



305: Creating an Evening Routine with Emily Ley

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 305. 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, work, and life. You're enjoying this podcast ad free because of the generous, and I do mean generous support of subscribers to the Soul Minimalist on Substack. You can learn more and subscribe at emilypfreeman.substack.com. That's 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 or with 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, well, you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing.

My guest today is the founder of Simplified, which is a bestselling brand of planners and organizational tools for busy women. You can find those online and in actual stores like Target, Walmart, Office Depot and Staples. Her name is Emily Ley and she has spent nearly 13 years empowering, inspiring, and equipping women in the areas of organization, planning and simplicity. She's the host of the Simplified podcast and author of national bestselling books, *Grace, Not Perfection: A Simplified Life, When Less Becomes More* and *Growing Boldly*. But today, we're going to talk about concepts she writes about in her newest book, *Near In the Night: A Collection of Reflections on Finding God's Peace and Rest*. If you, like me, have trouble turning off your mind at the close of day and are hoping for some simple practices to help you do that with ease, listen in.

Emily P. Freeman:

Hi, Emily Ley, welcome to The Next Right Thing.

Emily Ley:

Hi. Thank you for having me.

Emily P. Freeman:

I am so glad to have you today mainly because I'm just going to start it right off and tell you that I am so looking forward/not looking forward to having a conversation about one of the routines that I find to be the most difficult, and that is my evening routine. But before we get there, I would first love to hear you share just a little bit about yourself, where you live, your family, and maybe what your days look like right now.

Emily Ley:

Yeah. Well, first of all, thank you for having me. I told you right before we started this, but I'm a big fan of your podcast, so it is so fun to be here. Well, my name is Emily also, and I live in Pensacola, Florida with my husband and our three kids who are no longer tiny children, which is very strange. I have two eight-year-olds. My twins are Tyler and Caroline, and then we have a twelve-year-old boy named Brady and a dog named Walter who's here with me today. I'm the founder of a company called Simplified and we make planners and organizational tools for busy women, and I write books and host a podcast and generally, just stay very, very busy. It's a lot of fun.

Emily P. Freeman:

We share not only a name but also, the fact that we have twins.

Emily Ley:

I know, and you're like a step ahead of me in the kid ages thing, so I'm taking notes.

Emily P. Freeman:

Yeah. That's right. Wait, did you say are your twins your younger ones?

Emily Ley:

Yeah. They're eight.

Emily P. Freeman:

Okay. See, I had twins first, which you already had one and then you added more.

Emily Ley:

We did. We went back for the second one and we got a BOGO, which was awesome and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Emily P. Freeman:

That's good. You knew what you're getting into sort of, but not really. That's how this goes.

Emily Ley:

Sort of, but not really. Yeah.

Emily P. Freeman:

Well, I mentioned it already Emily Ley, which by the way, I think you might be a first name last name person for me. You know how some people, you say their first and last name always?

Emily Ley:

I still say Brian Ley when I talk about my husband. He is my first and last name person.

Emily P. Freeman:

I get it. I call John Freeman. I'll do that. I do that too. So here we are. I'll try not to do that here because that could be annoying for the listener, but here is something that I've been thinking about a lot lately. You just mentioned it, the fact that our kids are in different stages. So my kids are older. I've got two out of the three out of the house. Our youngest is a junior in high school now.

Emily Ley:

Oh my goodness.

Emily P. Freeman:

And so it goes by fast, but also not, that's the whole thing. But I will say because of that, our current season of life, my morning routine is my jam. I've got that on lock pretty much as far as it being for the most part, predictable, and it's very life-giving and it changes with the season, but for the most part I can rely on it.

But here's the deal. At the end of the day, I have such a hard time ending the day well, lately. Especially lately, this has not always been the case, but I don't know if it's that we did have two leave the house last year, and so I'm still getting used to that. I'm not sure what the deal is. Maybe you can help me out, but I'm curious, since you have written a beautiful book, which I love the cover by the way, *Near In The Night*, I'm curious, is there a single most... And I'm going to put you on the spot. A single most transformative practice that you have found that's helped you end the day well? Or does it just depend on your season or tell me if there's top right here at the top of the episode. Here's the thing that helped me the most.

Emily Ley:

It's funny, the season that I'm in is the peak crazy evening season, I think. I don't know if it gets crazier, it might, but we're in football five days a week, cheerleading three days a week, basketball. When you have three kids and they each choose a sport, it turns out, it's a lot.

Emily P. Freeman:

Yeah, that's your life.

