



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 218

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

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

[00:13](#) Okay, friends, in this episode I'm talking to my friend and cohost Katherine Willis Pershey, and as always we're talking more about what we wrote about this week. Both of our essays have to do with gathering in community. Katherine's a pastor, so she talks with me about the nuts and bolts of how she's created her mom's group in her town now going on 10 years. It's a group where everyone's welcome. They provide fabulous childcare and it's about building relationships, not a program.

Then I talk about what I've learned gathering people for events where people come from out of town for a set amount of time. In my case, that's this weekend as this episode goes live when I'm hosting my first ever group coaching gathering here in my town where 15 of you listeners are coming in from all over to spend a weekend with me, but it's also with Literary London, which I've hosted now for two years and have the most experience in so far. The 2020 trip is also now open for application. If you have any interest and you're the right sort of person for the trip, please do check it out. There's a link in the show notes of this episode number 218, so we'll get right into it.

But as always a quick reminder to make sure you're signed up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things because that is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode of this show or any thing else that I've created or loved. Basically you get links to five things from the week plus occasional news you'd otherwise miss because I don't share it anywhere else. The emails can be read in under a minute because I hate long emails too. Go to five quick things dot email to sign up for the free weekly email or just click on the links in the show notes of this episode.

Let's get into it. Here is Katherine first sharing with me a bit of a how-to on creating a small group for gathering right in your own hometown.

Katherine, I feel like we have the added benefit of you being a regular voice on this show and a pastor because you are all about, I say regular in quotes, your

regular job, gathering and being part of a community. Tell me a little bit more what you're thinking in light of this and your post this week.

Katherine: One of the things that I love about my vocation is literally in my job description. It says I am to be in relationship with people and cultivate community. I just love that, it's literally my job to befriend people and to develop meaningful relationships. I do spend a lot of time cultivating a community through different ways that we gather people. But one of the most meaningful has been all along this Moms and Faith group that I helped found right when I came to my current church. I've been here, we're in our 10th year of Moms and Faith. I've been here going on 10 years. We gather every Friday. It's always about 25 to 30 people. It ebbs and flows a little bit. At one point in the the second or third year we got way too big and we've realized it's actually better not to be huge, but there's just some things about it that have consistently been really meaningful. It's always open. There's this incredible welcome where there's a lot of other stuff around here where you can feel like, well, if you're not in that school district or you don't do that activity...there's no requirement that anybody's a member of the church. Oftentimes half the people who come aren't members. There's never any hidden agenda that we're trying to, sometimes they do join, but other people, members of other churches or don't have a desire to be a member of the church but still find the meaningful connection.

[04:08](#) I think it's one of those places where people can be real. There's a lot of conversation about women's ministries and sometimes they can be geared toward cultivating more superficial relationships depending on the culture. That has just never been the case. It's a place where people go and are asked how are you really? And people can answer. It was really fun to reflect on that, how it's been a meaningful part of my work and personally to me, those relationships are dear to me.

Tsh: [04:51](#) I'm curious because I've seen the gamut of women's groups or small groups in churches and I've been in some that are literally you just get together and hang out all the way to there as a very structured, like a book or a Bible study that we are going through and we're gonna do X, Y, and Z in X amount of weeks. Where in that spectrum does your group fall?

Katherine: [05:14](#) We started out as more of a book group and actually the second book we ever read was *Organized Simplicity*.

Tsh: Oh my gosh, that's funny.

Katherine: I still have the notes that I wrote because I found a lot that really resonated. You asked us in that book to come up with what is your family's purpose and mission statement? When I was reading it I was like, this is perfect for our group. It's not

necessarily a Bible study in a formal way. People are coming from different contexts, different religious backgrounds. That was such a great book for us to read and I still have mission statement that I wrote during that time. Probably time to revisit.

Tsh: [06:00](#) That's so fun. I have to say just for the listeners, I literally did not know you're going to say that. That wasn't a set up. I really did not know.

Katherine: [06:08](#) That was the first time that we communicated, because I sent you an email to be like, do you have a group? I ended up developing one that was specific to our group. Since we don't have a really formal structure, but we do have our rituals. One thing, and I would say, if somebody is interested in starting a group, whether it's a community group or a group within a church, I do think particularly if we're talking about moms, offering excellent childcare, you gotta start there because if you're able to organize babysitters at home, it's tricky. Thankfully our church has always underwritten that, but I was thinking one time I went on a writing retreat with other moms and we brought a babysitter with us and we all just kicked in for the babysitter. If you are thinking about starting a community moms group, somebody who has a finished basement with a toy box in the basement, everybody kicks in to get a babysitter and then you have your time with other adults.

