



296: What's Saving My Autumn Life

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 296. I'm an author, a spiritual director, and an occasional workshop leader. I live in the Piedmont of North Carolina with my family and through my work I've helped thousands of spiritually thoughtful people overcome decision fatigue so that they can discern their next right thing in faith, in work and in life. You are enjoying this podcast ad free because of the generous support of subscribers to the Soul Minimalist on Substack.

You can learn more and subscribe at emilypfreeman.substack.com where we'll continue the conversation we start here about discernment and decision-making for anyone who wants to move beyond the pro con list. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just are someone who needs a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, if that's you, you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing.

Today's question, what's saving your life right now, specifically when it comes to autumn? It could be anything from a favorite product to a spiritual practice, a fun new show or a meaningful relationship. When it comes to naming what we love this fall, everything counts. Listen in

If you've been around here a while, you already know that once every quarter I like to reflect and name what's saving my life.

Hat tip to Barbara Brown Taylor and the friend who asked her this question many years ago that's now become part of our cultural ethos in a way to be able to name what's saving your life. This is not a literal saving your life, although maybe sometimes it is, but we love this question because it's a large bucket for a lot of things. You could name simple and small moments or you could name dreams coming true, the handy gadgets, the skincare favorites or tips and tricks that we've learned and loved.

The list of what's saving your life right now may be really long or it might be really short, but if you sit to consider it, I bet you could come up with something. And the reason this is important, at least for me, is because this is part of living a reflective life. This is kind of the fun part of looking back. It could be a great starting point, especially for those of you who have heard me drone on and on for years about the importance of reflection and you just don't get it.

Maybe you're a little bit afraid to look back on your life, afraid that all you'll see are mistakes and mishaps, but this, what's saving my life right now is naming what's here now and maybe the last couple of months, things that have been meaningful to you, gifts that you have enjoyed, and that's one small baby step into the world of self-reflection and reflecting on your life. So maybe for you, this could be a great place to begin.

One way to help you do that is I'm just going to share with you 10 things that are saving my autumn life right now. And listen, I share these in no particular order. They're not in order of importance, and so I'll just jump right in with number one. The first thing that I've recognized is saving my life in the season are hand crosses and stones.

Now, if you've never heard of a hand cross and you don't understand what I mean by stones, I will just say that I have at least two small bowls in my office filled with various objects to hold, and I hold these objects during certain times, anytime really, but I hold them during prayer, a lot of times during Zoom calls, sometimes while I'm reading, really anytime when I feel like I might need something to do with my hands to keep my hands occupied or to have a sense of comfort or grounding.

I use all kinds of objects from rocks I find in my neighborhood, smooth shells collected from the shoreline or even stones designed for this very purpose like a worry stone with a little thumbprint that's carved in it or an inspirational rock with a word stamped on it. Those aren't found in nature. Those are made with machines or with people stamping words on them like 'Faith' or 'Belief,' things like that. I have a few of those. They can be a little cheesy, but sometimes it's just what you need.

My current favorite thing to hold are either I mentioned before, a hand cross made of olive wood, like the kind they sell at The Garden Tomb in Israel. If you've ever been there, they sell a lot of those there. But you can also just get them on regular old Amazon. I also have a few smooth, heavy round spheres, the kind you can find at a gem or a rock shop like clear quartz or moonstone. And listen, let me just point this out. The object is not the point. It's just something to do with your hands. It really doesn't matter what it is. It's just a way to hold onto something while I'm doing something else like praying or reading or working to be present, especially for online meetings. So I just like to hold a little something in my hand. And that's one of the things that's saving my life right now, helping me to be present, to have something to fidget with, like a grownup fidget spinner, if you will, but a little more grounding than that.

Another thing saving my life this season is a book by Cindy S. Lee called *Our Unforming*. I mentioned this in my monthly letter that I send out at the end of every month. It's where I share the books that I'm currently reading. If you don't get that letter but want to, of course it's free. It comes out on the last day of every month, emilypfreeman.com/letter. The subtitle of her book is *De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation*.

And I haven't finished the book, but I have started it and it is phenomenal. Howard Thurman writes that the source of life is God, and Cindy Lee references him when she talks about how the spiritual life really is about returning to God from whom we have come, and she submits that in this cyclical formation. We are also returning to ourselves. She says, and this is a quote from her, "Our spiritual lives are the cyclical journey of becoming that person God first saw, still sees and will always see in us."

And so she concludes in summary, something I believe in my bones, that spiritual formation is not about progress, but about wholeness. Her words and the way she sees the world as an American woman, it's a perspective I need. It's one I'm challenged by and one I am deeply grateful for specifically in this season. Well, speaking of seasons, quick pivot is one of my favorite shows right now. Number three, things save my life is *Survivor*.

