



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 216

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

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

[00:17](#) Hey friends! In this episode, I am sharing with you again a previous episode from last year when my friend Erin Loechner and I did a four part deep dive on knowing the news. This feels pretty relevant right now since so many of us are being bombarded with so much constantly changing news and since the series of ours focuses not so much on time specific news but more on how to stay engaged without losing your mind or your soul. We walk through a pretty timeless collection of ideas that are so timely right now. Now I'm only re-sharing with you the first part of our four part series, so to keep listening to the rest of the series after you're done here, check the links in the show notes.

We'll get right into this, but first a quick reminder to make sure you're signed up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things because it's the best way to make sure you never miss an episode of this show or of anything else. Basically, you'll get links to five things from the week I either created or loved plus occasional news you'd otherwise miss, because I don't share it anywhere else. The emails can be read and under a minute because I hate inbox clutter too. Go to fivequickthings.com to sign up for the free weekly email or just click on the links in the show notes of this episode. All right, so let's get into this. Here is Erin and me talking about staying informed with the news without losing your mind.

[01:41](#) Okay Erin, we are starting a series here about the news, how important it is or not to be reading it, is it doing more harm than good? And then in the next two parts of the series we'll get into the why, the good and bad reasons to stay informed on world events and then also the how. What's the best way to stay informed without losing your mind and damaging your soul. As we begin this series, Erin, I want you to start telling me your first thoughts on this, the news and whether you think it's important to keep up with it. What do you think?

Erin: [02:11](#) Well, I will start by saying that I think the question is less about the importance of staying informed and more about whether or not quote unquote the news is actually informing us. I have always viewed the news as a product, whether it's newspaper or TV or internet form, its job is to sell to a specific

market. I think it does that really, really well. I think it's been doing that really, really well in recent years. My question is, can we accurately call that being wholly informed? Would we be more informed if we prioritized reading three historical nonfiction's about a particular issue? Would we be more likely to act on those issues if we were proactively seeking them out rather than just passively digesting what we're fed to care about?

Tsh: [03:00](#) Am I hearing you say that you think it is really important to stay informed, you're just not sure if staying informed via traditional news feeds is the best way to stay informed?

Erin: I think so. I think if the question is whether or not should we stay informed or not, I don't know if the news really even touches on that. The news is feeling very entertainment-ey very gossip column-ish. I think depending on your outlet and depending on your source, which we're totally going to get into later, I think a lot of times that does a really poor job of informing us in a more deep rather than broad way.

Tsh: Right. I think that's the question here is, I mean honestly that we want to tackle with part one is what does it mean to follow the news? Is it just scrolling some social media feed and we can question that later whether that's good for your soul, but what does it mean to know what's going on in the world? And maybe even, what do we need to know? I think one thing that I think is really important is that we live in a 24/7 news cycle and that has not always been the case in most of history. By far, even what, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, it definitely was not like that. I don't think living in a 24/7 news cycle and then just consuming it is healthy at all. I don't think we were made to consume as much information as we are given anymore. I mean our souls really can't handle that and remain healthy.

I think right away for sure, I believe that we have to limit ourselves to the news, whatever we want to call news. That's the tension here, staying informed, but keeping healthy boundaries around our minds and our souls.

Erin: I think too, it seems to be that there are two schools of thought. It's either, okay, read the news, be a news junkie, follow everything, follow every outlet. Read lots of multiple sources or you're just burying your head in the sand. I don't know if that's an appropriate school of thought either. I don't want to think it's not an either or discussion. When we talk about whether or not it's a privilege to choose to not read the news, right? I think it's a privilege to have access to the news, but I don't necessarily think it's a privilege to choose not to hop onto that 24/7 cycle that we keep talking about.

