or name? Is there a pain in my body that won't go away? Am I holding on to a disappointment or a dream or a desire that I haven't yet made space to name? If your answer is yes to any of those things that need your

attention, perhaps your next right thing is to either make a decision, make some time, or make some peace.

So if you have a decision to make, maybe there's an action to take or a choice to make about this thing that you are now aware of. Maybe you need to make some time for a conversation or some understanding or quality time with a person in your life, or maybe it's time to finally make some peace to begin to grieve something, to lament, let go or offer forgiveness to someone else or even to yourself.

The fourth movement in our soul minimalist guide to our birthday, choose your absence. What can you skip this year? This is not an attempt to avoid something necessarily, but it's an invitation to put on your soul minimalist hat when you look at your birthday and ask yourself, honestly, are there some things I do on my birthday every year just because it's what we've always done, but maybe they're kind of not something that I love? Maybe it causes unnecessary stress or overwhelm or anxiety in you or your family, maybe you don't even like those things. Maybe you always have cake, but you don't actually like cake. Maybe you gather with a particular group because it's habit or ritual, but you realize that's not really what I want to do on my birthday this year. And there might be all kinds of reasons why you can't back out of that commitment, I don't know. But I think finding something that you can skip or some place where you can choose your absence could be a gift to yourself on your birthday.

I think a lot of times we think about, well, what am I going to do on my birthday and who do I want to be with? But you might also want to think about what you don't want to do and who you don't want to be with. Is there something you would skip on purpose? Remember, this doesn't have to be only tangible things on the calendar, like events or activities. It could also include mindsets, expectations, and shame. Choose your absence. What can you skip? What can you let go?

And finally, this could be the fun part for you, plan your presence. What would be inner life giving for you on your birthday this year? What's an action that you can take on the outside to help you experience and embody your birthday posture on the inside? And remember, that's why it's so important to choose your birthday posture for this year because maybe last year was a milestone birthday, maybe you turned 30 last year or 50 last year, and it was huge. And now you're just turning like 31 or 51 and it doesn't feel like as big of a deal. Maybe that's great with you. Maybe you want it to be more quiet. So planning your presence is going to look different this year than it did last year.

And let's keep it simple, you can choose a lot of things to plan your presence in, but I would encourage you to pick at least one. What is one action you can take? Maybe it's something you're going to eat or a place you know want to go or a group you know want to see and that in doing so this will bring light and energy to your inner life. As always, the only wrong is not choosing at all. So what is your next right thing? Plan your presence. So you can think about that while I close us out by way of review.

What do you want your birthday posture to be this year? What invisible thoughts, beliefs, obsessions, addictions, or mindsets are going to keep you from leaning into your intended birthday 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 birthday 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. And also in the words of our friend Beth Silvers over at Pantsuit Politics, may you have the best birthday available to you.

\*\*\*

Thanks for listening to episode 272 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple and fun practice of celebrating your birthday like 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 making our lives. As always, you can find me on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman and online at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com), where you can also find a transcript of this and every episode.

Special thanks to the team at Unmutable who faithfully edits our sound and to Ashley Sherlock, my content manager, who keeps me organized and creative in all Next Right Things, including our podcast, tech, and show notes. If it's not your birthday anytime soon, I hope you'll return to this episode when your day comes around. And if you know someone who has a birthday coming up, send this episode their way.

In closing, I'll read a portion of a poem by one of my favorites, John O'Donohue, from his book, *To Bless the Space Between Us*. And the poem is titled simply, *For Your Birthday*.

Blessed be the mind that dreamed the day the blueprint of your life would begin to glow on earth, illuminating all the faces and voices that would arrive to invite your soul to growth. On this echoing day of your birth, may you open the gift of solitude in order to receive your soul. Enter the generosity of silence to hear your hidden heart. Know the serenity of stillness to be unfolded anew by the miracle of your being.

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