



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 180

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

Tsh: [00:02](#) This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

[00:07](#) Hi friends! In this episode, I'm chatting with my friend Andrea Debbink who's been on the show before and since then has become actually the managing editor for The Art of Simple. She is fantastic. If you like any of the changes you've seen in the past few weeks, they are largely to blame on Andrea. Well, here she and I are talking about what we both wrote about this week. For her, that's her journey with anxiety and how learning a practice called mindfulness meditation has helped her learn how to float through anxiety as opposed to the usual reactions of fight or flight. And then since I wrote about the books I read this past month, five and a half books, to be specific. I'm talking here about the simple ways I'm reading more books and how you can too, and then at the end, since it's the start of a new month, I'm talking once more to Haley Stewart as I learned from her about what's on the liturgical calendar for us in February. Good stuff here. Let's get right to it. First up, here's Andrea and me talking about anxiety, mindfulness, meditation and how to add more reading in your life.

[01:14](#) Okay. Andrea, I am really, really curious what you have to say about this topic because mindfulness is such a broad word these days and I feel like I'm seeing it all over the place. Almost like it's a buzzword now, but I know it means something really specific. Why don't you dive right in and tell me some of your thoughts.

Andrea: As I go into in the blog post, mindfulness itself is just this idea of being aware of your thoughts and being present in the current moment, having an awareness of your physical sensation and the surrounding environment. Because of that you can bring mindfulness to pretty much any activity you do. I mean, people talk about mindful eating, they talk about mindful exercise or mindful yoga. The type of mindfulness that I get into specifically in my posts this week is mindfulness meditation.

[02:05](#) What that is, is a type of meditation that just gets you to focus on the things that I already talked about, either physical sensations, your surrounding

environment, just observing your thoughts. For me, it's a really been a great way to help kind anchor myself in the present and it's something that has become a part of my regular routine probably for the past, I would say five years or so. I'm at the point now where I do mindfulness meditation, I try to do it every day. My goal is actually like 15 days out of the month, so like every other day if possible. And I've just found that that's really helpful for my own kind of wellbeing and mental health and it's really helped me learn to coexist more with those anxious thoughts and stressors that you just experience throughout daily life.

Tsh: How often, like what's the time length of every time you do meditation?

Andrea: [03:00](#) It can vary. Back when I first started doing this, so back in 2014, I was at the point where I would meditate three times a week for 30 minutes. That can be really long, especially for someone...

Tsh: That is long.

Andrea: It is long and I needed to work up to it a little bit because you can't just start doing it for 30 minutes if you've never done it before. But then I went through this period of time. I think just with my day job and everything going on in my life where I just couldn't find the time. It's actually pretty hard if you're also exercising and going to a job and have other obligations to just find 30 minutes to sit still can be a challenge I think for most people. I got to a point finally where I thought, okay, 10 minutes is good enough for me.

[03:43](#) These days, I actually use an app called Calm.

Tsh: Yes. I've looked into that.

Andrea: That's really great because they have many different meditations that are different lengths of time, but they have something called the daily calm, which is every day they give you a new 10 minute meditation, so everyday is different, which is great, but it's also only 10 minutes. I made that a goal about a year ago to just start working that more regularly into my life rather than have these bigger goals of okay, you have to do 30 minutes or 40 minutes. I still like to do 30 minutes or 40 minutes, the longer times when I can, but they're just a lot less common because it's a big commitment, that sort of time. Right now it's really 10 minutes at a stretch, 15 days a month, so every other day if I can swing that.

Tsh: [04:30](#) I've got some questions for you that have to do with both meditation, with mindfulness and with how they wrap up into this whole idea of anxiety. The first question about a meditation is broadly, do you find it hard to focus? Because I know that's probably what a lot of people are thinking when they hear

this. That's definitely what I think of because I have attempted meditation before and I continually find my mind drifting away. How do you deal with that?

Andrea: [05:00](#) That's totally common when you're meditating, like I said, especially if you're just not in the habit of doing it because I really think that meditation is a skill, like any other skill that you really have to practice over time to be able to do it. I often like to compare it to running because I tend to run for exercise and so I find that to be a really good metaphor. If you go out and run for the first time ever, it's probably not gonna be that great and you're not going to feel that great, but as you run a little bit over time, you're going to get stronger, you're going to get used to the exercise. And meditation is like that too. Meditation is mental exercise. When you practice it over time, it does get easier. I also think it just depends on the day. Even though I've been doing this for a while, some days I'm just more distracted than others, and part of mindfulness meditation practice is just accepting that about yourself and not beating yourself up over the fact that you can't focus, but just bringing your mind back to either your breath or maybe just the feeling of sitting on a chair, or the sounds in this space that you're in because that's really what meditation is the practice of focus.