Emily Ley:

Yeah, I'm in the car... And every evening looks different. And so for me, and this has just been

a part of my evening routine since I was a kid, I am a bath girl. I love my bathtub and I have a candle right there and I have my book that I'm reading right there, and I will every single night, typically around the same time, I go and I take a bath and everybody knows that's my... I just need 20 minutes, give me a little space and a little time. And it helps. I think it physically just helps my body and my brain know that now's the time to calm down because my problem in this season is that I'm going so quickly and moving so quickly and thinking so quickly that at the end of the day it's hard to turn it off.

And so for me, it's just that physical... It's almost a spiritual act of going in the bathroom and turning the lights down, getting a hot bath going and getting in there and just relaxing for a couple minutes and then I can come out and do the rest of the things that mom needs to take care of before the whole house shuts down. But I really feel like once you find the thing that speaks to your body and your soul and your spirit, whether it's reading a book or going for a walk outside, once you find that thing, just protecting it and making it a constant part of your routine, it's really helpful.

Emily P. Freeman:

You already said two things that I want to make note of. The first is that you lowered the lights. I really appreciate your sensitivity to light. I've heard you say several, turn off the overhead lights, turn on the lamps to give us that physical cue, that visual cue that the day is ending. But I also notice that you do it before you do the evening stuff with the whole family.

Emily Ley:

Yeah.

Emily P. Freeman:

You don't wait until the kids go to bed?

Emily Ley:

No, because an early bird. So I wake up pretty early and I love to go to bed pretty early, so once my kids are tucked in, my head's hitting the pillow, most nights. And so for me, I really find that when I don't do that, when I leave that part of the routine out, that I'm still frantic. I'm trying to get the kids in bed, I'm trying to get the house picked up and I'm trying to get everybody quieted down for the evening. But when I do that for myself, I find that I'm able to re-emerge and do the same for my kids. And so I like to do this little thing that my mom taught me. She did this for me when I was little and I feel like it's the special warm thing to do.

I go in my kids' rooms and I try to... We call it turn-down service. So I'll go in their rooms and turn off the overhead lights, turn on the bedside lamp, turn the bed down, and I can distinctly remember as a child, coming home from dance practice and being frazzled and busy and stressed and in high school, and I would come into my room and my mom will have done that for me. And it just feels like, no words. There were no words said. She didn't say I

ike, "Hey, I did this for you." It was just that, I went into the room and I just felt so loved, I felt so cared for. And so I find that doing that for myself is also helpful as well. So before I get in the bathtub, I turn my own bed down and turn the little light on and it's little bitty things, but it's a way of telling yourself, "Hey, we've got this. It's okay to do nice and special things for yourself." So yeah, I think once you find what that thing is just constantly repeating it, eventually, it becomes a habit.

Emily P. Freeman:

I don't know why that makes me tear up, but it does. I think that just that visual of not only doing that, having that done for you when you were young and then doing it for your small people, but also doing it for yourself and caring for yourself in that way is a profound gift that I think I sometimes forget what a big impact those small things can have.

Emily Ley:

Oh my goodness. And I'm reaching the age of life now with my kids where I'm starting to see a little bit of what they're learning, what they see and what they're repeating. And so for probably the past year and a half, Caroline, my daughter, she's eight, she will sneak in my room on days that she knows mom has had a particularly frazzling day, and I will come in my own room, to go in and get a bath and my bed's turned down and my curtains are drawn and my little lights on, and sometimes she puts a little note on my pillow and it is the most... You know, as a mom, when you see that they've clearly learned something from you and it's really sweet. It means the absolute world.

Emily P. Freeman:

It sounds like your mom has passed down her legacy and it continues.

Emily Ley:

Yeah.

Emily P. Freeman:

That's beautiful. Well, you mentioned you're an early bird. Have you always been someone who prioritizes sleep?

Emily Ley:

No, not at all. When I started Simplified, it was about 15 and a half now years ago, I'm the person that I throw myself into things, so I'm very all or nothing. And when I started the company and I saw so much potential and I saw how much fun I was having doing it, I just wanted to go, go, go and work, work, work and just see where it was going to go and it went places I could have never imagined, but that meant staying up all hours. I can remember working a full-time job at university and also trying to get Simplified off the ground and I would stay up until three o'clock in the morning and get up at six to go to work.

And it was fine because I loved it so much and I just knew I was working towards this huge idea of leaving that corporate environment and doing my own thing. And so there were a lot

of years that I did not prioritize sleep or rest or self-care or myself. A few years ago, I found that I was paying the price for that, that you can't really go that fast and that hard for that long. And so now that I'm a little bit older and Simplified's a little more stable. I've just found it so important. If you're not protecting the asset, which is yourself, if you're not taking care of yourself, there's absolutely nothing left in you to give to anybody else.