Tsh: [05:28](#) Yeah, I agree with you. It's definitely probably healthy to not, but I don't know. I want to push back a little bit and say that, well, first of all, let's define privilege. Listeners that might be hearing this, that's become such a popular word that it might bristle some of your feelings, but when we're talking about privilege, we're just talking about a set of unearned benefits that are given to people who just fit a particular specific social group. There's some of us that have certain kinds of privilege we didn't necessarily earn, but they're not bad either. That's what we're referring to. I'm not necessarily codifying the word privilege as a bad thing. But with that in mind, I do want to say that I do think it's a bit of a privilege to choose to look the other way, to maybe not know. That's not to say we have to know because we were given access to, we should know, but when it comes especially to more conversational and what we choose to consume via those conversations, or even I guess in our news feeds or our social media feeds, I think it's a privilege to just be able to turn it off because it doesn't affect you. I think news at the end of the day is about people and sometimes those segments of news make us uncomfortable and for us to say, I don't want to know about the racial tension in the city. I don't know if that's healthy. What do you think?

Erin: [06:55](#) Oh my gosh, I totally agree. I agree that that would not be a healthy reaction. For me, I have a conversation with my husband all the time because he is super informed and he's very good at applying that information and making connections on his own. Whereas I, my brain ingests it and then thinks, well what are we gonna do about this now? For me to receive and to consume such broad topics of things, that yes, I am privileged to be unaffected by, I think that's where I have a hard time jumping to. I think it's a privilege to choose to look the other way, yes. In terms of whether or not you engage with a certain topic. I think in some way or another we are all affected and connected by the news cycle, but I think some of us see it and act on it a little bit more strategically, if that makes sense. For instance, I would never fault the single mother working two jobs for not spending that extra 15 minutes of downtime debating whether or not Oprah should be president or debating whether or not Trump got the national anthem lyrics correct. You know what I mean? I think it's about prioritizing what is important in your life. Prioritizing what you can and can't handle and acting out of care for other people regardless.

Tsh: [08:17](#) Sure. I think that goes to the whole idea of what is the purpose of just staying informed and that's what we'll get to in part two. But I do think it's important to say at least to set the stage here. I think we need to remember that we stay informed because we care about other people at the end of the day. I think of the quote from Emma Lazarus, the poet, "Until we are free, none of us are free." I think she says it more poetically. We are none of us free. She's the writer of the new Colossus, that poem that's on the Statue of Liberty. To me, I

think of that a lot. We stay informed because not all of us are free and so I need to care. Even if it doesn't affect me or my community or my demographic, it's important and yet at the same time, here's the tension. I'm a mom or I am just a busy person. Do I really need to devote X number of hours to keeping up with all of this, this 24/7 news cycle for the sake of being a good wife and mom and neighbor, I don't know.

Erin: [09:21](#) I think too, sometimes we get mixed up, having information about a certain segment of group versus being empathetic toward that group. I don't think they're the same thing. I think it's one thing to, I do think they are related. It's really hard to be empathetic if you're not informed. But I also think what better way to learn that than with each other. If people truly are the bottom line of the new cycle, let's learn alongside of each other and not have it trickled down based on headlines that we just rarely are getting the bigger picture. I think it's a really important practice to ask yourself with every news article that you're reading, what's missing here? What has this author with this particular set of beliefs, what have they thought to crop in and to crop out? What are the priorities of the larger whole? What is perhaps another areas action or reaction? What's another segment of the population? What are they believing? I don't know that simply reading an article about...everybody is so different. I do think there's such a difference between that empathy that we seek and the information that we're trying to maybe hop over the empathy across. Does that make sense?

Tsh: [10:44](#) Yeah. I think that's maybe a byproduct of this 24/7 news cycle is that we start painting caricatures of people and there becomes very much an us versus them thing. I just think you even mentioned the word headline and it got me to thinking how many times people often just look at headlines and respond even just to that, we're not even talking about reading the article. We're talking about just hearing a little soundbite, a phrase and making an opinion based on that. You talk about people and having these conversations, it reminds me of stories. I think as human beings we are hardwired for stories. We learn best through stories. I've said this before, but this is why years later you can remember the pastor's sermon illustration and not remember his sermon. That's because we remembered the stories. I think that's what it comes down to is exactly right what you said, we need to actually talk to these people behind these words or on the other side of maybe what's being described to actually get some feet on the ground.