Tsh: [06:13](#) Got It. Okay. You get into this a little bit in your post that I'm curious if you could deep dive a little bit more, what's the difference between "regular meditation"? I don't know if that's even the right term and mindfulness meditation because I think, like I said at the top, mindfulness can be such a buzzword. It's hard to know what that has to do with a specific type of meditation.

Andrea: [06:35](#) There are many different types of meditation because it's obviously been around for a really, really long time and it's a part of different religious traditions, but mindfulness meditation actually, is a type of meditation that was developed by a man named Dr. John Kabat-Zinn. I don't know if you've heard of him before?

Tsh: I feel like I have, but I don't know why.

Andrea: He is known as the big mindfulness guy. I'm trying to remember right now which university he is associated with, but he either is or was a professor as well. I think about 30 years ago or more, he pioneered what he called mindfulness based stress reduction, which is what we know today as mindfulness meditation. What he did at that time, he took principles of meditation that I think actually originally came from a buddhist meditation and used it to help people who are dealing with chronic pain.

The meditation that he developed, he secularized it. The type of meditations that you end up doing in a mindfulness based stress reduction are, like I said,

just really focused on the present moment and what you hear and what you feel and the thoughts going through your head. There isn't really any sort of overt religious aspect to it, but he actually used this with people who had chronic pain issues and it was a way of helping them coexist with their pain because it couldn't make the pain go away, but it helped them have a different relationship to the pain that they were experiencing.

Tsh: [08:07](#) Kind of like in your post, you talked about the idea of fighting anxiety being really counterproductive then.

Andrea: [08:13](#) Fighting anxiety is something that I have a lot of experience with. I was actually diagnosed with an anxiety disorder back in 2010. At that point, realized that I had been living pretty much with an anxiety disorder since I was four or five years old. My M.O. when it came to anxiety or panic had always been fight it. Either fight it or flee because that's what anxiety is, it's the fight or flight response. When I first started learning about mindfulness meditation, I think that's the first time I really realized I had a third option when dealing with anxiety. I didn't have to fight it, I didn't have to gear myself up and get stressed out about it even more and I didn't have to distract myself or run away from it. I could sit with it and I could observe it and I could accept it. And that's actually the most helpful way of dealing with anxiety. Even from a therapist perspective, some of the most effective treatments for panic disorder or OCD are actually exposure therapy, which is the idea of just experiencing the thing that's causing you anxiety over and over to the point where you get used to it and your nervous system gets used to it. And that's ultimately how people can get freedom from this sort of anxiety.

Tsh: [09:28](#) You're saying that that's a healthy way to work through your anxiety?

Andrea: Yeah, the exposure.

Tsh: Really? Oh my goodness. Okay. I would not have guessed that.

Andrea: I didn't either until I started going through what they call exposure response prevention, which is a type of therapy that they use for people who are dealing with panic disorder or obsessive compulsive disorder. The idea in ERP is that you actually do things to provoke a panic attack in yourself. It's a very difficult type of therapy to do. It takes a lot of courage I think, and it also takes in many cases, the partnership with a therapist to help you through that. The idea is you do things to purposely have a panic attack over and over and you actually end up getting used to it.

Tsh: [10:19](#) Really? That is so fascinating to me.

Andrea: It's so counterintuitive. It's not, especially when you're in the midst of a panic attack, that is not what you want to do.

Tsh: That's not what you feel like doing. This is good. I'm taking mental notes right now because this isn't something I personally struggle with, but I am around it and this is helpful to know for how to help others that I love. Mindfulness meditation and then anxiety disorders and that's sort of a bit about your post, but I'm curious what has been your journey to where you are now thinking about the listeners where they could maybe pick up and start this idea if this resonates with them. Like, oh my gosh, this sounds so much like my life, but I don't know where to begin.

Andrea: [11:07](#) That's a great question. My whole journey of getting help for this in my life really started with me just telling someone because for years, it was a secret for me and it was something that I felt like I couldn't tell someone else because I didn't understand it and I didn't have a name for it at the time. I didn't know what anxiety was or anxiety disorders. I had a lot of stigma about mental health and going to a therapist. I'm taking medication. It was hard for me to even acknowledge that I needed help initially, but I took the first step one day, and again, this was back in 2010 and I told my boyfriend at the time who I'm actually now married to, he's my husband, but at the time we were dating and it felt like a huge risk to tell him this is what I'm dealing with, these are the thoughts I'm having, these are the experiences I'm having.

