



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 211

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

Tsh: [00:04](#) This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

[00:14](#) Hey friends. In this episode, I'm chatting with my friend and co-host Christine Bailey, and as always on the show, we're talking about what we wrote this week. She's a farmer, but it hasn't always been this way, having lived in an urban city before, so she talks about what it means to live connected. It seems like it'd be easier to connect with neighbors living in a city, but she's found that the opposite is actually true. She shares a little ways they've made their farm open to neighbors and friends and how we can do the same in our own homes, whether we're in the suburbs or small town or even major metropolitan area. This week I wrote about morning and evening routines and how they've been so important to me over the years. I go deeper here and talk with Christine about three rituals I've been holding onto the past few weeks that are really simple but really important, especially when life is as nuts and unexpected as it has been for us lately.

These three things have helped me feel like I'm getting somewhat of a passing grade at adulting 101 even if I'm not doing so hot in the other life things I have no control over right now. We'll get right into it, but first a quick reminder to make sure you're signed up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things because it is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode of this show or any of our weekly essays. Basically, you'll get links to five things from the week I either created or loved, plus occasional news you would otherwise miss because I don't share it anywhere else. These emails can be read in under a minute because I hate inbox clutter too. Go to fivequickthings.email to sign up for the free weekly email or just click on the links in the show notes of this episode. All right guys, so without further ado, here is Christine and me talking about rituals for connecting with others and for keeping our heads above water.

[02:07](#) Christine, tell us a little bit about what you wrote about this week.

Christine: Awesome. This week I wrote a post about finding community and a sense of neighborliness in the country. My family and I, we live about an hour south of Nashville and a little tiny community called Santa Fe, Tennessee. When we first

moved there, we moved from Dallas, from an urban neighborhood, some people might remember me talking about that before, but my biggest hesitation in moving to a rural area was that I would feel really isolated and I knew that I was totally made for living in more space and green and we wanted more freedom as a family. But when it became an actual reality for us, it could actually happen, I resisted it and really uncovered that there was a fear underneath all of that, that there would be a big disconnection to people once we moved to the country.

Tsh: [03:06](#) What's funny about what you're saying is you literally are at a friend's house right now because your internet isn't super great on the farm. I can understand how that would make even feel more disconnected.

Christine: Yes, completely true. We have one bar of cell phone service on our front porch only, in the house, forget it. We have a little booster thing that boosts our signal. It's amazing how there's still pockets that don't have Internet service or cell phone service.

I was really afraid of just that disconnection from people. Would anyone come to our house? Would we have a close community? Where would my kids learn to ride a bike? Things like that. That's what I dive into in the post and that I've actually been totally surprised that I feel more a part of my community now in the country and connected to my neighbors than I did before in the city.

That's been a crazy journey of just really being surprised by that. It was totally different than my fears. I also addressed a couple of generalities. I had a lot of preconceived notions of what it's like living in the country so I talked about that a little bit. But I think in general I just feel less insular and I'm more aware, more outside myself and just more aware of the people around me, sharing with neighbors, and just contributing to the community more than I did before in the city, which is weird.

Tsh: Tell me some practicals about how you would literally know your neighbors out in the country. Because we have friends that live out on acreage as well, and it's not like your neighbors are super close. You have to actually like get in the car. How do you know your neighbors?

Christine: [04:51](#) I did not know that this would happen, but when we moved in, we had neighbors that actually came to our front door and knocked, they just started knocking on our door uninvited.

Tsh: What in the world?

Christine: Yes. Right in the city, that does not happen. Never ever once, in my urban neighborhood, it was just so easy to wave to new neighbors or be like, oh, there's somebody new across the street, but for someone actually show up on your door that seemed really invasive and we just got used to, after we moved in for the first couple of months, we were just used to people showing up and just introducing themselves. At first it's a little bit uncomfortable, but then you're like, oh my goodness, this is really how we're meant to live.