Erin: [11:45](#) I completely agree. I think that's been a real struggle with me when I do read the news is it has such a lack of relativism. We're being alerted to a problem, but there is such little space or time to assess that particular problem against another segment and problem that might seem unrelated but really isn't.

We're just all so much more connected and our stories are alike, yes, but so different. When you talk about painting a character and how our news often is certainly our headlines. I think we've all seen two headlines against each other. One is targeting a certain segment, another is targeting another and they say completely different things about the same subject matter, the same factual responses. I do think when we're considering whether or not the news is harmful or good or how much we need to stay informed versus how much we need to be consuming. I think it's really important to find a new source that humanizes the issue of it. NPR are so good at this. I know we'll talk about how we specifically read the news, but I think it's important to consider whether or not a particular news source inspires us to act on behalf of those people or on behalf of ourselves even. Or is it debilitating? Are these sources inspiring action more than the slant or the shock factor?

Tsh: [13:14](#) Right. Which I actually would love to talk about this. What is news now? I feel like I've seen clips, maybe you've seen them too of past presidential debates or talks, from the Reagan administration or George Bush Sr., and the way the discourse sounded was so different. It almost sounded like the reason they were having these discussions is to come to a solution not to polarize us even more, which I feel like is sometimes, but it does come down to this question of what is the news? I would love to hear your thoughts Erin, on there's that phrase fake news, which we'll get to in a second. But with news having such a little amount of relativism, what do you think it means to be newsworthy?

Erin: [14:04](#) Oh gosh, I am the wrong person to ask about newsworthy-ness. I don't think it's possible to determine for every single person what they would deem newsworthy to. Do you know what I mean? I work at our local soup kitchen from time to time and we ran out of bread one day and it was a huge issue. It was a total cluster. It was a madhouse. That was news for us. That was a huge moment in our life that will never make a headline. It will never be even as a human interest story, it is what it is. I think there are things that are happening around us every day that will never make the front page that will never be a headline, but are considered good and worthy and important and, connect us as a whole and our problems and our solutions.

I agree with you completely in that it feels like that's not the goal anymore. It feels like connection and solutions are no longer the goal. I don't know when that shifted. But it does, it feels like the discourse surrounding whatever headline was. Journalists were encouraged to wrap things up in a tidy bow or to offer hope or offer something. And now it's almost as if, and it's a great thing that we have been able to embrace the gray and embrace the fact that there are no tidy solutions and this is very nuanced time. At the same time, I do find that there's that lack of hope when I read the news.

Tsh: [15:37](#) Right. It almost feels like they just dropped these little bombs and then we don't know what to do with it and that's when it can really hurt our soul. There is a value, I think, in reporters just sharing the facts and letting us come to our conclusions. I think that's hugely important. I was the editor of my school paper.

Erin: Me too.

Tsh: No way. Oh my goodness. I was in journalism. I thought it was going to be a journalism major. I came this close to doing it. I think of that often because I think, oh my gosh, I could be a reporter this day if things were just a little bit different. I remember being taught a lot the difference between a news article and an opinion article or even a features article and what the end result was. In a news article, the most important thing is the facts and you share the facts. In fact, it's crucial that you share the most important things first. You cover the who, what, when, where, why, how, and there's even a certain order to that. Then at the end is when it's just all the extra stuff because they literally would cut it back in the day when it was more of an analog process to create a newspaper and they needed to be able to cut the least important things first to make room for an entire page. I think it's really valuable to remember that a lot of times, even though these bits of news feel huge and empty and without a what, then, therefore, that in some ways we need to pick up that baton and decide on our end, what am I going to do with this instead of being told what to do with it? Because these journalists at the end of the day are just letting us know what they think we need to know.