But it actually ended up being the beginning for me of getting help because he didn't completely understand everything, but he was understanding and compassionate towards what I was going through. That was the first step. And I think that can be a good first step for anyone, is to tell someone in their life that they trust about what they're dealing with and maybe that person can either help them find more help, whether that's a therapist or just more information or they can just be a listening ear and dispel the secrecy.

Tsh: [12:34](#) Now because you said that you can look back now and say that you had your first panic attack when you were, I think you said four? Four or five?

Andrea: Yes.

Tsh: Did you know whenever you finally brought this up to your boyfriend that something was different all this time? Or were you just wondering why the heck do I feel this way? Do you feel this way too? Do you know what I'm asking?

Andrea: [12:53](#) I think the first thing you said, I had the suspicion that there was just something that wasn't quite right, in me, in my mind, in what I was experiencing. I had that feeling from the time I was a young kid to this point where I finally

talked to my boyfriend about it. I actually remember exactly what I said when I talked to him because I started describing, hey, I'm having these thoughts, I'm having these feelings and I'm really struggling. Do you think this could be anxiety? And he didn't even hesitate. He said, yeah. Just to hear him look at me, listen to what I said and say yes, it was such a huge relief to finally have a name. Okay, so this is what anxiety is. Because of course, by the time I got to college I had heard of panic attacks. I had heard of anxiety. In my mind, anxiety is something that other people dealt with. It was really hard for me to see it in myself.

Tsh: [13:55](#) Sure. I get that. I've had a depression diagnosis, clinical depression, and it felt so out of body because, not that I like thought that was a terrible thing, but I just didn't think that was something that could happen to me. I 100% believe that.

Andrea: [14:07](#) That's what's helpful about bringing someone else into is to just get their thoughts like, hey, this is what I'm experiencing.

Tsh: [14:14](#) Right. So that's good, start off by talking to someone and then I'm pretty sure you actually worked with doctors for a while, right?

Andrea: [14:27](#) Pretty early on. Around that same time that I first told my boyfriend about this, I started seeing a counselor who, I had never seen a counselor before and ended up finding someone in my community through a pastor at my church. I just started seeing her and then at the same time, I went to my primary care doctor and talked to her what I was experiencing. When I first started out getting help, it was kind of this partnership between my counselor and then my doctor.

Tsh: Okay, that's great. You've been doing meditation for, I guess more than half of that time then if you've been doing it for five years now, then, right?

Andrea: Yes.

Tsh: Do you think this is gonna be something that's just part of your existence now? Like you're just always going to be doing regular mindfulness meditation?

Andrea: [15:18](#) Yes, I do. Especially over the past few years, I've built a lot of things into my life for my own mental wellbeing. Mindfulness is just a part of that. Like I said earlier, it's just helpful for me to think about it as a mental workout. If I want to stay physically healthy, I keep running or doing yoga, if I want to stay mentally healthy, I keep doing meditation and resting my brain and in doing these sorts of things that help your mental wellbeing.

Tsh: Sure, it makes complete sense. The post that you've written on The Art of Simple is in the show notes of this episode. You go through a bit of the mechanics of meditation and your back-story. If you're listening to this right now and you're thinking, I really want to deep dive into this, head there to that post and you can get started and thank you for sharing, Andrea. I just love that you're sharing this and I want you to keep sharing if you don't mind, as you keep writing. This is so relevant to so many people, so I think it's great.

Segment Two

Tsh: [20:58](#) The post that I wrote this week is a start of a series I hope to write throughout 2019 and it's basically when I read this month. It turns out whenever we asked people what they like reading about on The Art of Simple, a whole lot of people like reading about reading and books in particular and that is music to my nerdy ears. I am completely happy to talk about books, what I am reading and why I read what I read and how to read and all that good stuff. You can find my post in the show notes as well and what it is is basically a roundup of the books I read in January. I was looking through it, I realized that I could talk a little bit about my "how to" of reading for this first episode of 2019 about reading because the book list is rather comprehensive and I don't think it will always be this way.