We're meant to live welcoming and opening ourselves up to people. We just had to learn to be prepared that people might drop by unannounced. But that's just one example. We've had people knock on our door and say that they rescued our pigs that were crossing the road. We've had horses in our backyard that we had to rally back to a neighbor. We've had neighbors come over and babysit our kids or help us plant lettuce or really help us out in a bind and we've been able to do that for them. I don't know if it's just that the nature of living in a rural setting that you need each other more, but I think that there's a big, and I'll talk about this more in a minute, but I think there is definitely, there's more space and time and the slowness in living there that creates that naturally.

I don't think that it's something that we have to live in the country to find.

Tsh: Right, I was going to say, for me, I have felt more in touch with my neighbors in my community than I ever have probably since before when we lived overseas where it felt more natural to do so, here in a small town as opposed to the suburbs, which is where we were in an in between season and really where I grew up, in the suburbs, there's something about small town where, I know just about everybody on our block and we've had kids come into our house and it's like, who are you? We joke that we have like the eighties sitcom neighbor kid because we'll just walk right on in and start talking to the adults and we're like, go home now, we like you. It's just so funny, Kyle and I look at each other and it's like we're living in a sitcom.

Christine: That is hilarious. It's like Full House or something.

That's totally the point. I think what you just said, is that it doesn't really matter what kind of neighborhood we live in. We want to live connected and it's important for us to live actually connected to people. We've been talking about this tons on The Art of Simple and here on the podcast. I was just listening to you and Andrea in the episode about tech and at the root of it, we're really craving community and connection and that's what we're trying to find in social media. That's also why a lot of people are stepping away lately because we're not really finding it there.

I thought I'd share today just a couple things that I'm going to call our rhythm of gathering because gathering people together is really a way to build community. Whether that's with just neighbors or with your really close knit, inner tribe of people. I think that gathering people together is just such an important part of that. It's really something that my husband, Steven and I have just done our whole lives together, so many times and it's really who we are. It has become second nature to us, but I just forget that this really not second nature to a lot of people and a lot of people I talk to just don't invite others over because they really don't know how to gather people together or they maybe feel insecure about their space they have or they just don't really know how to create time for it.

I think that it really is good for it to become a rhythm or a routine because it makes it really attainable to actually do it when we keep saying it's something we want to do.

Tsh: [09:10](#) I don't know if you're going to say this yet, but I will say as someone who lives near a big city where most of our friends live, old friends that we've had for a while, we have had to learn, especially just in the depths of parenting and having to work to provide for the family, that we have to be so crazy intentional about this. Otherwise it really truly does not happen. In fact, a group of us were just talking about we just need to put it on the calendar the third Sunday of every month or whatever it is we are getting together for a potluck dinner. Otherwise it just absolutely won't happen.

Christine: [09:50](#) That is so good. I think that just being intentional and putting it on the calendar as a regular thing, because before you know it, months have gone by and you haven't seen those people that you really love and want to be connected to.

The first thing I thought of was we mentally prepare ourselves to create space. In our perspective, if you're coming to our house, just be prepared to be there for four hours minimum. We're building everything around creating space for people to just be and not rushing and really savoring the time that we have together. It does help that we're in a really quiet and peaceful place. I've done this in a suburban neighborhood and I've done it in the city and I think it's more about what you're preparing for people and really setting, carving out that sacred time in your schedule.

Tsh: [10:41](#) We did this when we lived in Turkey in a city of 4 million people. It's part of the culture there that's more relational, but we had to learn if we are just going to get together for tea with our neighbors, which is a common thing they're getting together for tea, that actually means from 2:00 PM to midnight. That's just what that means. That is something I've really missed and appreciate

and I get that that's a challenge and not always feasible, but it was eye opening for an American who was very much, okay, let's get back and get things done, instead of tossing the to do list out the window in name of getting together with your neighbors.

Christine: [11:20](#) I think we're conditioned to just like show up, eat really quick and leave and there's really not that space in time created where the real community is built, and the real connection is built over that slow meal or just sitting there for a while and talking after you're eating or preparing the meal together. I think it goes against the flow a little bit in our culture, like you said It is more common in other countries and it's something that's not as common here, but it can totally be done. I just think overall people don't want to be entertained. They just want to belong. They want a safe place where they can feel like they belong. They just want us and our presence. You don't need a fancy house or a fancy backyard.

