



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 222

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

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

[00:16](#) Hey friends, in this episode I'm talking to my friend and co-host Andrea Debbink, and as always we're talking more about what we wrote about this week. It's hard to believe, but it's time to start thinking about the holidays. This week Andrea wrote about how she's learning to approach the wildness of the holidays as an introvert. In this chat she talks about some of the practicals she does during the holidays, which would work well for both introverts and extroverts. Basically anyone in the market for calming down the season and the hubbub. Then I wrote about advent. It's coming up really soon. In this chat, I share how our family recognizes it really, really simply along with a bit of an announcement and a free resource for you. You'll hear about that in the second half of this episode is so stay tuned.

[01:04](#) We'll get right into it but first a quick reminder that I have a new Substack community, which has officially replaced my Patreon. It's a free newsletter for you guys where I share with you my Five Quick Things plus occasional extras. But when you choose to support my work and become a paying insider, you also get access to the community, weekly chats where you can ask me anything, secret podcast episodes, longer form essays I don't share anywhere else and more. It is a great place to be so check it out with a link in the show notes here or go to theartofsimple.net/community.

Let's get into it. Here is Andrea starting us off with how to quiet the holiday season in the name of sanity.

[01:50](#) Okay, Andrea, I really cannot believe it's already time to talk about the holidays, but here we are. You wrote this week a little bit about something pretty dear to my heart as a fellow introvert. Talk to me about your thoughts about holidays for introverts.

Andrea: [02:08](#) You've written about this before on *The Art of Simple*, which I love, but this week when I was thinking about what I wanted to write about that relates to the holidays, I had planned to write about experiencing the holidays as an introvert. I started digging into that topic a little bit, but the more I explored the topic, I realized that the ideas that I wanted to write about and the things that I've learned about being an introvert on the holidays are actually helpful things for anyone, whether you're an introvert or extrovert or don't care or don't know because this can just be a really full busy, stressful time of year, no matter what your personality is like. I do present this week's post as a advice or tips for introverts for the holidays, but really I think these are things that can apply to anyone if you find yourself getting stressed out and just overtaxed during this time of year.

Tsh: [03:04](#) Yeah, for sure. I think introverts, extroverts, all of us, we can dive in a bit too eagerly perhaps at the start of the holidays and then we find ourselves by mid-December already just counting down until they're done with and none of us really want that yet we find ourselves in that situation so often.

Andrea: [03:21](#) That was the situation that I found myself in a few years ago. I've always loved the holidays. I love the whole holiday season from Thanksgiving all the way through New Year's. I love Christmas, especially. But a few years ago I was realizing that I was approaching the holiday season each year with the same mentality that I would have as an undergrad facing finals week. I wrote about this a little bit in my post because I don't know if you remember, but when you're an undergrad and you're heading towards finals season, you're just trying to get through it and everything falls by the wayside in terms of self-care, eating healthy, being active, getting good sleep. Even though I was not an undergrad anymore, a few years ago, I realized I still had that mentality when it came to this time of year that I thought I just needed to push through it, that I started neglecting the things that I actually needed to be healthy during this season.

I think it was actually when I started reading Susan Cain's book *Quiet*. This was back in 2013, her big book about introverts, that I realized I didn't actually have to live through the holiday season with this mentality. I think the reason I was affected by it is because I had never really understood myself to be an introvert before. Of course, this book gave me the language to realize, oh yeah, I actually need solitude a lot to

recharge from time spent with people. When I started thinking about making changes in my life overall, it just naturally spilled over into how I approached things like the holiday season, which are really sociable times of year that can often feel very busy and full. Another thing that makes the holiday season for me a little busier, it's just the fact that my husband and I have to travel every year for the holidays. Neither one of us lives near our families. My parents live five hours away and his live about an hour and a half away in different states from each other. Every holiday we're on the road traveling to see our family, which is good. We love our families and we like spending time with them. But it also just adds that extra layer of stress because in addition to the holiday busy-ness, you're also always traveling. That's what prompted this big change in my life a few years ago.