In January I read four books from cover to cover, but also read a couple chapters in another book and then I read almost, I want to say like 25 or so chapters in *Jane Eyre* because I am teaching that right now in my high school English class. My January books, I read two fiction novels, one is called *One Day in December* and the other one is *84 Charing Cross Road*. And then my two nonfiction books were *Best Year Ever* and *Atomic Habits*. Then the book I read just a few chapters in was called *Inferno* and it's a giant World War II history book that I would love to just read and do nothing else, but I have to wash dishes and go places. Otherwise, I would just hole up and read that. What I thought I would bring up a little bit on these books that I liked, but also a little bit of the "how to" because that's four and a half, almost five books in one month.

Andrea: That's impressive.

Tsh: The thing is I want to start off the series by really emphasizing that I think it's perfectly okay to read slow. I used to keep track of my books by the number of books I read, I would make a goal like I'm going to read 60 books this year or whatever, and then I found it stressed me out and took the joy of reading out of the equation and I didn't want that. To me, reading is just one of my favorite things to do and so to keep track of it or to try and beat the clock makes it not fun. I 100% don't doubt that there will be upcoming months where I read two

books, which is a slow for me or one book maybe even if I've got a lot on my plate.

I'm just gonna say that now. It's totally okay to read slow. I just happened to read fairly quickly and it's also my preferred entertainment choice because I am woefully behind on TV series, for example. I love certain shows and I am so far behind because at the end of the day, if the kids are in bed, I'm going to pick up my book. I'm not going to pick up the remote. That's just me personally. I just wanted to say that and that I don't count my books. I know a lot of people do, more power to them. Good for them, not for me.

Andrea: I got to that point too, about a year ago I realized I don't want to set another goal for myself in an area that I really love. I love reading and it turned into something where there's pressure on it. I agree, I stopped counting my books too.

Tsh: [24:25](#) That's the thing, I realized I don't need to keep track because I will read anyway. I think it's a great habit or a goal for somebody who maybe is not in the habit of reading, but since I am, I don't need a goal. Speaking of habits, my favorite book of the month was *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. It was fantastic. I did it via audio book and I liked it so much, I actually bought the print book and I want to reread it now and like take notes in the margins and underline stuff. That's how much I liked it, but I go into that a little bit more in the post. If you're curious about my specific thoughts on each of these books, what I thought of them, head to the post, you'll see.

[25:05](#) What I wanted to talk about with you Andrea, is the how to of how I managed to read four and a half bucks this month. And what it comes down to for me is I feel like the back pocket secret, I have is audio books and the reason is because I spend a lot of time in my car. I am driving my kids all over the place. It's just the stage of life I'm in. Audio books makes it possible for me to read while I'm doing other things in sort of a zen focused deep dive way. I don't always love audio books, so I wanted to bring up what I have learned over the years, what makes it work for me because it's taken a little trial and error. I used to think audio books just weren't for me. I don't know, how do you feel about them?

Andrea: [25:52](#) I love audio books. I'm always listening to an audio book and reading a physical book at the same time because then you can always be reading no matter what situation you're in.

Tsh: That's right. A few keys for me, I just talked about reading in the car via audio book with the Bluetooth Connection on my phone, but I also got some, finally some good Bluetooth wireless earbuds, which I'll mention in the show notes. I

had had some really terrible ones a few years ago, but the technology has gotten better so I finally got some so that they're good and I can just always have them in my purse and listen while I'm doing, not the driving part. I don't put your buds in then. But when I'm shopping or running errands or doing other things, like cleaning the house, I will listen. A recent switch for me is that they have become my default audio books listen, instead of podcast. I love podcasts. I listened to some great ones, but I found myself really feeling like I was behind, not behind like the counting way I was just talking about, but behind as in my, I had such a big stack of books I kept wanting to read that I realized I'm going to podcasts first and I need to be going to audio books first. I kind of flipped the switch where I now go to audio books as my default and so that's helped me listen a lot more to my audio books. Andrea, do you go back and forth between podcasts and audio books? Are you just mostly audio books kind of girl?

Andrea: [27:15](#) I go back and forth. My struggle with audio books is that I can't always get them when I want them. My library, they do have, you can get audio books electronically download, but they have a pretty small selection, actually. You ended up having to wait for months and months for books that aren't even new releases. What I started doing is I joined a Libro. It's L-I-B-R-O dot FM. It's like audible only it's not Amazon. It's a place where you can download audio books, you pay a monthly membership fee, but what's cool about Libro.fm is it actually works in conjunction with your local independent bookstore, so the bookstore actually gets a credit for your purchase. You're purchasing the audio book from your local bookstore. I've started doing that and that helps me to actually make sure that I always have an audio book on hand, while I'm waiting for the ones that I'm having to reserve from the library. I'll get one off of Libro. Pretty much every time I'm in the car, I'm listening to an audio book and then when the rare time that I'm between books, then I switch back to podcasts.