I love what Shawna Niequist says, she's just one of my favorite authors and she's my guru on this when it comes to gathering people around the table and her book, *Bread and Wine*. I've probably quoted it before because I love it so much, but she says,

"What people are craving isn't perfection. People aren't longing to be impressed. They're longing to feel like they're home. If you create a space full of love and character and creativity and soul, they'll take off their shoes and curl up with gratitude and rest no matter how small, no matter how undone, and no matter how odd."

I love that. It reminds me of our first place we lived when Steven and I first got married, was this little condo in Dallas and it had red plush carpet and floor to ceiling mirrors. It was, oh my goodness. It was just fancy. It was not our style at all, but we have the sweetest memories of gathering people in that place for meals, fo sitting around the coffee table talking until two in the morning, game nights. We had lots of single friends who loved coming over. It's just totally not about how the place looks. It's about the environment that we're creating there.

Tsh: In fact, I know of a friend who purposely leaves a basket of laundry out in the corner because of that idea because she says she can actually tell people, feel more relaxed in a slightly not perfectly done house. That feels like you actually want to feel like, oh look, they're just a human who lives here. I thought that was really great.

Christine: [13:40](#) That's so awesome. Well, if you come to our house, there will definitely be hay on the floor.

Tsh: When she said that it was like, what do you mean be intentional about it? Isn't there just always one there?

Christine: Yeah, that's just my normal house. Before we moved to the farm, we lived in a rental house when we first moved to Tennessee. It was also totally not my style, not my ideal place at all. We just soon realized, are we going to just not gather people because we're maybe embarrassed by how it looks or it's not ideal and we just decided to go for it anyway. Once again, it was just some of the sweetest times and no one cared. No one cared. They were just there for the connection and for the friendship. I just think it's great to think through that and to not get stuck in our preconceived notions of what something has to look like.

It's been really cool having our farm store that we have open every Saturday morning and because we are in the country and in a more rural environment, like you said, you can't just knock on all your neighbors doors. But it's been really neat that we have a set time place that the community knows they can come to our farm. It's been so cool. We've just met so many neighbors and it seems like everyone that comes is like, I live a mile down the road and it's people we maybe wouldn't have met otherwise other than like our immediate neighbors. But it's great to have that set time in place when they can come and know that they're welcome and just be and walk around the farm and hang out.

A couple other things we do just in our rhythm, when people come over, we generally don't have cell phones around unless we're taking photos. Like I said, we only have one bar reception anyway, so that helps. I've heard people just having a basket to put phones in is just so great because it just takes away that distraction. What we do is we usually don't have people bring food that's already prepared. We love to create an environment where we can prepare or cook it together. Even if, and I know that my husband's a chef, but it doesn't have to be anything fancy. It can be literally be tacos, but we've found that it makes the time unravel more slowly and lets people know that we really want them around for a while. Like I said earlier, we're not just going to eat and then send them out the door. I think it just sets up the environment, this is going to be a slower meal. Settle in, relax a little bit and we're going to go through the whole process together.

Tsh: I heard years ago from a friend, that I really applied this and it's so true, that guests feel more comfortable when you give them a job. They want to help in the preparation. Even if you want to have some of it done but have some stuff left undone so they can do it, even if it's assembling a salad or slicing bread or whatever it is. I totally know what she means when I am a guest somewhere else. I love that too. Sure, I'll help set the table. I think we like being part of it.

Christine: I agree. And I think that applies just as much to new people we're having over and just our close friends that are always, that we have over often. I think either way it still applies.

As far as kids go, I know that people have all different ages of kids and honestly we've had everywhere from like babies to teenagers gathered together at parties and things like that. What we've found is just letting them be free to play and not feel like we have to entertain them in any way. It never fails. They end up making up some kind of cool imagination game outside or inside. I think it's the same concept of creating the space and creating the time and letting it unravel slowly. With older kids they can help or be more involved. We've had them learn how to make a campfire if it's an outside party and how to tend the fire through the night or to even learn how to cook something and be a part of like what the grown ups are doing in the kitchen. I wanted to just add that about kids because I think it's really important for them to have time too where it's not scheduled and it is that slow evening of freedom.