Tsh: [05:40](#) It's good. It's funny how these come to Jesus [ha-ha] moments about the holidays tend to make us question the way we've always done them because I have a very similar situation that I'll get into in my portion of this chat that the same exact thing. In fact think maybe 2013 as well. Maybe there was something that happened in 2013, so I totally get it. It's really cool to hear how you've actually taken the time to look into that and evaluate the best way to approach the holidays instead of just oh well and shrugging it off.

Andrea: [06:14](#) Yeah. 2013 was a big year of this epiphany for me. But I think the changes that I end up talking about in my blog post this week were things I discovered through trial and error over time. Just realizing, oh, when I do this I feel better. The list of tips that I have for people this week on the blog, a little longer than what I'm sharing here. I'm just going to share the few main ones I think that have helped me the most during this time. These are just a few things that have helped me to be a healthier person and also just to really embrace the joy of the season and not see it as something as I have to push through to January.

The first thing that I realized for me that was really important in shifting my mindset was to take the time to pay attention to the spiritual aspect of the season. I know that you're gonna get into this a little more in your section of the episode today, but as a Christian, this time of year is important to me from a faith perspective. I didn't grow up in a liturgical church that actually recognized Advent. I think I had heard of Advent, but it was something that I had always associated with a few specific denominations and not something that was a part of my own experience.

The church I go to now does recognize Advent, the four Sundays leading up to Christmas and the different things that are a part of that. But it wasn't until I started going to this church, actually, I started going to this church 19 years ago, so it wasn't 19 years ago. It was more like six or seven years ago. I really started bringing some of these Advent practices into my own personal life. Not just at church on Sundays, but in the time that I would spend alone. I'm an early riser anyway. I'm a person who gets up throughout the entire year early. I sit down with my coffee, my books, my journal, and I'll always have that reflective time. But now in the Advent season, I actually will change the readings that I'm doing, the reflecting that I'm doing to be Advent focused. Sometimes that's looked like using an Advent devotional or a series of Advent readings. Last year I actually, watched some videos for my reflection time, which maybe sounds antithetical, but one of my former pastors actually moved back to Portland and he started something called The Bible Project. I don't know if you've heard of that? It's a website that has a series of videos breaking down and explaining the Bible according to different books and different themes. They have a four part Advent series. Each of the videos, they're just a few minutes long. They cover hope, peace, love and joy, the different themes of Advent. Last year when I would have this time in the mornings reflecting, I would watch the video for that week and then I would write this reflection on it. It was a really short little time. But for me, just that continual plugging in to the spiritual part of the season was really important to me. That's something I'm still trying to figure out and navigate.

That was number one. The second one is just the importance of scheduling solitude throughout this busy season.

Tsh: Amen.

Andrea: [09:34](#) I realized I have to schedule it. I can't treat it like a reward. This is actually something I think I learned from my first therapist. I used to approach solitude and rest as something that I deserved after getting a bunch of things accomplished. She had really encouraged me to look at it as something that you have to schedule throughout your day. It's not a reward, it's part of the rhythm of the day. I started out writing this post for introverts, but when I started reading about solitude specifically, I came across this article that just came out in the New York Times in October. It's called "Why You Should Find Time to be Alone With Yourself." I think

we're going to put it in the show notes so people can link to it and read it.

Basically, the article is talking about why everybody needs solitude in their life, this rhythm of being without other people around you, without input from other things. What struck me in this article is that they said one of the big benefits of solitude is that it helps to regulate our emotions. I thought that was especially important this time of year because this can be an emotional time of year, for better or for worse. A lot of different things can come out and having that regular time alone can help regulate those emotions.

Tsh: [10:53](#) Okay. I have to ask then, Andrea, because someone might be curious, when it comes to regulating your emotions through solitude, what literally are you doing during the solitude? Are you sitting on a couch and staring at the wall? Are you going on a walk? Are you journaling? Are you taking a nap? What does that look like for you?