Listen, ever since we watched *Survivor* with my sister and her husband back way before John and I even had our kids, I've been a fan of this show. We missed it a few years in the middle there when the kids were really small, but we've been fully back in it for a while and I'm so glad this fall, September, the first episodes aired of this new season, and I'm so excited about it. It's just something fun to look forward to, something that's still a network TV show. It's a reality show.

It's all about decision-making, and what do humans do when they are taken out of their comfort zone and every other thing they always rely on to make their decisions and they're forced to make really "Life or death," and I put that in quotes, "Life or death" in the game, decisions without all of their support systems that they usually depend on, what is in them that they can grab onto out on an island with a bunch of strangers.

It's fascinating to watch. I will stand by that. Well number four, something saving my life are the plants in my office. Since moving my office into our sunroom I am so glad to be surrounded by happy plants. One is a monster that we've had for a while, but I've only started paying attention to it this past spring when I put it in my office. I've shared before about the terracotta watering spikes that I use to water these plants, a plant nanny, if you will.

And that particular plant seems to really love it, and it seems to be doing really well. Well, I was so excited when it seemed like she was sprouting new leaves, new shoots that were going to become new leaves, but I've watched them for months now, and those leaves were really just long, soft like sticks that have stayed brown, not green.

Finally, I googled it and I learned that those were never going to be leaves, but they're actually aerial roots. That's a thing. It's a way for the plant to attach herself to trees or other surrounding plants if she needs to. And I did not know that this particular plant is a climbing plant, but there you go. Either way, having these plants in my office is saving my life, especially during this time of year with the anticipation of leaves that are going to change soon, with many of the trees outside my office.

Some are evergreen, but many will be losing their leaves, and so my green view outside will turn a bit more brown and gray, which I particularly love. But I also love the fact that there are green plants on the inside that I can look forward to enjoying all fall and winter. A fifth thing saving my life is a magnetic phone stand.

This is not specific to fall, but it is something that I use every day and I've just started realizing that I love it. It's a phone stand that is also a magnet, so you have to have that magnet, that circle magnet thing on your phone case. I have one at my desk that is adjustable in height, and I use it to keep my phone in place, almost like I put my phone in a timeout. I put it on that little magnetic stand. And I also sometimes use that for video.

So sometimes when you see me do the Instagram videos on stories where I'm taking off my nail polish with that little nail polish remover pot from Olive and June, that's what my phone is on. It's on this magnetic stand, and that's how I video myself. It's adjustable, small and it's lightweight, but I just keep it there on my desk.

And then I also have one in my car that's for, you put it on your car. Your dashboard sticks to it. You put it on there, and then you can have your phone in view for your maps or whatever for navigation. So magnetic phone stands for the win. What did I do before this? I don't even know. Number six, saving my life this autumn is my mug from a local brunch restaurant. If you're local to Greensboro, it's the Sage Mule.

That won't mean much to you if you're outside of the area, but this brunch place has the best coffee mugs. I love mine. They're heavy. They're large enough to get your hand through the handle, which is ideal. It's got a black and white, the logo is black, the mug is white, which is my favorite diner mug is black and white ones, and I love this one.

If you're ever in Greensboro, go to the Sage Mule. Get their food, yes, and also grab a coffee mug on your way out. But I'll say maybe bigger picture is something I think is really fun is to just have, if you're going to have coffee mugs anyway, have them from your local area and where you live. It's like a nice little fun, simple, maybe silly way to feel connected to your community.

At least it is for me. I mean, again, I said it's small, it's simple. But I do like having these mugs from local area coffee shops, especially when they're good ones. Look for those big old handles. Number seven, something saving my life specifically this season is I've picked up

doodling. I use that word lightly. It's not art. I mean, it is I guess, but I'm not trying to necessarily be super good at it.

I'm sort of leaning into my beginner posture. If you get my monthly letter, you've maybe already read about my newfound hobby as a beginner doodler. I'm pretty good at doodling plants and leaves, simple things, not so great at human faces, but I mean, even ones that look like cartoons, they don't even look like good cartoons, but whatever. I am enjoying the practice of, I say doodling, that makes it sound like it's kind of offhanded.

It's actually pretty intentional. I have a little sketchbook and everything, but it's still doodling. It's just doing something for no marketable reason and not because I think I'm good at it, but just to keep my hands busy. Maybe that's something that's I'm noticing, realizing in this moment that is a common denominator and some things that are saving my life right now is Emily needs to keep her hands moving.

But doodling is one way I've been doing that and it's been a nice little grounding kind of mindless, enjoyable practice. Well, number eight is on the more pricey side of something that's saving my life, it is my Remarkable. This is not a commercial form Remarkable, but I'm going to go ahead and share it anyway because it's something that's made a big difference for me in the last month. If you don't know what a Remarkable is, I'm going to be the worst person to describe it.