Tsh: [18:04](#) One thing that I'll add that has been helpful for my kids' ages. I've got 14, almost 12 and then nine, is sometimes we have friends with the younger kids, like maybe their oldest is around our youngest kids age, is to let our kids bring a book sometimes, which sounds antisocial but actually allows us to stay longer and they feel more at home. That's actually a thing you do at home usually. Giving them the freedom, not saying all you need to do is just show up and read a book the whole time and never look up and talk to people. But in that moment when they're like, there's nothing but little kids here, what do I do? Allowing them to read helps them relax and feel at home.

Christine: [18:47](#) I like that. That's a really good idea because that is the whole concept of that you're settling in, this isn't just a show up and leave thing. This is to really connect with people, there has to be time. I love that. I think just using what you have for these gatherings, the tables you have, the chairs you have. We use spread blankets on the grass a lot of times when we just don't have enough seating for people. On the 4th of July we had a gathering and we made a giant slip and slide from a tarp and used a hose and dawn dish soap. It was amazing. It was epic. I just thought of that because we are just, it's not going to stop us from gathering people because we don't have the perfect outside toys or all the picnic tables and things like that. I just wanted to encourage people in that.

Tsh: [19:41](#) We've had an episode before in the past with former co-host Erin Loechner and she talked about, because she's known for having beautiful photos of perfect place settings that whenever her friends come over, she usually just does paper plates. I loved that she just owned that and said that out loud. I've heard from several people since then, the whole paper plate episode, once she said that, I started doing that all the time and it just made me feel

better. I know that's sort of adjacent to use what you have, your tarp slip and maybe we think of that. It does not have to be super cute and mismatched vintage China. It can literally be paper plates from the grocery store.

Christine: [20:19](#) I totally agree. I was actually going to say, my next thing was that we have a big plastic tote that we call the party bin and it is always filled with those supplies. We never have to say where are the plates, where are the birthday candles, where are the solo cups? They're always in that bin and we just keep it filled and if there's anything left over from a previous party, it just goes in there for next time. It's super easy, we just pull that out and we have everything we need. Everyone that comes over knows that they always bring drinks and we don't have to worry about the drinks.

Tsh: Nice. Sweet.

Christine: We just always have a giant cooler ready with ice. This was just part of that rhythm, that routine. We're having people over Saturday, these are the things we know we do every time. They just come put their drinks in it and it's super easy and super doable.

Tsh: [21:05](#) Do you mean drinks to share or their own drinks?

Christine: [21:10](#) Yeah. If there's a certain drink that someone really likes, a certain beer or La Croix or whatever, it's generally shared and that's the drink cooler, whatever you're bringing. Just one more practical thing, we love putting together fun little playlists. I think I shared my summer evenings playlist in one of my past posts, we can put it in the show notes, but it's just fun to have like a, I know you love playlists too that are themed, and we just pipe it through some wireless speakers and it's just fine. It's a two plus hour playlist. I just love that certain songs come on the playlist and I think about the people that I was with and I was gathering with or what we were doing that night. That's just another thing we love to do.

Tsh: [21:58](#) I'll say the one thing I'll add to all of this for people maybe listening in a big city or similar to us where we are in a quaint little town but our house is small, when we have groups of friends over it can feel really crowded, especially with all the kids, which we do anyway. We love doing that. That doesn't stop us, but we also completely embrace things like parks and general central locations. I remember years ago on the podcast we had a friend on that lives in Manhattan, she did at the time, and she talked about family with four kids in a two bedroom apartment. It's very hard to have friends over that. They thought of Central Park ultimately as their backyard and they used it often and one of the cool things to sort of come full circle with what we were saying at the top, she actually felt like she lived in a small town because in a place like Manhattan, you know your immediate neighborhood really well because you walk everywhere and so you

actually do get to know your neighborhood in a urban, like an uber-urban area almost more than in the suburbs when you can drive everywhere. If you're listening and you're in a city and you think, well that's all great on a spacious farm having farm to table dinners, that it can happen anywhere and you just have to think outside the box.