Erin: [17:28](#) Agreed. And maybe that's maybe why the 24/7 cycle could be so problematic is there's no time for digestion. There's no time for what does this mean for tomorrow? What does this mean in relation to science? What does this mean in relation to human arts? think there is, there's such little margin. It's not as if we're getting the daily paper at our front step and we have all day to mull it over and then talk about it with our family. That's not happening. It does seem as if we're almost refresh, refresh, refresh, hoping to gain clarity on certain issues that do seem more complex but we're unable to because it's disappearing. There's something to replace it literally 30 minutes later.

Tsh: [18:17](#) Right. And plus, I haven't seen cable news in ages at years, but if I remember correctly, there were times, and they probably still do this, where it's like you're sharing with me about 10 minutes worth of news and you're just repeating it. You're just saying it again and again. I can't imagine what that must do to a psyche if they just keep that on. I don't know. That just feels so very 1984 to me a little bit

Erin: Yes.

Segment Two

Tsh: [21:48](#) Fake news. I'm doing air quotes. You can't see me, but I'm saying fake news because that's a phrase now that we're all familiar with. What's your take on it? What do you think that means, Erin?

Erin: [22:02](#) I have too much baggage about the whole term to properly consider. I think the good thing about the term just being thrown around quite often is we are encouraged to be more mindful about what we're taking in and I think we are encouraged to check our own sources and we are encouraged to think a little bit more than we maybe happened in the past. To find those valuable sources, to ask questions, to consider other perspectives, to weigh one outlet versus another. See what's missing from the story, what the bigger picture is. On that front, I think it's great that it is coming to the surface. But I also, well, we can talk about free press a whole another issue. Tell me first your thoughts.

Tsh: [22:53](#) This is such a loaded weighted thing that I think is important, actually that's what we're here to do, unpack some of these things. I think there is some truth to the idea but I think it's largely a misused term now and people have their various opinions on mainstream media and I use that term broadly, just because that gets tossed around a lot too. But I take that to mean the major traditional news outlets. The Washington Post, New York Times, CNN, those sorts of things. There are a lot of people out there, people that I know and love that automatically discount those outlets because they assume that they have an agenda and this agenda is counter to maybe what their personal agenda or bias is and the thing I think is that yes, news is biased, but that is because every human being on the planet is biased and we can't help it. We have a bias, that's just part of existing on earth. Our past experiences, our worldview, what we know and what we don't know makes us biased people. Because the news or just in the media I should say is comprised of human beings, it's just by nature going to be biased. But that doesn't mean there is a bias with an agenda per se. I'm not saying there's not, but that doesn't have to mean that. I think sometimes people are so quick to label something as fake news because they assume there is some kind of agenda and maybe that that assumption comes from not liking what is being said. Yet at the same time we have to make sure we don't swing the other pendulum and just say, well, you don't like this because it says something what you don't like, but I'm going to buy into it because I like what it says. Do you know what I mean?

Erin: [24:49](#) I do. Exactly. I think that's such an important distinction. I think we're all conspiracy theorists at heart and we want to jump to the fact that if you're saying something that I don't agree with, what's behind that? What's your bottom line? What are you trying to do to me, what's happening? I think in that vein, it's incredibly problematic. I agree. When I was in journalism school, we were

tapped to replace the word bias with point of view because it's the less loaded word or whatever, and of course everyone has a point of view. We all have a different perspective. That's a lovely thing. It's a fantastic thing. Me having a different point of view than someone else doesn't mean that I'm out to get them. It does mean I see things differently. I also think, of course, agendas exist. I tend to, when I'm digesting the news, I do consider the source pretty heavily. But I also check those facts myself all of the time against what I can find against what this slant of the facts are. I'm not going to give a specific example that will derail us completely, but, I feel like even statistics can be so heavily slanted. I think we do our best to try to form a valuable opinion based on statistics knowing that even those can steer us wrong a lot of the time. I don't think that that means we as individuals have agendas either. I think that means, and maybe this is Pollyanna to say, but I think that means our point of view is showing and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Tsh: [26:29](#) Sure. I mean that just shows our humanity, I think.