Tsh: [07:24](#) I will even say even if you do a mixed, a couples gathering or group, we were part of a small group where it was husbands and wives and singles, but we all chipped in for a babysitter that was a few houses down. It was in an where there were two people that lived on the same street, just really close to each other. They used one for the kids house and one for the adults. That worked out really great.

Katherine: [07:47](#) Yeah. We actually have, we run two childcare rooms, four total, because we have policy about how many child to adults. Everybody's background checked, wanting to have a safe church. That's one of the core things that really gets people there because they know their kids are actually cultivating community too because they have so much fun together. I've always thrown out a general opening question. Sometimes it's something silly or light. Sometimes that ends up being surprisingly a meaningful opening question. I asked that one, it's almost a cliché, who would you have dinner with if you could eat with a dinner with anyone? It ended up incredibly moving opportunity to hear about some people's griefs because I hadn't specified alive or or deceased and so many people talked about a grandmother or a parent, a sibling even. It was meaningful.

We have an opening question and that's a chance, everybody has a turn because talking in a group can be a little intimidating if you're a more

introverted person. We say names, it's always good to know one another's names. We used to read something. We did books for awhile and then I would send out a blog post or whatnot. Lately I've been sharing a short film because we've just found, then everybody is getting on the same page in the same room. We're not asking anybody to do homework.

Tsh: Yes, that's a big deal for a young moms. I mean moms with young kids.

Katherine: Are you familiar with the Work of the People?

Tsh: Yes, that's a really good resource.

Katherine: [09:39](#) A really good resource. There's all different kinds of authors and that is faith-based. Again, we're faith based group but we've actually also done Ted talks. We did Brene Brown's Ted talk one time. Brene Brown also has some good videos on the Work of the People. Then we talk. I'm a very open ended facilitator so I've never been fond of those where there's questions at the end of the chapter and you reflect on this very specific question that feels like a yes or no answer. I really don't like panned discussions and so I tend to open by just saying was there anything that caught your attention and the conversation will flow from there.

[10:33](#) I love facilitating conversations and if I'm allowed to say this on the air, I think I'm good at it and I tend to be pretty hard on myself about whether or not I'm good at things, but there is an art form to stating and making sure that you're making space for people to jump in and you're reading the dynamics. If a conversation, sometimes political issues come up and you really have to be tuned into, or a theological issue. You have to be tuned into where people are and does somebody need an extra invitation to jump in or that is one of the things that I love doing and I think I'm good at. Am I allowed to say that?

Tsh: [11:21](#) You are allowed to say that and I'm going to even add on to that, that I think I'm fairly good at that too but I will say I've become better at it because I've practiced at it. My biggest example is my English class where I teach high schoolers. 75% of the class is a book discussion. It is very open ended where I will come with the list of questions or topics that I think we should cover, but I'm not going to stick to a script and make sure we answer X, Y, and Z and it is actually harder, I would argue to facilitate a discussion where you start off with what were your initial thoughts, any reactions, what's your broad takeaway? And let the conversation go from that. But I think it ends up fostering a much richer, more personal and practical conversation that people appreciate rather than coming with a scripted flow that might not fit exactly but you're trying to force it. So I think it's really good on you.

Katherine: [12:14](#) Sometimes I am totally surprised and utterly delighted at the direction the conversation goes because I never would've known to direct it that way. But I think if you have confidence and sense to read the room and to follow the threads as they unspool it really leads to some meaningful conversation.

Tsh: That's good. I really like that.

Katherine: We have a couple of different kinds of meetings. Then we take time to do joys and concerns, we call it. We go around the room again. Everybody has a chance to share a joy and a concern that they brought with them. That is beyond a shadow of a doubt the heart of what the whole group is about and why people come. I really do think it's that opportunity to tell the truth about your life and coming with a concern about a loved one or yourself and people have shared very big real things and knowing that not only are we going to pray together at the end of the group, but I really try to remind people throughout the year, we're making a commitment to pray for one another throughout the week and people are awesome about following through. You hear stories about somebody shares something hard and three hours later there's flowers on their doorstep. Not being alone. I think that's the thing, that's what makes me so passionate about this group and just wanting people to have the tools to nurture really meaningful, genuine relationships. People are so lonely and people are struggling so much and to create these sort of sacred circles where you can come and speak the truth and have it be heard and then hold space for other people, it's still good.