Christine: [23:17](#) I totally agree. I think the point is connection and gathering people and having that space and time to really settle in. I totally agree.

Segment Two

Tsh: [26:21](#) You talked about sort of a rhythm of gathering, on my post this past week, I talked about my rhythm of routines, so that might be redundant, rhythm and routines. I wrote about it in light of the fact that this past Monday it ended a sale on a really old e-book that I finally updated. I wrote it just a few years after starting to write on the Internet and so I updated it and it was about these different small little things you can do to simplify your life in little bites. That's why it's called One Bite at a Time. What it is, is it breaks down the things you already know to do anyway, but in manageable pieces. In re-reading some of this, it was very flashback because it was written when my kids were little, so I always was talking about little kids stuff from that perspective. One of the things that really stuck out at me was a foundational concept of morning and evening routines. With some of those little project things that I suggested doing, I don't really do them too much anymore simply because we don't need to in our life stage. But this is one that I think has remained true in my life over the 12 years since I first wrote that book, having a set morning and evening routine. That doesn't mean it doesn't always change. It does. But having a rhythm that stays roughly the same, let's say in a season, your fall morning routine or your summer evening routine. It's stuff we do naturally and organically anyway. The things we do in the evening in the summers is not the same as what we do in the evening in the winters.

This is a time of year when a whole lot of us are starting, I guess you could say new things. If you are a students listening, you are starting a new school year. If you're a parent of a student, you are starting a new school year. I think lots of us just think in terms of school year rhythms, I think, even if we're not, we think of fall almost as a second new year really. Things I feel like just get really hectic around this time of year and for whatever reason I'm not gonna get into it right now, but the past couple weeks have been really bonkers for our family. Rough or just chaotic or topsy turvy, just a lot of stuff that is not super fun, but it's just part of life. It's nothing like at all to be overly concerned about it. It's just a lot of a little, and I think a lot of us have had weeks like that where it's just nothing is going right. Right?

Christine: Yeah, absolutely.

Tsh: For me, especially last week and the week before, when life has just been bonkers, chaotic, I have found that rituals, even really boring ones, are the things that are saving my sanity. I have to guard them and protect them like they are the most important thing in my life because that helps me stay above water. If I don't, I don't know if this is an all or nothing kind of personality or maybe my Enneagram four that's just very moody or inner reflective about maybe even really benign things, it's easy for me to let things slide and then before I know it, I'm living I belong in a college dorm without a mom and I don't know how to take care of myself. Do you know what I mean?

Christine: [29:35](#) Yes, completely. I'm excited to hear what you're going to say, because I need this really well.

Tsh: I'll just say right now, some of these things are so basic that it's hard that they're even a thing, but they're actually hard to do. These things that are just 101 adulting, I find sometimes our heart when life is crazy bonkers because all I want to do is just say, well forget it all, eat ice cream straight off the bucket and watch Netflix ad nauseum until the kids put themselves to bed or something like that. I just can't do that. It's these things that protect me from me.

This past week I have learned that there are three rituals right now that are really helping me keep my head above water and make me feel like a grownup in addition to those morning and evening routines, which I wrote about on Monday.

I'll put a link to the show notes of that post. You can read more about what I mean there. In addition to that, there are three rituals that I'm really holding on to you right now to keep me from losing my mind.