Emily P. Freeman:

Was there a particular habit or routine that you started with back when you went from burning the candle at both ends to saying, actually no, I need to be a person and for me that means going to bed at nine o'clock?

Emily Ley:

Maybe. When I think and you know this because you've had twins, but when you have two small people who don't like to sleep, you're in survival mode for a little while and I think that that's okay. I think it's okay to have seasons of staying up late and working hard and obviously, raising tiny children, but when you realize that the seasons are shifting and that there might be more space for you to do the things that you genuinely know are good for you, for me, it just started with being disciplined about it. When you think about habits, and I love your perspective on these types of topics too, but when you think about habits, a lot of times in the beginning, it's work. I had to set an alarm on my phone to say, "Now's the time you should be turning off the computer. Now's the time that you should think about, the kids are probably asleep by now, you should probably go to sleep."

Emily P. Freeman:

And was it easy for you to ignore those or were you like, "I am motivated by this alarm?"

Emily Ley:

I very quickly realized how much better I felt when I was doing those things. And for me, when there's a reward in it and I'm like, "Okay, this is working." It's hard to ignore. I was also having health issues. I was suddenly during those years, and I can distinctly remember this era of my life, it was 2017. I was starting to have all kinds of health issues, and it was just a really physical mental burnout period of time. And once I started implementing these small things, they seem so small and insignificant, but really, they're quite enormous. When I started implementing those, I saw how quickly things turned around, and even though it was work to implement those kinds of habits in the beginning, eventually, they become the norm. And so now when the clock says nine o'clock, I'm like, it's nearing my bedtime.

Emily P. Freeman:

What time do you get up in the morning, Emily?

Emily Ley:

Six. Not super early.

Emily P. Freeman:

Yeah, that's fairly normal.

Emily Ley:

Yeah. Yeah. I set my alarm for 5:30 and I'll just press snooze for a few times until about six o'clock. And I like to be up when everybody else is up and moving around, but my husband shuts the house down at night and I wake it up in the morning.

Emily P. Freeman:

Nice. That's a lovely visual. Well, maybe you remember, maybe you don't, you can tell me. But when Oprah first started writing her ongoing piece, What I Know For Sure.

Emily Ley:

I love it.

Emily P. Freeman:

I love it too. And I remember riffing off of that and thinking, you know what? I'm going to write for 30 days about things that I know for sure. But then when I sat down to do it, I found that for [inaudible 00:15:33] was tripping me up. And so I shifted to writing down and reflecting on things that I'm learning, which has become a regular rhythm of my own life since 2014 is recording things I'm learning on a monthly, quarterly basis. And I feel like that's been really generative for me. You mentioned something similar, you said over the last few years I found it more important than ever to ground myself in the truths I know for sure.

Emily Ley:

Absolutely. When I started writing this book, and this is actually the second in a little miniseries, Sure As The Sunrise came first as a morning devotional, and then this one came second. When I started writing this book, it was in the middle of the pandemic and I didn't know a lot for sure. I had three kids I was trying to homeschool. I was running a company that made day planners for a living and everyone's plans got canceled. There's a lot we didn't know for sure. And so I don't do very well with a lot of lack of structure and there was no structure. Everything was wild, everything was confusing. I remember standing on my back porch one morning and looking out and thinking... I felt like, God, where are you? Did you forget about us here because this is nuts.

And I remember calling my mom and saying, "How am I supposed to do all this? How am I supposed to homeschool three kids, run a company, be in charge of nine team members and... What am I doing?" And she goes, "I have no idea. I've never done this before. I don't know what to tell you." And so it was in that moment on my back porch, the sun rises in right off our back porch, on the water. We live on Pensacola Bay, and I was looking at the sunrise, and I have not had very many of these moments in my life where I just viscerally physically hear God, but in that moment I heard him say, "I have not forgotten about you. The sun still comes up every day." It does, and I know that for sure.

I know that tomorrow if it's raining or snowing or whatever, if the world's on fire, the sun's still going to come up. And so that was the first thing that I was like, I don't know a lot, but I know that the sun is still going to come up tomorrow. And for whatever reason in that situation, during that season, that was really comforting to me, to know that he was still there. The sun's still coming up. And so I did the same thing. I just started searching for what are the things I know for sure, and those truths, be them biblical or just from my own lived experience, they became the backbone to both of these books.