Tsh: Yeah. That sounds ultimately, especially if I was in the stage with young kids, but heck, even now with kids my age, that's the bulk of why I would want to go to something like this is not so much to have a formulaic program laid out before me, but so I could actually share a joy and concern and hear from other people in the same murky waters as me. That's really where friendship, like you just said, friendship and relationships are birthed. That's good.

Katherine: We try to be mindful, not to try to fix one another's problem, but then sometimes you do walk away with really good advice and you're like, I'm glad somebody broke the don't fix it rule.

Obviously, you have to establish a culture of trust and really drive home that anything that's shared has to be held in confidence. Otherwise you're going to turn around and see someone at the drop off line or whatnot at school and that can feel really vulnerable. In order for that to be that sort of safe refuge, we really have to know that the people are going to hold that confidence.

Tsh: [15:18](#) How often do you guys meet as a group?

Katherine: We meet every Friday throughout the school year with a handful of exceptions. Whenever our school district is off, we don't meet and we do have a couple other types of meetings. We have breakfast together once a month and we have a little signup genius. People bring treats and then we sit at tables of six instead of a circle of 25. That is great way for people who feel more comfortable in a smaller group setting. Once a month they get their small group. That's awesome to just share a meal together. Again, that builds so much community. At those meetings we'll bring in somebody who works for a local nonprofit or perhaps a church member who has gone on a mission trip. We just heard from somebody who to Malawi with Locks of Love, which is an incredible organization that we are only new partnering with. Maybe once a month, but a couple of times a year we bring in a speaker and sometimes it's a professional speaker, but then sometimes we just invite, one time I felt like we were recreating a Glamour Magazine feature article. I brought in women in their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s, one from each decade. We did a discussion and asked them all sorts of questions and it was so awesome. I've done a number of panels like that and then that builds relationships with these women who tend to be in their thirties and forties, with other folks in the community. That's always valuable.

Tsh: [17:00](#) I'm guess I'm thinking about the listeners here who are maybe inspired to create some kind of gathering like this within their own group and they're thinking, I am not a pastor. Do you have any thoughts on how to just get started when all you know, is that you want to gather a group of like minded people together?

Katherine: I think that you have to trust that if you find one or two other people who are motivated to gather. One of the simplest ways to gather with other people is to start a book discussion group. That's a known gathering point for a lot of people. We know that we know what that is and our culture I think it's really helpful to be clear from the beginning what kind of group you're going to be. Because there are book clubs and there are book clubs and whether we're talking about gathering around a novel. Is it going to be the kind of book club where everybody's thrilled to just be there and nobody cares if you read the book or not? Or is this everybody reads the book kind of book club? The same thing you were asking, what kind of church group is it? Is it the kind where you do a lot of homework and you're doing intensive study or is it show up in your yoga pants, we're just glad you got here? I'm very clear that there's no right or wrong answer for the kind of group you are.

But I think in clear from the outset and the language we use is covenant. We actually have a covenant that we all agree is what we're about. It has those things like maintaining confidentiality and not interrupting. It kind of lays out what we intend to be and we do an orientation at the beginning of the year.

Whatever you are just being clear and cultivating the kind of group you really want to have. I big fan of keeping open borders and so always inviting new people into the circle and just focusing on hospitality even if that means a group might get bigger. Different people have perspectives on that.

Tsh: [19:21](#) Yeah. I've been in groups where they're both, and I can understand the spirit behind wanting to maybe close doors in terms of fostering community, especially with that confidentiality aspect. I can completely understand why, but I in general have always appreciated when you have more of an open doors policy so that you feel comfortable inviting someone along who maybe says something to you and you think, I bet they would really like this group. You feel like you could without having to get permission or get an exception to the rule.

Katherine: [19:52](#) A really big thing, so we do a little bit of promotion, we'll have a blurb in our church newsletter. A couple times I've done little flyers that we distribute on Facebook, but personal invitation, if you want to start a group, invite people to join it and invite them direct, tell them why you would love for them to be part of it. Maybe they'll say no, some people are hungry for community and some people have a full dance card and you'll find out. Taking the risk to invite people personally. That's how this group really has grown. Almost everybody who's there, somebody else said to them, hey, I think you would like this group. I mean sometimes people are invited by people who aren't even in the group. They've just heard of it. Personal invitation is huge.