The first one is that I check my email only twice a week and at the same time. This was another one of those topics that I read back on from my old e-book from 2011, whoa, a lot has changed. Not only in terms of my own personal approach to things, but also the technological world we lived in at the time. It was just a reminder, wow, things have changed so fast. It used to feel like where, I think I used to feel like I had to claim inbox zero at the end of every day in order for my day to be called productive or good. I completely don't agree with that anymore. The reason is because I view an email, I mean, sorry, I view an inbox as somebody else's agenda for my time. It's almost like this inbox is staring at me, competing with my own personal to do list and asking, oh yeah? Is that all you have to do or is that really the most important thing? Or do you want to maybe open this and see what might be more important, really? I say this both personally and professionally. Personally as a mom and as someone

who goes to a church and has friends and all that and professionally, which is a lot of what comes into my inbox for my work as a writer. Checking them only twice a week has really been a sanity saver because it makes me feel like I'm the boss of me instead of, I definitely don't just leave my inbox open anymore, which is what I used to do. I think I felt like I was supposed to just have a tab open on my email because then I would stay on top of it, which is like a recipe for distraction. Not only that, I go many days without even opening my email at all. The reason is because I have learned that if something is truly an emergency and if I am needed, the people that matter most to me, I can be reached in other ways. The people that matter most can text me or Vox me, which is an app use or for work, with Slack. Those primary tools of communication for my inner circle, whether it's my work team or even my kids' school, they use a separate app called Band and then of course friends and family just with text. Those are ways that people who have passed that filter who truly might need me in an emergency or might need to talk to me can, I really can't think of anything that comes through my email inbox that's an emergency. Keeping that at an arms length distance has really helped me stay above water in ways I've forgotten that was even a thing because I no longer really make a big deal about my email anymore. How often do you check your email, Christine?

Christine: Yeah, I'm just thinking, this is conjuring up a lot of ideas and thoughts because I definitely leave my Gmail open all the time. I do, back in the day, I totally was that person that cleared my inbox and now it frustrates me sometimes and overwhelms me because you never do that with Gmail and it's like this ongoing piling up. I wonder how much that's really affecting my productivity and my level of distractions. That's really good. I never thought to just close the tab.

Tsh: [33:50](#) I think that's a key reason why I decided just to throw out inbox zero because it never happened. I would even like take screenshots where it says you have no new mail or something as though it was a big deal about an hour later, something that would come through, it was insane. I'm not saying email is all bad. Heck, I write an email newsletter and I'm really glad so many people read it. Some email is great. There are a few newsletters that I subscribe to that I open religiously. It's just that I open religiously on my own time.

Christine: Exactly.

Tsh: Nothing is urgent via email anymore, for me.

The second ritual I've been holding onto the past few weeks is this idea of reverse engineering our evenings. What I mean by that is during the school year, especially the start of the school year, when you're tapering off of summer mode, heck not tapering, you're jumping off the deep end from summer mode and getting right into a school year routine. We have to be in bed much earlier

than we normally are as a family. My family, I have a bunch of night owls. I'm the only morning person in my entire family. I love the mornings. Everybody else loves the evenings. We have to protect those evenings really solidly in order for people to even go to bed remotely on time because we have learned, and I'm sure most people understand that when our kids do not get enough sleep they are Jekyll and Hyde. They become different people. It's just a stake in the ground of our family during the school year, everyone has to be in bed early, even the teenager. Early, I say early because that means different things to different families and even within the same family. My daughter's early is different than my nine year olds early, because she's in high school and he is nine years old. Early is still earlier than, I guess it's the opposite of late, Practically for us, this is how it looks. Reverse engineering our evenings means we start with the ideal bedtime, which right now we're kind of saying is 8:30 and 8:30 can mean after that then our daughter, our teenager can read in bed for an hour or my middle guy can read for half an hour or whatever, but I ideally is 8:30 is when evening is done. People are where they need to be until bed. Then we work backwards. Before that is story time, which in our family, we still do, even with the teenager, we all do a group read aloud together and I'm going to do that until everybody is, until we're empty nesters. It's so important to us.

Christine: I love, love, love that.