I have to ask thenb, you say you fact check all the time. How do you fact check? What do you do?

Erin: [26:40](#) Well, generally I ask my husband, he's more statistic. I don't even know what to say, more advanced than I am. He will say, okay, well here's a question. What about this, have you considered this angle? What about this? Did they look at the focus group for this amount of time or was the focus group in this sort of environment? That's like a science background of it. This is different. But, generally what I will do, and we'll talk about this a little bit later, but I will go to the local, local, local, local source. I will follow the local journalists. I like to check their Twitter page, see what's happening. A lot of times people on the local level have a far different viewpoint than what's being reported nationally. I think that's one of the beautiful things about free speech, about Twitter in general is yes, I think it can be problematic in a different way, but I think if we can really find people on the ground boots down that are in that environment, how beneficial was that when we were looking at Ferguson, for instance. That's the first thing that's coming to my mind is it was so helpful to see what we were quote unquote being, what was not being printed, what was being hidden and then what was perhaps true to this person and what was true to this person. Even depending on their different views of which side of the street they were standing on. I think when I try to dig deep and look at the facts and look at how those facts are being skewed, I go to as local a source as possible or just get out my dictionary. Sometimes I just don't even understand the words that they're throwing around and I want to know, okay, what does that actually mean? What is the accurate definition for this and is that being used correctly?

Tsh: [28:40](#) I've heard actually from those websites, those dictionary websites that say that they'll see a huge uptick in the word look-ups based on some speech that was just made. I remember typing in one time not too long ago, what is, and then the first dropdown was collusion. I was like, oh good. I'm not alone.

Erin: Yeah, I didn't even know what that meant.

Tsh: Right. I wanted to know, I get the gist, but I wanted to actually know what are we talking about, legally or factually. I think that's really smart. You bring up the feet on the ground, boots on the ground. I think maybe that is one good side to maybe not the 24/7 cycle, but the social media side of it or the accessibility we have to the news is that the average Joe and Jane can become news sources in a way. I want to talk a little bit in just a second about the difference between journalists and just reporting the news. But I think of, just like Ferguson, I think of the example like the Arab spring or back not too long ago in Turkey, had a little bit of a throwdown in Istanbul with the park. I had a lot of friends there still. I was super glued and hitting refresh every few minutes just to see what was going on, are my friends okay? It was so interesting to be able to follow real people on Twitter and for them to say, I'm at the park right now and I just got gassed. Or I just saw a woman get beat up right next to me. I don't know, there's something pretty amazing about that. Of course there's the flip side of that that can be a little dystopian, but I don't know that there's some good to that.

Erin: [30:17](#) It's always so much more a contextual conversation because when you've been living somewhere your whole life or for any period of time, there's such a context around that. There's such a texture to that conversation and it just adds, I think it's about humanizing. It just adds another layer. In that way, I agree that it's a tricky thing and I love that we're going to talk about the difference between bloggers and journalists and whether or not you're reporting facts or something in your certain hometown. But I do feel like most of the time, it's not about being popular. It's not about getting retweeted. It's about saying what you're seeing and saying this this is happening around me. It's about connecting with the people around you and connecting with a larger world. I think that's a beautiful thing.

Tsh: [31:12](#) It is. I see a lot of times people start questioning that, people either question motive or question whether that's actually happening. I get that. There is something still a little wild West about all of this, that people can say what they want and maybe this comes back to the distrusting the media at large because who knows who to believe anymore. On the whole, I think if we approach it with a mindset of these are real people behind these avatars, behind these articles, we can start remembering that this is all about people and this is humanity. I would rather err on the side of trusting this person and that they

care, they have shown themselves to have a track record of caring for the good of the situation that I'm going to choose to believe them with a healthy dose of skepticism.