Tsh: [20:39](#) I think that is such a good key takeaway. When I think about why I would want to join something, it's not because I read an announcement and my church bulletin or some kind of flyer on a bulletin board at a coffee shop, even though those things aren't bad. I think the thing that would actually lead me to trying it out because it is scary to try something for the first time and to feel like, am I going to be put on this spot? Am I going to end up hating it and wish I had a way to back out? That personal invitation and that personal vouch that I think you would actually like this and it's not just you feeling all weird saying, I think I want to try this, but I don't know if I'm going to like it.

Katherine: We are really intentional whenever anybody new comes. We have a steering team that I work with and sometimes it's as simple as sending out an article and being like, do you think this would work for us? They help generate ideas and they help with some of the organization and organizing childcare and whatnot. But they're also, I really empower them and encourage them to really take seriously that they are the first line of welcome. If somebody new comes, to make sure they receive a very warm welcome from that team, it's not like they're all together. They're not wearing a tee shirt or anything. They just have this responsibility to be welcoming.

Tsh: [21:58](#) Yeah. That's good. I love that. It sounds like a fantastic, you said you've been doing this for 10 years now, right?

Katherine: [22:03](#) This is our 10th year, so we started in the fall of 2010 and it's been a long time and it's been an awesome part of my rhythm and pattern and I love we don't actually kick people out. Some groups, once you don't have preschoolers anymore, there's still one other person who been in since the very beginning. But people come and go and people have kids from babies through high school.

Tsh: [22:28](#) Yeah, I love that too because I totally get the point of having more age centric groups, but there's something that's really great about interacting with each other. Someone who has high schoolers, still interacting with someone who has babies as though you might actually be friends and maybe have something in common. I think that's fantastic. [inaudible]

Segment Two

Tsh: [25:04](#) I piggybacked onto the same sort of topic you did, which is gathering and community. Although mine is a little bit different because when I thought about who do I gather? What is my frame of reference for that? The thing that came to my mind immediately from my experience is London. I host Literary London and I've done it twice and we're going to do it for a third time. In fact, it's cool we're talking about this because it is now open for applications for next summer. That's very fun. If you're listening to this and you think I want to go to Literary London, you can go. I'll put a link in the show notes or you can apply, I should say, I don't want to just say you can go, we only have room for six people. We purposely pick, since we're talking about this sense of community, we purposely pick based on the cohesion of the entire group. Based on what we think would make for a great time together and beyond. More than just will these people get along based on their personality? But actually, the type of work they're in, what phase of life they're in with their work and how the conversation might go as we share about our work and help each other with what's next when we get back from London. I say all that to say, if you're interested, please apply. But that doesn't necessarily mean if you don't get an invitation that that means something. We will maybe open it up again in a year and you can try again.

[26:33](#) All that to say, that was my frame of reference, but it's also cool that we're talking about this right now, Katherine, because I am hosting a group for the first time this weekend, people are coming into town, my little old Georgetown, Texas. I've got 15 women coming to hang and we're going to do a group weekend of life coaching, moving onto the next thing in our work. I'm really, really, really excited about this. It's similar to London thing, but on a much smaller scale, obviously much closer to home. It was open to my patrons and I

knew that this idea had hit a spot because it's sold out in an hour. Oh, this is a thing that maybe I should do more often. I have grown to really, really love gathering people. I think there's something about it, maybe it's 12 years of doing this kind of work online that I'm just craving more in-person time with people. There's something great that thousands and thousands of people can listen to us talk right now, but it's not the same as having coffee with one another with only a table between us. That's what I've grown to really love about meeting people in person. It doesn't necessarily scale. I couldn't do this group with more than 15 people because then you just get too big and you lose the small group aspect of it. This is very much a, I'm just trying this out, I don't know if it's gonna work. We'll see, perhaps by the next podcast I can give a little takeaway or something saying that was great or I don't know if I'm going to do that again.

[28:08](#) But I have learned from doing London twice now a little bit of what it looks like to host people for a set amount of time. Katherine, where you were talking about your small group, that's, I don't want to say indefinite but I guess it kind of is, you meet for the school year and then you take a break but then you kind of pick right back up.