Andrea: [11:12](#) If I'm remembering correctly from this article, the article was more about just doing activities by yourself. It could be journaling, it could be taking a walk. I think the way this particular article defines it, it's just time not spent around other people. It's like literally being alone, but at the same time, it's interesting because I just finished reading, finally, Digital Minimalism. In that book, of course, as you know, Cal Newport talks about solitude. I thought it was really interesting that he defined solitude as a break from input of any kind. He would say that even reading a book or listening to a podcast is a true solitude which is interesting, it's something I'd never heard about before. I thought solitude was just spending time alone. I think the answer to that question depends a little bit on who you ask.

Tsh: [12:03](#) I think that's true. I mean you can technically listen to a podcast alone, but I don't know about you, whenever I don't have input and I let my brain process and it usually needs to be doing something on the autopilot like walking or maybe driving a really familiar route and then that's when it's like my brain files all my thoughts in the appropriate place and then I can have thoughts or conclusions or ideas or something like that.

Andrea: [12:32](#) Yeah. I've discovered that, too. I think I definitely do enjoy times alone where I'm just reading or listening to something. But there does

come a point for me too where I feel like I can need to go for a walk outside and listen to nothing except for the world around me and just let your thoughts sort themselves out. I think that's actually probably more with that regulation of emotion comes in, when your mind isn't having to process input. That's not based on necessarily what this article said, but that's been my own experience with it.

Tsh: [13:05](#) Yeah. Very good. I can completely see why the holidays that would be all the more necessary because we have so much more sensory input then. Not only the sights and smells and sounds, but the busy-ness or the vying for attention or maybe even just decisions to make when it comes to gift buying or even, do I send out cards, do I not? All of these things that are vying for our attention just feels like sensory overload.

Andrea: [13:32](#) Yeah, absolutely. The next recommendation that I had was, it goes hand in hand with scheduling solitude, but I just called it take a break. This is actually more about taking breaks when you're in the middle of social time. Just as an example, I wrote about this in the post. I have a friend who spends multiple days with her family over the holidays each year, like four or five days, and she has the type of family who thinks that you should spend every moment together during these holiday visits. That was really hard for her because she's an introvert like me, and she was feeling really depleted after these times with her family. She just started taking naps during these weekends. She's my age but she would be at her parents' house or a family member's house and if they're just all there together, hanging out, she would just excuse her herself and go take a nap in a guest room.

Tsh: [14:30](#) That's perfect.

Andrea: I remember the first time she told me that she did this and I was so shocked by it because I just said, you can do that? Because it never really struck me as some socially acceptable thing that a person could do. But she would just describe how she would feel refreshed. She would be in a better mood. She would get along better with her family members. She had that clear little break in the middle of all of their time together. I haven't actually started taking naps, but I have started when I'm visiting family for an extended period of time, I'll just excuse myself to do mindfulness meditation with my Calm app or I'll read or I'll just find a reason to get away for a while. Maybe you run to the store and pick up an

ingredient we ran out of or just have these little moments throughout that time where I'm by myself.

Tsh: [15:19](#) I know every family is different, but I have found over the years too, the older I've gotten, the more I've come to embrace or realize that most of my family members don't mind at all. The idea that people will be either offended or hurt or think it's weird is really truly on my end of things. First of all, especially if there's a lot of people around, like when we go up to Oregon for my in-laws, they literally won't even notice because there's 27 people all around. If I go on a walk for 15 minutes, no one will even notice I was gone. But let's say even if they were really, and truly, I don't think any of them even notice or care. Let's just say they do care. I've learned to be okay with that. You know, that's on them, not on me.

Andrea: [16:09](#) Right. I think you brought up a great point because I think often times we think other people have these expectations. If you prod those expectations a little bit, you realize, wait, I'm assuming they have this expectation and maybe they don't actually have that and maybe they are okay with me escaping and disappearing. Maybe they want to disappear too for a while and come back. I think that's a great point.