Emily P. Freeman:

You articulated some of the comforts and complications in naming *What We Know For Sure*, and really, it's that part. What do I know for sure? That becomes a really important filter, and it comes down to some of what you mentioned, the really large themes or even parts of our faith or our core values or those things that... It's the big categories of things that really matter, and I could see why that would become a catalyst for writing about how to end our day well and not get stuck in the complexity of maybe the details or anxiety that we might be carrying with us into the night. I'm curious how working on these a hundred meditations for the evening, what did it change for you? What do you know now that you didn't know before you wrote these?

Emily Ley:

I think the biggest thing is that we are constantly evolving and changing, and life is constantly changing and moving, and God is in every detail of it. I'm the type of person that at the end of the day, I'm typically pretty full of anxiety. I've picked up many things to worry about throughout the day. I like to worry about the things I can control, the things I can't, the things I said, whatever I did 10 years ago that maybe I shouldn't be thinking about it right now. And so at the end of the day, I find myself just thirsty for that. What are the things that I know for sure and what are the things I know for sure that are certain and never changing? And then there's this overarching truth that things are always going to change and that God is in every bit of it. And that's okay.

I turned 40 this year. I was like last year, I don't know how old I am anymore. I turned 40, and that's a whole thing. Turning 40, I feel like did something to my brain where I was, the things that really, really mattered suddenly don't matter as much, and the things that didn't really used to matter are now on fire on the front of the stove. And so realizing that God is in every detail of that, he's in my worries. He's in the things that keep us up at night. I don't know, to me, there's just such a comfort in knowing I'm not alone in any of it.

Emily P. Freeman:

Absolutely. It's funny you talk about turning 40. I can relate to that feeling of like, oh, things shift into focus, and I hear that continues to happen, Emily Ley, as we hear that continue to age.

Emily Ley:

I hear that.

Emily P. Freeman:

It just keeps going. Thanks be unto God. I almost wonder, you mentioned it's what I know for sure, also that are certain and unchanging, but then recognizing and also, most things are always changing, and it invites me to want to maybe change the mantra to what I know for sure for now.

Emily Ley:

Oh, I love that.

Emily P. Freeman:

That allows for maybe a more generative or larger conversation with it or in that space.

Emily Ley:

It's funny, you write a book and then you market a book, and so it's like you live it twice.

Emily P. Freeman:

Right?

Emily Ley:

You live the story while you're writing it, and then you relive it while you're sharing the story about it. But I found, or I've always found really, that the tactical tips are the things that speak to me the most, I love a good encouraging story and I love advice from other people, and hearing what they've gone through makes me feel less alone. But I also want to know the tactical tips. I want to know how to do the thing. That's why I make planners for a living.

And so for me, one of the things that was super important to me in talking about this type of a thing is talking about what actually works. And I view it as a toolbox. What are the things that I could hear about from other people that I could put in my proverbial toolbox to pull out at night when I'm trying to develop an evening routine, or in the morning when I'm trying to develop a morning routine, what does it actually look like and what are the things that I can add to my toolbox? And so throughout writing and sharing about this book, I've been trying to develop that toolbox and try things on, and some of them work and some of them don't. But adding things to that that help bring my body and my mind and my heart to a calmer spot before sleep, you know what I mean?

Emily P. Freeman:

Absolutely. Are there things off the top of your head that you found that you tried that did not work for you?

Emily Ley:

Yes. I would really love to know how to meditate, and it's something that I giggle about it in my head when I think about it. I'm just a fidgety person. I can't do it, but it's something that I want to learn more. It's something I'm very curious about. For many people who've tried to

meditate in the past or I read *Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics* by Dan Harris, and it's really helpful, that kind of thing. But I'm the type of person that will close my eyes and try to center my thoughts and my... It's like an invitation for all the thoughts to come into my brain. And so I would say that, so far, but I'm still very curious about it. A lot of people say that having tea or something like that at night is really helpful for them, not helpful for me. I don't know why I forget about it. I go off and do something else. So it's something I tried on. It doesn't really work for me.

I like to make my big thing of water at the end of the night and hang out with that. So yeah, I think it's just a matter of trying on different things and different ideas and seeing what fits and then seeing what doesn't. Obviously, the bath thing for me is really helpful. Also, journaling. Journaling is one thing, but for me, I like to clear my brain. So taking all the to-dos, all the worries, all the things out of my brain in list format and just writing them down. So I use a notebook and I just have this gargantuan list going of things I need to do, and I get them out. And once they're out of my head and they're on paper, I feel like they're safer there and I don't have to keep continually reminding myself of them. And so that practice for me, has been super helpful. And then just my time with my kids, just tucking them in and turning down their covers. I don't know. For me, it's soothing. It makes me feel happy, something I enjoy doing. And it quiets my brain as well.