Tsh: [28:26](#) Okay. That's really good to know. I'm going to look into that then because I have the same issue with my local library. I love them dearly. I'm always at the library, but they do have a pretty limited selection on audio books and most of the time there's quite a wait list. I have been a audible member for quite a while. I actually just downgraded my membership though because I would find the credit building up quite a bit and I was basically spending money on books I wasn't getting. I have downgraded to where it's now six books a year. I still feel like that's a good deal though whenever I look at some of the titles that I want to get at the library and they either don't exist or there's a million person wait and I think would I buy this book at a Bookstore on the shelf and in paper form, if that's how I prefer to read this book. And if the answer's yes, I'll go ahead and buy the audio book. The thing for me though, here's why I used to think audio books weren't for me and how I learned to make them work for me. I used to read novels via audio book and I found that that just isn't for me. I

am a paper girl when it comes to novels or the kindle version. I need to see the words and I think that's because I feel like it's sort of a, it's not sort of a form of art, it's a work of art to write a well crafted novel, but I want to see the sentences and the wordplay and go back and reread beautiful paragraphs and just enjoy the tactile experience of getting into a novel with the turning of the pages and the drinking of the tea and having a blanket. To me that it's an experience to read a novel and so I need to have it on paper and I just found myself getting really distracted via audio book when it came to fiction. There are a few exceptions to that and that's if they almost do a, I don't know what you call it, like a dramatized version, if it's not cheesy. And those are hard to find. Because sometimes the dramatize versions are really over the top and they are distracting, but if they're done really, really well, like the voices are fantastic or, or they keep things like sound effects to a minimum. One that I read, I actually forgot I read this one as well, so I guess I could count this. It was an audible special called *1914* and it's about the Christmas Eve I think, oh maybe *1917*. One of the years of World War One and it was only an hour long and it was so well done because it was dramatized but in a chill, perfectly done way to where they, they really took the time to make it quality.

For me that's how fiction has to work. Otherwise, I prefer reading nonfiction on audio book. I actually prefer personal development/self-help/business, that kind of book on audio book. And the reason is because it feels like I'm taking a class and I like school. I feel like I am getting to sneak in on a really smart professor and take notes and learn from them as I'm driving a car or, or grocery shopping and I can just do it again and again. That's my preferred genre of audio book followed by memoir. I like it whenever it's just a really engaging story because I feel like I'm being told a story, but it has to be read by the author and the author has to be a good reader. I'm really particular because if I know it's not the author somehow I just get really distracted whenever it's in the first person and I'm thinking the whole time, yeah, but it's not really you. That's probably me being really particular. I don't know.

Andrea: I feel that way too because especially if you know the author, like if the person is Michelle Obama or somebody that you're familiar with and then it's not their voice that's reading it. It's, it's a weird disconnect.

Tsh: One hundred percent. That's what it's gonna say. I actually really enjoy memoir when it's somebody that's already known, like it's somebody that's telling their story that I don't personally know, but I would like to know and have a cup of coffee and just pick their brain. I feel like this is the next best thing I can get. And then the sub genre with that because sometimes it's also a memoir is comedy. I love comedy audio books because you also get to feel like you're either having coffee with a funny person or you're going to a standup comedy

show depending on the type of book it is. If it's memoir comedy, like Amy Poehler's book or Tina Fey's book. Then it's just enjoyable to listen to or if it's a little bit more joke style, kind of like one of Jim Gaffigan's books, I feel like I'm getting to listen to one of his sets at a show and comedians are just good at delivery and so the book most likely is going to be good.

Andrea: [33:02](#) Yeah. I feel the same way. It's funny until you described your kind of audio book/regular book reading style, I never realized that I pretty much do the same thing. I love nonfiction on audio book when it comes to fiction, like novels, I like to actually read it and I think that's probably partly because as a writer I want to see the style on the page. I want to see the sentences and I want to be able to connect with it that way rather than simply hearing it. That's really interesting. I don't know if you've run into this too with reading books versus listening to books is I have a really hard time if I don't know how a character's name is spelled, when I'm listening to an audio book because then as much harder for me to remember. Sometimes I find myself checking the physically printed book so I know how to spell this character's name that I keep hearing.