Katherine: Right.

Tsh: In this case it's a set time. It is a week in London. It is a weekend here for a weekend gathering. Of course there will be hopefully some relationships built that will continue on past that. But there is a finite point to what we are doing. I'm going to just share a few thoughts about hosting, in light of me hosting my first domestic gathering, the day this airs and also having done London for a few years.

[28:51](#) The thing I'm also learning is through this book called the *Art of Gathering* by Priya Parker. Have you read it, Katherine?

Katherine: Oh, I haven't read it, but I've heard really good things.

Tsh: Yeah. So my my business coach told me I should get it knowing that I had the group of people coming and I am loving it, so I'm just starting it. I have not gotten very far in, but it is fantastic. I got it from the library, but I think I'm gonna go ahead and buy it so it can be on my shelf. But I'm gathering some things already and one of the first things she says is that as the host, your attitude and your posture really does set the mood for the gathering. I knew this and I know this, but it was really helpful to hear her say this.

She actually talks about it's a bad idea to be a chill host. When I first read that, I thought, okay, hold the phone. My favorite thing being a chill host, I want to be

chill. I am a human. I don't want to be formal. I don't want to have, I don't want to be too rigid. But the way she describes it as not so much you can't be chill in your personality or in your style. It's more being chill about your intentionality. It's not a good idea to just show up and hope that by being laid back and not taking command that someone else will do it. Because what she says is if you don't capture that task that has been handed to you, somebody else will. It might be someone that doesn't necessarily want it, but they have to because somebody needs to steer the ship.

It's basically being at the helm guiding the ship, but it's not necessarily commanding all the attention or being a cruise ship director saying at 0800, we're going to do this, this, and this. I get what she means though, that our attitude and posture sets the whole mood for the gathering. To me that looks like a lot of cheeriness and welcome and authentic spirit of, I'm so glad you're here and yet at the same time behind the scenes really setting things up thoughtfully. An example that I can think of is in London. I arrived two days beforehand before everybody else and I spend like a day and a half based on the flights, I spend that time, we set up the house, we set up with groceries, we decide, me and my assistant, we decide who's going to be in what room based on what we know so far about their personalities and maybe whether they're a night owl or a morning person, that kind of thing.

[31:13](#) We set it all up and then we little welcome baskets on their beds so that when they show up after a long haul flight and they're exhausted, and on the pickup, Caroline, who does the pickups, she has a water for them and snacks for the road. They walk in the door and they've got a bed where they're already told her to go because they don't have to make that decision and there's a little welcome basket. It's a lot of those things I feel like sets the mood for how you want the week to feel, even if you very much want to be chill because I am very chill and very laid back.

Katherine: Yeah. I get what you mean. Don't be haphazard. You have to be intentional. That makes a lot of sense. It takes a lot of work.

Tsh: [31:54](#) Yes. I really love the idea of it taking a lot of work behind the scenes, but perhaps somebody who is a participant can't even tell that. All she knows is things seem to work. Things seem to make sense.

Katherine: It reminds me of that metaphor of you see the ducks gliding on the surface, but beneath the surface of the water, the legs are kicking as hard as they can to swim.

Tsh: Yeah. That's a great way to put it. That's fantastic.

Another thing she says is it's good to decide on the purpose of the gathering, but a category is not the same thing as a purpose. A category might be a small group from your church or a book club or a travel group, going to London. But that's not really the purpose. The purpose is what's beneath that. It's, in your case, Katherine, it's for moms to connect and get to know each other on a real authentic level so that friendships and intimacy are created. For the case of Literary London, it's not just to see London or to go sightseeing. We're here to connect as women who work, figure out what's next on our plate, how we can learn from each other and in light of what we are exploring within London and learning about the literary greats, how we can apply that to our own creative work. That's the purpose of it. I think setting that helps determine a lot of the flow of what you do. Because if I was just there to lead a sightseeing trip to London, I would do it completely differently. I would probably invite more people. We would make more space. We would visit things in a different form of transportation. One of the great things about limiting it as we can all be in the same small van as we travel. We use that time to do a lot of talking and getting to know each other. If we were in a big group, we would have to hire some charter bus and we wouldn't have that same effect. Small matters for the purpose of the group.

I think in the case for you, Katherine, I can see why I'm having an open door fits the purpose of your group because it's about relationships more than a set agenda or a program.