I'm going to ask you, what do you see as the difference between a journalist and a blogger?

Erin: [32:11](#) Don't journalists have to adhere to a code of ethics?

Tsh: Yes.

Erin: Okay. This is just all coming back from school, but, I feel like bloggers maybe do that as well. I don't think that people don't have each other's best interests at heart but I do feel like the standards are a little bit, and that's up to that's individual interpretation, I suppose. You might be a very repeatable blogger and fact checking might be of utmost importance to you or not. I do feel like a lot of times there are some signatures being made when you're owned by, when you're a journalist, whether freelancing or not for a larger source. I think there's a little bit more on the line in terms of risk management.

Tsh: [33:07](#) Yeah, I think there are enough people in the chain of command, I think in a more mainstream news situation that a journalist can't just say whatever they want and just assume they're going to have their job or assume that they're not going to be reprimanded in some way. I think a journalist, not only do they have to subscribe to a code of ethics, I think there are some very specific things that they need to subscribe to or have a license to. Maybe a listener can fill us in if they know, but I do know that things like the New York Times, Washington Post, they have several layers of fact checkers. There are people on staff who do nothing but check facts and and give their stamp of approval before something goes out. That doesn't mean they don't make mistakes, they do all the time, but on the whole journalists do have several layers backing them up along with an editor that their reputation is on the lines. It's within their jurisdiction to fire a journalist or have them stop reporting what they're reporting on if they are damaging their own personal reputation.

Erin: [34:19](#) Right. Yes. I think it's a greater system of checks and balances perhaps.

Tsh: [34:24](#) People listening to this right now might be thinking like, oh my gosh, this is so sad. The world we live in, the situation, the keeping up with the news. But I want to wrap up part one on a positive note, I would say, or at least let's not feel so like tragic and dystopian. What do you think Erin? Is it important to read the news then and is it doing more harm than good? What are your thoughts?

Erin: [34:50](#) I wouldn't say it's doing more harm than good. I think like most things, it's a priority issue. I think there are seasons in our life when the news is far less sustainable to our day. Say you're in the thick of, you've got a sick kid and a sick parent and you're just trying to get by. I don't think anyone would fault you for what we would call sticking her head in the sand. You were trying to get through your day. You were trying to do the best you can. I think that's everybody and I don't think that concerning every part of yourself with policy and activism and information would be healthy for you at that time.

I think it's not about whether or not we should be reading the news. I think it's about whether or not we should be considering other people. I think that answer's always yes.

Tsh: So you're saying it's worth it if it helps other people? Is that what I'm hearing you saying?

Erin: I think it's worth it if it serves the purpose of connecting you to something outside of yourself. I think a lot of things do that. I think historical nonfiction does that. I think having a greater context around just the current cycle will do that. I think talking to your neighbors will do that. I wouldn't say that reading the news is harmful, but I think it's completely okay to abstain from reading the news, if you must.

Tsh [36:35](#) Sure. I love how we're broadening the definition of news here that it can be literally what has going on in the world, but just like you say, having that broader context of history by way of reading really good books or having the conversation down the street with the neighbor who might be directly affected by this bit of policy that was just made. That is news as well. I agree with you. I think we need to broaden our definition of news in order for it to be healthy.

[37:12](#) Don't forget you can listen to the next three parts of our conversation through the links in the show notes, so head on over there. You can find Erin at designformankind.com and check out her other thing OtherGoose.com. You can also find her on Instagram [@erinloechner](#) and keep up with me, I'm on Twitter [@tsh](#) and Instagram [@tshoxenreider](#) and of course at theartofsimple.net where you can find my writing. Head to the show notes for this episode, number 216 at thesimpleshow.com where you can find all sorts of things, links to things we talked about, where 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 per month as well as how to connect with Erin and myself. The show is 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.