Tsh: [33:49](#) Yes. I've actually had that too. That is so funny. I didn't even put the two together, but you're right. It's funny the things we want to see versus want to hear and it's funny you say that you wonder if it's because you're a writer, because I was talking about this with Kyle last night and he laughed and he said, I am the exact opposite. I way prefer fiction over nonfiction as an audio book and I want my nonfiction in writing so I could see it and take notes. He's not much of a reader and he's definitely not a writer. These are his words. And so I wonder if there's some kind of connection to that, whether you are more of a writer and therefore like to see the words when it comes to storytelling. I don't know, but I know there's no one right way to do this and it's just funny how he and I are completely the opposite about this.

A few other quick things that have helped me read these books in January. One of them is that I've developed the habit pretty well for about six months now of keeping my phone away from my nightstand. I used to have it plugged in to where it was charging at night on my nightstand and that was just dangerous to me because even if I wanted to not be on my phone anymore, I would come up with some quick reason to check and when I say reason I can mean anything from like tomorrow's weather to just setting some kind of timer or alarm. The worst is when I say I'm just going to quickly check instagram or twitter or email, that's just dumb. And then really and truly before I know it, an hour has whooshed by and I have to set this parameter for myself because this is just who I am. I don't think this is a dogmatic, you have to do this rule, but I personally have to do it because otherwise it's just way too easy to check my phone for an otherwise, okay, benign reason and just go downhill fast for me. It's really upped

my reading game just to keep my phone away from my nightstand. It's kind of a weird thing, but there you go.

Andrea: [35:40](#) I think that's a great tip and I think everything I've ever read about like digital detoxing or unplugging totally recommends not having your phone in your bedroom. I decided to start doing that a couple of years ago myself to the point where I had to buy like an old school clock radio and it was surprising to me how hard it was to find one that didn't have like i-phone capability as well. That it's a great way to get some time back to not have the phone in the room.

Tsh: [36:05](#) That's right. I'll put a link to the alarm clock I got the show notes. It's not a radio one for me, it's just a little one with a AAA battery in the back. It's tiny. It's a travel one and it feels so 15 years ago but that's okay with me. I am totally okay with being old school. It doesn't bother me a bit. And then the last tip I have that I think has upped my reading game is my family and I've done this thing called family reading nights for about a year now. I've instagrammed story this before, so if you follow me there, you might know what I'm talking about, but one to two nights a week and it just depends on what's going on in our family calendar. We as a family, the five of us will read our own thing, but together in the living room.

My youngest is eight and a half and my oldest is almost 14 and we have finally gotten into this place, I would say within the past year, once my youngest became really an independent reader enough to where he could hang out with a book by himself for a good half an hour. It took him quite a while compared to my older two. But we will all just get together and we'll do things like turn down the lights and just turn on the lamps. We'll have a candle going. We'll play some really chill, quiet background music and we'll all just read the book that we're each independently working on and it's a really great way to counter the, what we call family movie nights. Our kids call it that still, even if that means watching a 30 minute show to them, that's family movie night just because we don't turn on the TV unless we're intentionally sitting down to watch something.

It's a nice counterbalance to that to where we say it's a school night, we're not going to watch something, but we'll do a family reading night so that we're still spending time together and still in the living room hanging out, but we're reading and it's not perfect. It sounds so Norman Rockwell or some kind of Little Women's situation. It's totally not. There as a kid who's bouncing off the walls. There's another one who is asking, is it time yet? Is it time yet at the time yet? There are times whenever we say no, we're not watching something, but we're going to read something and there's a bit of an oh, but then it really is like two thirds of the way through everyone's into it. I can look around and everyone's reading and into their book and when the 30 minutes is over, they are reluctant to close their book because they have enjoyed it. If you're listening to this and

you've got kids and you wish you had more time to read, maybe start incorporating that a little bit and start off slow. Give yourself lots of grace. It's not going to go well at first, but it's really become a fun thing that we like to do.

Andrea: [38:24](#) That sounds awesome. A great way to get away from just turning the TV on every night or you know, when you need downtime.

Tsh: [38:30](#) It's a great way to build reading kids. If you want your kids to read more, I think one of the best ways to do that is model it when they see their parents reading and prioritizing reading, they'll know that it's part of just being a human to read frequently to always be reading something and so our kids are just avid readers and I think that's a tiny little reason why is just because I'm always, always, always reading something. This has been really fun, Andrea. I love catching up with you, so thank you so much for the chat.