The last thing that I wanted to talk about was just the importance of honoring your regular habits and your regular routine during a time when your routine is disrupted. I covered this in different points in the post, but I've just learned over the years the importance of, this sounds very basic, but staying hydrated when I'm not at home or when I'm traveling, watching my sugar intake, going to bed at a regular time, continuing to exercise. I used to just put all of those things on the back burner when it would be the holiday season or if I'd travel for the holidays and I'd think, oh, well, I'm not at home. I shouldn't have to worry about doing my regular run. I shouldn't have to worry so much about the sugar I'm eating. I just realized over the years that that was a really bad combination. Going to bed really late, not eating my regular diet, not being active. It just made me feel physically bad and then that would make me feel mentally bad.

Tsh: [17:40](#) Right. And the thing is we play in our heads, it's a short season. I'll just get back to it. But really it's kind of long. If you take that mindset for the whole season, we're talking like a month and before you know it,

you've been eating terrible food and not moving your body and staying up way too late for a solid month out of the entire year.

Andrea: [18:01](#) For me, the whole after of that just really caught up to me and I realized I didn't want to spend all of January trying to recover from November and December. I just wanted, and this is really the bottom line for the whole post that I wrote was just for me, the holiday season is meant to be a time of joy and it's a time of celebration. I just think that learning to look out for myself in these small ways just helps me to be more joyful during this time. It also just helps me better connect with the people that I actually want to be connecting with this time of year. It's just been a little mindset shift of seeing some of these things is selfish and realizing no, actually caring for yourself just makes you a better person in the long run and healthier and present.

Tsh: [18:54](#) And to piggyback too, on your last point there, I will say too, when our kids were a little bit younger, we prioritized keeping their routine and habits during the holiday season as well, especially when we were traveling. It's easy to think, oh, just stay up late and eat all the sugar. We definitely weren't line in the sand hard-nose about it. But you all know if you have little kids, how much that can build up to total chaos, terrible attitudes, exhaustion, et cetera, et cetera. That just doing things like keeping some boundaries when it comes to nap times. We kept our bedtime routines whenever we were visiting family. We're still in someone else's house, but we do our rhythm of story time, prayer time and just even capturing 10, 15 minutes alone, just our family, just the five of us as a unit, went a long way to helping our kids stay, I don't want to say sane or happy because they were happy because it was a holidays, but just maybe for our own as parents mindset that our kids were getting the regular dose of rhythm that they need to help the holidays feel special and not just like a downward spiral into mayhem.

Andrea: [20:12](#) Right. Yeah. That's good.

Segment Two

Tsh: [23:48](#) That is great info and really helpful I think for both introverts and extroverts and it intersects really well with what I wrote about this past week, which was Advent. It sounds crazy to be talking about Advent before Thanksgiving. However, Advent sneaks up on us this year, not because Advent is late or early. Advent always starts the fourth Sunday

before Christmas, but because Thanksgiving is so late this year, because Thanksgiving is late, it makes the first Sunday of Advent butt right up against Thanksgiving. It's easy to get it lost in the shuffle. Before you know it, it's December 1st, which happens to be the first day of Advent this year. It's not always December 1st, it just works out that way. You suddenly wake up Sunday and you're like, oh gosh, it's Advent. What are we going to do? And you feel yourself scrambling. I wanted to talk about it now before we lose our focus in all the hubbub of Thanksgiving and beyond.