Tsh: We do story time together and so we subtract about 20 minutes or so for that. Then before that, getting ready for bed, that always takes longer than you think. For whatever reason it takes some kids quite a while to change into pajamas and brush their teeth and our oldest, she does considerably more in terms of getting ready for bed and that bleeds into getting backpacks ready for the next day. We like to have things set and ready to go before we leave in the morning. We go to a school three days a week and homeschool two days a week. I'm talking about these days where we are out the door early, we want everything packed in backpacks. That takes time. Then before that lunch is made. We've had for years now the rule that our kids make their own lunches and we'll check them occasionally. We used to, especially at the beginning, but now they just have to do their own lunches. They still grumble and complain about it. I'm not going to pretend like everything's rosy, but they just know that's part of their routine. They have to make their lunch and they keep them in the fridge so that in the morning part of getting out the door is just opening the fridge, getting their lunch bag or box out. Backing up before that is dinner. We've learned through subtraction of all that time that we have to be sitting down for dinner by 6:00 for all of that to work to be in bed by 8:30 and so if you just keep going, that means starting dinner by 5:00ish which means ending the workday by 4:00ish. For me, I pick my kids up at the train station by 4:30 so I have to be out the door, I work

from home, by 4:00 and then we get home by 5:00ish because of traffic and we just get right into dinner.

All that to say reverse engineering our evenings to not be like militant about our evenings so that we can't like relax and have fun. But just to say, oh my gosh, our evenings are so important because getting enough sleep is key and crucial for us right now.

Christine: That's really good. I think that if we don't plan it down to this, it sounds like a lot, but if we don't think of it backwards like this, we end up just with chaotic nights and everyone's stressed out and everyone's flustered and we wonder why things feel like that every night. But if we just took the time to do this, it's really smart and you probably didn't realize you needed to end work at 3:30 in order to have the whole evening unfold like that.

Tsh: It's crazy. I have to start shutting things down, closing out tabs, shutting down Slack, sending off that last email or whatever it is in order to be out the door by 4:00 and that's okay with me. I don't mind. I like ending my work around that time of day, but it's just to pay attention to those things. Even though it sounds militant, maybe we do have to be militant for a few weeks to a month to solidify this ritual. But once it's done and once kids expectations are clear, this is just how it goes, it runs on autopilot and it becomes not a big deal. It's not like at 0800 we do this or that. It's just how you live life. We let it slide a ton in the summer, which is why right now at the start of a school year, we have to be really on our game here. This is such an easy way for me as a parent to be really, you're exhausted by the end of the day. The last thing you want to do is do this but if you can just roll up your sleeves one last time, then the evening is so much more life giving for me anyway. I need those wind down evenings so that I can have my mornings that I like so much.

Christine: I love it.

Tsh: This is my third one that I've been doing the past few months, meaning this isn't something I've well-established for years now, but I've really grown to appreciate this. What it is is in my bullet journal, which I've used for a long time now, instead of writing down everything I need to get done today, like just a brain dump of this is everything I need to get done so I'm going to put it down, the day we're talking right now is Friday. I'm going to write it down all under Friday's date and then looking at my to do list and thinking, well there's no way on earth I'm going to get all that done. I have to do the bullet journal thing of drawing that arrow to the left of it so that I migrated over to Monday the next day. That's all well and good, but for me it stresses me out to see, oh I am expecting to do 12 things today. That's not going to happen. What I've been doing instead is on a page in my bullet journal just writing down a master

monthly to do list. I've got August or September and all I'm doing is brain dumping every little to-do item there first. I'm talking about everything from I need to turn in my book edits by the middle of the month. There's a hard deadline, all the way to call and set dentist appointments or things that maybe don't have a specific date, I'm not talking a calendar, I'm just saying I need to get these done. I put them all there and then either the night before or the morning when I think of my to do list, I only pick three. I pick three things to get done that day. I feel like it's just because three things equals that day was pretty good. It's lowering the expectations in a way so that I could do those things better and because once you get those done, you have a fully checked off list, which feels amazing. Then you can go back, I go back to that monthly to-do list and pick one more thing. If I have time, that is if my day, if I still have plenty of work time or whatever, then I'll go and add one more thing and then I get that done. Then I go back and add one more thing if I have time. If I see, like what I was saying earlier, by 3:30, if I see I need to start shutting it down, I might just say that's it. Or I might pick, oh, that's a tiny little thing. I can get that done in five minutes. How great would it be to get that done? And then boom, I got it done and something. The thing is it's all the same stuff, so I'm not really talking about doing some thing different. I'm talking about a mind game, really. Writing it over here instead of writing it over there. But somehow it's a psychological benefit for me because I feel just more in control, what I was saying at the top about, checking email only at certain times. I feel like I'm the boss on my to-do list instead of it telling me, you are falling behind on all these 27 things. Instead it's, no, no, I'm doing three things today and I'm going to own it and do them well and then if I have more time, awesome. If I don't, it's okay because I got three things done and that is fantastic. I'll say even on special occasions, like if I've got a big event coming up or a season, there's a newborn, seriously, one thing, one thing on the day's agenda is perfectly fine. I don't know where we got this idea of, you have to have a really full to-do list and then get it all done. But it's just our culture. This is a little ritual I do that's really making me feel like I'm adulting somewhat well, especially while things are total chaos right now.