Andrea: Thank you.

Segment Three

Tsh: Haley, I'm really excited to talk to you about this because February can be such a blah a month in so many ways that it is a little bright spot in my day to think that oh, there are things to recognize and celebrate during this otherwise kind "eh" month. Tell me about the liturgical calendar in February.

Haley: [39:33](#) Yes. You might not know that it's actually okay to leave the tree up until February 2nd. That's the official end, that's like last chance to get these Christmas decorations in the attic.

Tsh: Do you keep it up?

Haley: I keep it up until at least Epiphany on January 6th and then depending on how dry and crunchy and fire hazard-ey our tree is at that point then we'll need to say, dude, take it down today. Maybe I'll leave it up a couple more days. I have made it to Candlemas before.

Tsh: That's impressive.

Haley: But I think it would have just taken a slight flame to our whole house on fire. I probably won't do that again.

Tsh: [40:22](#) We just got an artificial tree this year for the first time and it's one of those super realistic looking ones which I love. I could actually see us doing that. It does take up room in our tiny house, that's my only thing. I wanted the tree down, I took it down January 6 just because I was wanting some breathing room because our house is so small.

Haley: [40:42](#) I felt like with all the baby stuff out, we have a five month old, the tree I was loving the feel of the lights, like the warm, cozy feel of the Christmas lights that I was ready to get that tree out the weekend of Epiphany. It did feel good to get it all out. I put our Christmas lights, because we don't have a working fireplace, I put our Christmas lights in a big pile in the fireplace because I was like, ooh, it'll be cozy. And my nine year old was like, this is really tacky, mom. Okay, fine.

Tsh: [41:13](#) I can see that looking cute though, if you do it sort of intentionally and not a big wide. I don't know.

Haley: [41:21](#) Yeah, I thought it looked cute. He was not impressed. So who knows.

Tsh: [41:25](#) It's a fun idea. You brought up a little holiday that I had only heard of about two years ago or so. Tell me more.

Haley: [41:34](#) It's called Candlemas, the candle mass, kind of like Christmas, Christ's mass, but it's celebrating the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. 40 days after Jesus's birth, Mary and Joseph take him to be presented at the temple and dedicated to God. Simeon and Anna are there and see him. This is a story in the gospel of Luke. Simeon, who's an old man and has been waiting his whole life to see the Messiah, describes Jesus as a light to enlighten the nations and the glory of his people Israel so that God has sent this light. I think that's where the whole candle thing came into play, that there is a procession with candles. The candles that are going to be used for the year are blessed and so it started to be called Candlemas.

Tsh: Is this iFebruary 2nd all the time?

Haley: [42:30](#) It's February 2nd always in the old calendar. I am not 100 percent sure, but I think they might move the Feast of the Presentation around sometimes depending on how close it falls to Sunday in the new calendar. Don't quote me on that, I'm not one hundred percent sure there.

Tsh: I'm curious what we could do around the house other than just have lots of candles out, which is I'm totally on board with.

Haley: One of the things that my family has done, and I say this as someone who is not crafty, I am not a crafty mom. I am not good at crafts, but we do make candles on Candlemas, just get a bunch of bees wax and my husband keeps bees so we always have beeswax and melt it down and get thread to dip it in. I think I usually use Jamie Martin's tutorial for candle making on Simple Homeschool.

I'm not positive, I'm 98 percent sure that's where I saw the tutorial and we just make little dip candles and they're not perfect, but they're fun. It's just our little

tradition. It's really not hard once you melt the wax down, you just basically dip dip the weekend there and then in cold water.

Tsh: I remember going on a field trip in elementary school to a pioneer farm and we did candle dipping. I'm assuming it's the same like just old fashion way that people have been doing it for hundreds of years then, right?

Haley: Totally. Interesting random liturgical fact. The candles that are used for liturgical purposes in the church have to be 51 percent or more bees wax is a random rule, but it's because of the significance of symbolism of bees and practical reasons of it, bees wax burns really clean, it doesn't smoke and it doesn't leave any nasty residue and it smells really nice.

Then there's symbolism about the bees is kind of a Christological symbol of the bees only working for others. They're not self-centered, they're working for the good of others and laboring. That's both as a model for the Christian life and as a Christological symbol of Christ going out and laboring for us and sacrificing for us. Little fun fact about bees. I know more about this than most because my husband's a beekeeper and he's interested in all these random bee facts.