Advent to me has become really special. I think I can pinpoint to that Christmas of 2013 that you were talking about as well, Andrea. I remember we were living up in Oregon and we were decorating for the holidays and our kids were younger and so they were super excited and giddy and hyper and they wanted to do all the things. I had been doing at the time a Jesse tree, it's a tradition where you have a tree and you add an ornament every day and you tie it with some scripture from the Bible and a reading, blah, blah, blah. But I was already behind and I don't remember how far behind, but it felt a bit like I couldn't possibly catch up at that point. I felt like a failure as a parent. I just remember actually looking at Kyle and saying, I think we should just take the holidays off this year. I was almost craving, could we just skip Christmas this year? He laughed and was like, yeah, it would be great to have that. We even said, well next year we'll be traveling because we were planning on doing our around the world trip. Next year will be different because we'll be backpacking, let's just make that our low key chill holiday season and this year just power through it. Afterwards I remember thinking, gosh, power through the holidays. That's unfortunate because it's supposed to be a gift. It's supposed to be something that we look forward to. I've always enjoyed the holidays, back from my childhood. I see how much my kids like it. I want to be a person who still likes the holidays. Fast forward a few years we were, we're back from our travels and we are immersed in a liturgical church. I'd always been interested, I say always, the past few years prior, I had been interested in liturgy and a more high church approach to my faith, but had not really been part of a church, a local church yet until we came back and moved down here to Texas and we started going to an Anglican church. This was the first time I was fully immersed in the idea of a liturgical calendar that begins with Advent. The first Sunday of Advent is the church's new year. That's when the church's calendar starts. It's a new year and it is a holiday. It is a season that is

completely separate from Christmas. It leads right into Christmas and it is about anticipation and arrival of the birth of Jesus, which is what we recognize and celebrate during the Christmas season. But they're two separate seasons. They're back to back from each other. Some traditions, even think of Advent as a mini Lent. It's an inward season of reflection, sometimes repentance, really focusing on where you stand in light of who you are with God and with the world. Whenever I started just immersing myself in the idea of Advent, that was the key that made me like Christmas again. It was like I needed that Advent season butted up right against Christmas to actually really love Christmas. That was 2015 and ever since then I have really grown to love Christmas and Advent and they are some of my favorite seasons again.

I thought it would be great since I wrote about Advent to talk a little bit more about it, especially with you guys as you're starting to think about the seasons and wanting to prep in advance without it getting too fluster-ey or last minute or whatever.

Andrea, do you in your home do anything Advent related like when it comes to candles and the wreath and the whole bit?

Andrea: [28:41](#) Yeah, I do. It's interesting, I started doing this a few years ago without really having much background other than knowing there should be about four or five candles. I ended up getting this wooden bread serving tray from Target. Each Advent, I fill it with evergreen boughs and then I put the four candles in it and light them. It's not a wreath, but it's just like our way of approximating the wreath.

Tsh: [29:10](#) Perfect. Well, we don't do a wreath either. The general gist of advent celebrated at home is lighting candles. There's four candles for the four weeks of Advent and then the fifth one for the Christmas Day or Christmas and beyond candle. Generally speaking, on the first day of Advent Sunday, you light the first candle and then all week long you light that one candle. Then week two, you like the first and the second candle and you keep going throughout that week. Week three, the three candles and on all the way to a Christmas Eve, which is when you fully lit all four candles and Christmas Day you you light the fifth candle. That's the general 101 of candle lighting during Advent. What I have found works for us over the years because I've tried to tweak and work with different books with the kids where we're reading a story slowly throughout the Advent season where you pick up where you left off from the night before

and you keep telling the same story all the way to just open and go Bible passage and that's it. Over the years, I've come to create our family's own Advent guide because I just couldn't find anything that was as simple as we needed it. I needed something so, so, so simple. Everything was so complicated. Even if it was like packaged to be simple, it still felt complicated because you felt behind. We all know that the holiday season is busy, so if you have a Christmas program at school, followed by an office party, followed by a family gathering, three days in a row, you're three days "behind" if you get home late and you don't want to do the whole thing, and so you go to bed and then before you know it you're like, well, I don't want to keep doing this because to catch up it's going to take us like half an hour and so why bother?