Emily P. Freeman:

There's such a lovely list of a lot of things, some that worked and some that didn't work for you personally, but it's just a reminder that we can take notes from other people's routines, try things on, put them down, but that we have a lot of options. And the point is, and I think it's important to remember that our rhythm of life, we already have a rhythm of life. The question is it one that we want? And also recognizing that our rhythm of life will change over time, that it doesn't have to be set in stone. And so I think you offer in this book, but just also in this conversation, a wide table for us to remember the reason why this can be really valuable and life giving, but also that it's not going to look just one way.

Emily Ley:

Absolutely. And I think there's a lot of beauty too in giving yourself the space and the grace to examine the way you're living your life and to think like, is this working for me anymore? Maybe there are parts of it that worked for a season but are starting to not fit, and we don't often recognize them until we take the time to step back and look at how we're doing it. And I love the way that you explore these topics on your podcast and in your books, that these daily rituals, these daily habits, the choices we make throughout the day, especially the small ones, they're quite important. And so often we think, no, I have work I have to do. I need to worry about X, Y, and Z. And yet those things matter, but underlying it all is this foundation we're creating with every small choice we make. And so taking the time to examine those things is very important.

Emily P. Freeman:

I would love to have you in closing, Emily, read us out. Something I love to have authors do, is read their own work, but before I have you do that, I do have one final question, and that is, what is your next right thing?

Emily Ley:

That is a big question. My next right thing is a season of quiet, and I don't think I've ever answered this question out loud. I think that for me, it's a season of quiet. We're coming into the holidays. I have a book deadline looming, and I have not started the book. It's started. It's not where me as an over-worker would like it to be, but I'm trying to give myself the space to ruminate on what that is and be creative and fill my tank a little bit before pouring myself into another piece of work so that I can give it my best. And that is not my nature. It is my nature to power through, especially when I know there's a big red deadline. But I think that's what my family needs from me in this time, and I think that I'll be better for it going into the new year.

Emily P. Freeman:

Beautiful.

Emily Ley:

Yeah.

Emily P. Freeman:

All right. I would love to have you read us a blessing and I'll say right now, I'm so grateful for your time. Thank you for joining us on The Next Right Thing.

Emily Ley:

Thank you so much, Emily. I appreciate it. For you who feel alone in the night, he heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalm 147:3. Once the sun sets and the noises of the world begin to quiet, do you ever feel lonely? I think we all have at one time or another. Perhaps you live alone. Maybe you live with a partner or a family, but you still feel those emotions surfacing in the dark of night. For you who are silently crushed in spirit and aching for companionship and love, a special blessing.

May you remember that you are altogether wonderfully made and worthy of love of all kinds, just as you are. I pray that while you're in this season, you find joy and togetherness in unexpected places, an impromptu invitation from a friend, books full of magnificent complex characters, or a neighbor who pops by for a visit. May you be filled with the love of God, who cherishes every bit of who you are and who you are not. May you find yourself strengthened by the knowledge that God is with you for you and near you, always. Go easy on yourself. If you're lonely, perhaps you can show yourself some extra love tonight, a quiet bubble bath, a warm cup of tea, a good book, an early bedtime.

Emily P. Freeman:
Amen.

Emily Ley:
Amen.

Thanks for listening to episode 305 of the Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of developing an evening routine 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, it's also about making a life. I hope you'll pick up a copy of *Near In the Night: 100 Evening Meditations on God's Peace and Rest* by Emily Ley, which you can find on her website Emilyley.com, along with all of her Simplified resources that can help you plan and prepare for the new year. Again, that's Emily Ley E-M-I-L-Y-L-E-Y.com, where you can find Emily and all of the resources she's created for us. As always, you can find me on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman or online at emilypfreeman.com where you can also find a transcript of this and every episode. Thanks to the team at Unmutable who faithfully edits our sound and to Ashley Sherlock, who creates our show notes and keeps this podcast organized.

If you want a little kickstart to an evening routine, we have a 10-minute evening routine checklist that you can download for free at my website that's emilypfreeman.com/evening. It's a simple framework for a 10-minute evening routine to help you transition from the day into the evening that you can do anywhere, in any season, no matter where you are, who you're with or what's gone wrong. Even more help is available about that 10 minute evening routine on episode 169, it's called *Simply Create your 10-minute evening routine*. Again, you can find that free downloadable resource at emilypfreeman.com/evening. I hope it helps.

In closing a short word and reminder from Ariana Huffington who says, "The way to a more productive, more inspired, more joyful life is getting enough sleep." Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.