Tsh: I think that's really cool. I assumed as much, bees are known for being the workers, so that makes a lot of sense. That's very cool. Alright, moving on in the calendar, what else do we have to look forward to in February?

Haley: There's a couple really cool Saint's days in February. February 6th is the feast of St Paul Miki who was a Japanese saint who is crucified, martyred in 1597.

I didn't know anything about the church in Japan until reading in Shusaka Endo's book, *Silence*.

Tsh: We've talked about this on the podcast before so I'll put a link in the show notes so if anyone wants to hear that.

Haley: It's fabulous book but very interesting historical period. St Paul Miki was crucified along with a bunch of other martyrs on February 6th and so sometimes my family just make simple sushi on February 6th and talks about St Paul Miki a little bit with the kids. Another really fabulous Saint is, actually on my son's birthday, February 8th, it's St Josephine Bakhita. She was born in Sudan in 1869 and then sold into slavery in horrifying circumstances. Horrifying torture from her masters. She was sold several times and then bought by an Italian who took her to Italy to be that the nanny of a little girl and this girl was sent to school, run by Canossian sisters who I don't know a whole lot about that order, but an order of nuns.

When they tried to take her back to Sudan, she said, no, I'm not going to be a slave anymore. I'm a free woman. There was a big legal battle, but because it was illegal, slavery was illegal in Italy, she won the legal battle. She said, I'm not going back. I'm staying in Italy. She decided to become a Canossian sister. She's pretty inspiring and cool, St Josephine Bakhita.

Tsh: I've never heard of her at all.

Haley: Yeah, she's pretty amazing.

Tsh: Anything you do at home for that day?

Haley: I feel like it's always overshadowed by my son's birthday so we won't have any family traditions for her, but I would like to do one. I mean we have a few dishes that we like to make that are inspired by African cuisine, but I don't know what Sudanese cuisine would be like specifically.

I feel like we don't, we don't have a food thing, but that could be, if you know about student needs food or Italian even food since she moved to Italy and that's where she fought for her freedom. You could have some options there to celebrate her.

Tsh: I could see a combination of Italian food and then maybe like reading a book on Sudan or something to that effect. We talked, in the WRLD for my patrons, I do a secret podcast for twice a month. We talk about a different part of the world and different kinds of super easy ways to learn about them. And WRLD stands for watch read, listen, do. One of the read episodes, we talked about a book on Sudan. It's a children's book, I mean it's a chapter book, but it's geared for kids. My older two read it and they both loved it. I'll put a link in the show notes to that book if anybody is interested because I learned a lot and it has nothing to do with the saint you just mentioned. It just has to do with the plight of Sudanese, a kind of modern day, I want to say like in the eighties or so. It was super fascinating.

Haley: Yeah, that sounds great. I need to check that out for my kids.

Tsh: There are things to recognize, I think even in the mundane and February to me just represents the epitome of just, I don't know, also here in Texas, as you well know weather is so all over the place. My daughter's birthday is mid-February and we never know whether we can go to the park or we have to stay inside. It just feels like this hodgepodge of a weird month and so I like having a little bit of scaffolding of things we can look forward to. And to me, just starting off with Candlemas and having candles going all month long is a way to provide some beauty and stability in our home.

Haley: Totally with you on Texas weather in February. Not the best. Not where we shine.

Tsh: No, but you know, at the next month and on, we do for a few months before all hell breaks loose.

You can find Haley on her blog at CarrotsforMichaelmas.com on Twitter and Instagram @Haleycarrots. You can find Andrea at AndreaDebbink.com and on Instagram @Andrea.Debbink. And to keep up with me, I'm on Twitter @Tsh and Instagram @TshOxenreider and of course at TheArtofSimple.net where you can find my writing as well as Andrea's and other delightful folks. Don't forget y'all to get my weekly email at fivequickthings.email, follow us on Instagram @ArtofSimple and to be extra awesome, show your support of the show by becoming a patron for just a few dollars per month. As always because I just gave you 10 places to go, I've got all of these things linked in this episode's show notes number 180, so just head there at TheSimpleShow.com. This show was produced by Chad Michael Snavely and Jesse Montonya and thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink and my intern Ginny. You can see a photo of Ginny at TheSimpleShow.com. Thanks so much for listening, ya'll. I'm Tsh Oxenreider and I'll catch you back here soon.