But it is a type of tablet that offers paper-like writing and reading. It does not have a glare or it's not backlit, so you can read it outside in the sunlight. It's supposed to be able to replace your paper notebooks, but I'm not there yet. And it also does convert your handwriting to type to text. So if you like to take notes with your hand and then it can become a document that is digital.

I do think that it does write, it does feel not exactly like paper, but kind of, which I do really enjoy. But the way it saved my life this month in particular is it's enabled me to read PDFs. I have several endorsements I've agreed to, and those endorsements are sent, the books I'm reading for endorsement are sent via PDF. And so it's very easy to send the PDF from my laptop or my desktop to the Remarkable, and then I can read it on the Remarkable, but I can also mark on it, underline, make notes as I go.

Because what I've learned about myself is I don't like to read, and maybe a lot of you are this way too, I don't like to read on my phone or on a screen that's backlit or on a laptop. I don't want to have to carry my laptop around to read something for endorsement. And so sometimes publishers won't send you the hard copy so you don't have the actual paper copy. Plus it's nice to save the paper and not have to read it that way. So it is good to be able to read the PDF, but I don't love reading it on a screen. And so the Remarkable makes that easy where I can read it, it saves my eyes, and I can also write on it as I go along.

And that way when it's time to write the endorsement, I have all my notes right there and it's very simple to use. So I like it that way. Also, fun fact, I can use it for my doodling, which is not the only reason to get a Remarkable, but it is a fun one. So that's been really fun. I definitely do not use the Remarkable in all the ways that a person could. There are so many more things it can do than what I'm using it currently for, but that's one way that it's saving my life right now.

A ninth thing saving my life, I feel like I talk about this every season, is fall playlists on Spotify. I have three current favorites. First of all is my own that I have curated and add to over time. You can follow it too. We'll link to it in the show notes. It's simply called Autumn. There's another one I listen to that my sister has curated. She picks autumnal songs with lots of banjos, which I love. Her playlist is called, you guessed it, Autumnal.

Autumnal. Feel like I'm not saying it right. And then Kendra, The Lazy Genius, she has a playlist called Breezy Instrumental. It's not necessarily autumn specific, but it's a fantastic playlist that I love to play in the kitchen. In fact, I'll usually have one of these three on repeat in the kitchen in the evenings these days, and also especially when I'm driving. Well, finally, the 10th thing saving my life this season is finally being able to talk about this next book.

I announced last week on the podcast that I have a brand new book I've written, and it's coming out in March called *How to Walk Into A Room*. The subtitle is *The Art of Knowing When to Stay and When to Walk Away*. And it's one that I've been working on for the better part of two years. I've not been writing two years, but I've been slowly building up to. And then in the spring of 2022, started writing and working on *Loosely*, and then in the winter of 2023 really deeply worked and finished the book.

But as you can see, that's many, many months on end of working on this huge project that dives deep into not only this idea of discernment and decision-making on a deeper level, but also my own life. And I've not really been able to talk about it. No one kept me from talking about it, but I have learned about myself six books in that I do better when I can put my head down, work, not have to figure out how to talk about the work yet, just be able to do the work.

And then once the work is done to be able to then turn to you and say, "Hey, I made something. I made something for us. I hope it's helpful for you." But not to have to do that while I'm still working on it. But all that to say, the challenge of doing it that way is that I have been working on this huge thing that I've been mind, soul, spirit, body, everything involved in, but I've had to continue doing podcast episodes and Substacks and monthly letters and not mention anything about this giant thing I've been working on.

So to be able to talk about that openly now, and it kind of feels like my two halves have come together as one. And so I have been deeply grateful not only to be able to talk about it, but also for your kindness in receiving it and your support in pre-ordering it and just for being the kind of people that I want to keep writing books for. So thank you. Well, there you have it, 10 things saving my life this Autumn.

I hope you'll take some time this week to consider what might be saving yours, because remember, it's not about the thing itself, just like it's not about the decisions you're making, not really, but what it's always and ever about is the person who you are becoming as you continue to do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 296 of *The Next Right Thing*. Well, I hope this simple practice of naming small gifts 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 where you can find a transcript of this and every episode. Special thanks to the team at Immutable who faithfully edits and mixes our sound, and to Ashley who does our show notes. And thanks to you for listening, for leaving reviews on Apple podcasts so others can find us here, and for your kind support through emails and DMs.

It is always good to hear from you. Speaking of hearing from you, our Soul Minimalist highlight of the week is from Carolyn who said, "Emily, you are the first person I've subscribed to on Substack. I've held off not feeling I could afford it, but I so value your words and your example that I couldn't stay away any longer." Well, I'm glad to hear it, Carolyn, and thank you so much for being here.

Thanks for taking a chance on me. I hope you continue to enjoy it. Well, now a benediction to send you on your way. May you have eyes to see the quirks of your own personality, the things you like that bring joy and delight in this season, and may you have the wisdom to fully enjoy them. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.