Christine: [43:31](#) That's really good. That's really helpful. I don't actually have a bullet journal so I feel like I need a visual of this. Is your weekly one, is it look like a calendar or do you totally create it on the pages? You just create it. You're on your own, right, in a bullet journal?

Tsh: Right. I'll put a link in the show notes to the original bullet journal 101, the guy that started it. You can make it however you want. Bullet journals all look like a million different things. But for me, I just usually take up about a week on an open page. I don't know what you'd call that, but two pages, one on the left and one on the right that ends up being roughly a week for me. I'll write at the top, Monday, September 1st and then I will just write out my to do list and I'll do the

dot for the things I need to get done. A circle for an appointment. I have a circle and then 1:30 podcast with Christine because that happens at a particular time as opposed to you just need to get that done sometime today. If I just need to know something about the day, I'll do a line. Like the dinner plan. If I have make your own pizza, I'll put a little line in there and put MIOP, that's just my shorthand. That is a reminder that at 3:00 PM we need to start getting the dough out so that it can be thawed, that kind of stuff. That's how I do it. Then as you get things done, you cross them off with a little x on top of the dot or whatever. If you didn't get things done, and this is what I was referring to, you're supposed to put a little carrot to the left and just migrate it to the next days. Which I still do, I guess if I thought I was going to get something done and it turns out I didn't, but then what you do is just the next day you write below it Tuesday, September 2nd, and you take what you didn't get done and put it down there. It's really not complicated, but that's what has worked for me. I usually create a spot for just either doodling or thinking through some brainstorm or whatever it is. I make space in that and I like to look back on the weeks when that happened. Just because it helps me process my way of thinking for what I need to get done on that monthly to-do list. I'll maybe think through some work-related conundrum. I'll have some little breakthrough and I'll flip over to September's to do list and like call so-and-so, look into this particular app or something like that in relation to my work.

That's kind 101, but I'll put a link in the show notes. I wrote a post, I need to update it. I don't do bullet journaling the same way, but I'll definitely add the guy who originated the whole idea anyway.

All that to say these are three little things that are not rocket science. I bet many people listening already do this kind of thing in some form or another. But just protecting these like Fort Knox helps me feel like, okay, the week is nuts, there's a lot of stuff coming at me that I did not ask for, what are the few things I can hold on to that I can feel the boss of because I'm in charge? Basically you can't tell me to not check email or to check email all the time or you can't add all these things to my to do list because I'm the one that decides only three things get done. It's just a small little simple thing to treat myself in a way so that I feel in control of my life.

Christine: So good and so helpful too. I love it. I'm really thinking through what I can do here to make things a little better.

Tsh: Good.

[47:10](#) You can find Christine at ChristineMarieBailey.com and on Instagram @organicstine. 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 Christine's. Head to the show notes for this episode number 211 at thesimpleshow.com where you can find links to all sorts of things, things we talked about, where or you can sign up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things, how you can become a patron and support the work it takes to create the show for just a few dollars a month, as well as how to connect with Christine and myself. The show was produced by Chad Michael Snavely and thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink, and my furry intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening. I'm Tsh Oxenreider and I'll catch you back here soon.