Be in charge but still be human. What I was saying at the first, an example for that me is I make decisions on, for example, the food. We are going to to this restaurant for this meal and that is because I am in charge of this trip. I'm not telling people, hey, where do you want to go to dinner right now? I have that set up, but I still am a human in that I interact like everybody else. I share the leading responsibilities with my friend Emily P. Freeman, who is a spiritual director. During our meals she might toss out a question of what are you thinking about X, Y, or Z or in light of what we just saw at Jane Austin's house, or C.S. Lewis', what are your thoughts about this regarding your work? I will participate just like everybody else and so will she actually, we'll share about our own work. We are there as the leaders, but we also contribute by being vulnerable and by being honest and saying just as much and actually welcoming feedback just as much because a lot of our conversations about our work are not so much fixing it, but providing thoughts and feedback. I welcome that just as much from the participants because they have wisdom that perhaps I don't have.

Katherine: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense to me. That's one of the things I like so much about this is I'm totally there as a peer leader and I think that that's such a good

way to lead to convene and to gather is to have that peer leadership. I know that you're more than you're there for with a specific set of skills and yet it would be weird if you were letting those skills distance you from the group.

Tsh:

Right, exactly. We all like having that, I think when I'm a participant, I so much prefer people in that same boat as well. If I were to go and not want that peer to peer connection, I would rather go to a lecture or some sort of seminar with someone older and wiser than me rather than a peer led small group or trip or gathering of some sort.

I think it's good when people don't know each other well at first to act as a catalyst. This is part of that duck analogy that I that I like, if were too chill, we might not proactively guess read the room and see maybe what needs doing. If people perhaps don't know each other, it's our job as the ones who are leading this thing to make sure that there is a connection made. That doesn't mean we need to act as matchmaker for friendships and facilitate a discussion because these are adults who can figure that out. But in general, if there's a little bit of, I don't want to say awkwardness, but perhaps just hesitancy because you don't know each other that well, it's your job to act as a catalyst.

An example for this is with London, our first meal together in the house, we have a set set of questions that we go around. It sounds like what you were saying about the dinner party question. Perhaps by day four we're not really showing up to sit around the table with a set set of questions because we already have a little bit of a shared history that we want to talk about. At first we act as catalysts by giving them something to say, almost like a script and then you can bounce back and forth from that once you get to know each other better.

With that, the flip side of the same coin is also don't be afraid to let people figure things out. These are adults, so you don't need to be overly programmatic where every single thing is planned. Because I know I'm naturally autonomous and independent and I would be hesitant to join a group like the one I lead if I didn't allow a lot of just leeway in space. Technically every single thing is optional on our trip because everybody is a paying adult. You can choose not to go to something and people do that and that's fine. But halfway through our trip, Literary London, we provide a free day and that's a day entirely on your own. You do what you want. I'm not going to be there to lead you. I am of course there to help figure things out and make suggestions. Caroline is there to take you to the train station to get you where you need to be, but you are on your own. That means you can either pair up with a group of people or a person from the trip and go do something together. Or if you're an introvert and are in desperate need of some alone time, you can go find a quiet coffee shop and do your thing. We want to give people the freedom to figure things out on their

own so being a host does not mean being hyper involved or micromanaging everyone's time.

Along with that, let people fend for themselves on things that are easy. It's great to have everything set up like what I was saying with the gift baskets, but at the same time you want people to feel at home. We tell them, drinks are in the fridge, you are welcome at any time to go in and grab what you want or make yourself breakfast. In fact, breakfast in Literary London are on your own. We fully stock the kitchen. Caroline goes to the grocery store several times, but you just do what you want or if you want to grab a bottle of wine and open it, you can. I think people really like that where it makes them feel at home, they're not just being catered to. I think that is a good example of that peer-to-peer of relationship. We're treating them like adults that can function well.

Katherine: It's also that I think about like the hospitality that is actually more inviting. Like you said, making them feel more at home instead of less at home because you're doing every little thing for them that like ends up feeling less homey and less welcoming.

Tsh: That's right. Yeah, for sure. Actually with that, I think it's good to have what I think of as in consequential imperfection, meaning if you want somebody to feel at home, if we think about our real homes, we are always going to have a little bit of that pile of laundry over in the corner or a few dishes in the sink or just a kid that yells for no reason because they live there, whatever that version is of the gathering, I think we all like that as well. Things do not have to be so polished and so perfect. It sometimes breaks down barriers when things are a little bit imperfect and I don't even mean imperfect, like something goes wrong. I mean imperfect, more like it's not hyper polished and perfect.

An easy example I can think of is in London we continue to talk after we're home for the evening from whatever we do, we get into our pajamas, take off our makeup and sit around the living room and chat for a while. That to me is a beautiful sort of imperfection. Meaning, we're just vegging at the end of the day and we're just chatting and there's no agenda other than just being humans who have a likeminded perspective on life because we work and we can just chat and shoot the breeze. That's one of my favorite parts of the trip actually are all those in between conversations. As we walk to and from the bus or just chatting at night before we go to bed in our pajamas.

I'm so autonomous and I also love to travel that I forget or it's good for me to remember that people like a bit of, I don't want to say an agenda, but a catalog of ideas that they can choose from. I will give a specific schedule of what we're going to do that day, but within that day, we have scheduled free time. Free time is there, but it is scheduled, meaning we just finished Westminster Abbey,

we just had lunch. You're on your own now until six, when we're gonna meet in this part of London at King's Cross for dinner. You've got four hours to do what you want, here are five to six ideas of what you could do between here and there. Here is how to get there. Here's what tube station to get on, here's how much money you need for that activity. You of course can do whatever you want. You do not have to stick with this. This is just my suggestions. It provides people that sense of autonomy with a lot of guidance so that they're not totally just on their own and they say, oh no, I'm in London. What the heck do I do? They can do what they want and it's nice for those who maybe want to go to the museum versus those who want to shop. They can do that and not feel like they're just having to go along with a group, even though they don't really want to do whatever activity it is. Free time but structured, I think is really helpful.

Katherine: [42:17](#) Yeah, that just sounds like a brilliant balance. You're making me want to apply for this trip, Tsh.

Tsh: You should go. I would love that so much. I would love that.

With that, the last thing I just want to share is that I have learned that most of the time people do like having choices made for them. After all, that is why they are paying to go on Literary London. If they wanted just absolute freedom, they would go by themselves. But they want this group camaraderie and the conversations and they want a little bit of, I don't want to say hand holding but it is in a way, but in a respectful way where when I first started I was thinking before we even went, I shouldn't give, these were adults and these are my peers. I should give them options. Where do you guys want to go to dinner? I would narrow it down to three or four places. What do you think we should do for dinner on this day? And they would all say, we don't know, whatever, you tell us. I learned by the second time, oh, I just need to say we're going to have dinner here. I'm not making them order a particular thing at the restaurant. They can order what they want, but I of course can be the one as the leader to make decisions. To wrap this up, as leader, it's good to just make the decisions and feel confident in that. If you have the right posture where you're laid back in all the right ways, yet really thoughtful behind the scenes and you treat the participants like peers, when you make a decision, it's going to be from respect and it's going to be respected that they're not going to be felt like they don't have a voice or taken advantage of because you've heard from them and you've catered to them in so many other ways. It really helps in that group mindset, too. When you have six people to think in this example, you can't possibly decide what every single person would want at any time. Making decisions is good and that can be hard for those of us who are type four, hyper autonomous, let me just do my thing. But really and truly people love having decisions made for them. That's one of the beauties of being part of a community that gathers for a

specific purpose, is that you show up and you are treated in a way that you wouldn't otherwise get to experience, were you to do it on your own and yet you have all the freedom to still be yourself and still take what you need out of an event and leave what's not meant for you and move on.

Katherine: Yeah. Obviously you're really cultivating trust. People don't like having choices made for them if they don't trust the person making them. But they're there because they do and that's huge. It really is an art and it sounds like you've got it down.

Tsh: It's one of my favorite things. I did not know I would love to do this as much as I did until I started doing it. And at the end of every London week I tell my friends I just want to do this all the time, write books and lead trips. That's all I want to do. I think it is so fun so I'm thrilled to get to do it.

[45:17](#) You can find Katherine at KatherineWillisPershey.com and on Twitter @kwpershey and to keep up with me, I'm on Twitter @tsh and Instagram @tshoxenreider and of course at theartistsimple.net where you can find my writing as well as Katherine's. Head to the show notes for this episode number 218 at thesimplishow.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 Katherine and myself. The show was produced by Chad Michael Snavely and Jesse Montonya, 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.