I needed something that if we needed to skip a day or two or a whole week, we could just pick up where we left off, open and go and you're not behind. I ended up creating it. Well, that was a couple of years ago. I shared that with you guys listening, The Advent Guide. The cool thing is that it has now become a book and the book is written and ready in some ways to go, but it's not going to be released until 2020 and that sounds crazy and it's a little bit maddening on my end because I want to share it with you guys now but working with the traditional publisher, books just take a really long time. I had written the manuscript this past spring, spring 2019 but that's too close a time to get it out by Advent 2019 with the book that I actually, we wanted to create. We could have slapped something together but it wouldn't be what we really wanted. This book that comes out, Advent 2020 is going to be beautiful. It's going to have art, it's going to have color, it's going to look beautiful on a coffee table. It is a guide for both individuals and families where you can open and go and you're never behind. It's based on the Book of Common Prayer and within the Book of Common Prayer is the revised daily office lectionary. The scripture readings are the Psalms from the daily office lectionary and I picked the Psalms. I you know much about the daily office lectionary, you're given a lot of scripture readings a day. You're given an Old Testament passage, a Psalm, a New Testament passage, and a gospel reading. I went with the Psalms for a couple of reasons, but one I love that it's poetry. Psalms in the Bible are our collection of poems and hymns really from the ancient church. Something about poetry and Advent seemed to really flow well together with me and the mindset I like to take during Advent. The other reason is because my number one line in the sand, must have in this book is I wanted it to be ecumenical. Ecumenical

is a fancy word that just basically means global church or denomination friendly is maybe another way to say it. I wanted a book that both the Pentecostal listeners, the friends that we have that take a more laid back approach to church, all the way to my Roman Catholic friends, would actually benefit from this reading. I feel like the Psalms is where we can all connect. The Psalms is from the old Testament and they're beautiful and they are written from the heart and written to God as a form of prayer. This is a way that we could walk together into Advent and both reflect and outwardly process.

The book is ecumenical. It's based on the Psalms and it's open and go. That was the other thing. I didn't want an ongoing story that you had to open up and pick up where you left off. If you miss three days, you just open it up to whatever day it is and you read that days Psalm. It's also arts-based. There's music to go every day. There's an accompanying Spotify playlist with the book that'll be out. Every day there's a different song to listen to based on the reading. There's historic artwork included, meaning like ancient or just historic beautiful paintings from the past that reflect whatever it is we're reading and about the upcoming holiday season.

[34:49](#) The general idea of this book is that it gives you permission to do less, not more. That's because that's what I want in my holiday season. I want Advent to be about doing less. I'm going to tell you a little bit in just a second why that's so important to me when it comes to Advent. But just know that with this book that's coming out, it's all about doing less, not more. If you're listening and you're thinking, well, that sounds great, but I cannot add one more thing to my holiday plate. Just know I can't either. And that's why I wrote the book. It's because I need something to tell me what to do without having to think about it whatsoever. That's what this book does.

In the meantime, even though we're talking about a book that doesn't come out for another year, which is a real bummer, I have been given permission by the publisher to share the first week with everybody for free. You get to read week one of my book that doesn't come out a year from now for free as part of your advent experience for 2019. I've got a link in the show notes of this episode. If you want to sign up to get that digital copy of the free chapter so you can get a little sneak peek into what the book is going to be and gets you sort of ready and excited about next year and what you get for Advent.

Andrea: [36:09](#) I'm not just saying this because I work with you Tsh, but I am really, really excited about this book. I feel like I've never actually landed on an Advent guide that I use every year because of all the reasons you said, they always feel like one more thing to add and then you get behind and there's all this guilt. Just what you've described, it sounds perfect and I wish we didn't have to wait.

Tsh: [36:35](#) I know. I wish we didn't have to either, so I'm so glad. I feel the exact same way. To me this is like the perfect solution that at least I get to share some of it with you. But yeah, I'm really glad. I think it will meet a lot of our needs and so I'm thrilled to share it with everybody.

If you're listening and you're thinking, that's great, but hold on. You just talked about Advent being a separate holiday from Christmas. That is brand new information to me. What does that mean? Well, because Advent is really about the inner preparation of our hearts to welcome the birth of Christ. There's a lot of good outward benefits to recognizing Advent that just come naturally as an outflow of taking time to reflect inwardly. Here's a few reasons why I absolutely have grown to love Advent.

[37:22](#) The first one is that it really does allow me to ease into the holidays. It gives myself permission. It gives me permission to not feel panicked or rushed or behind, because Advent is all about a slow journey toward Christmas. That can look both like something more introspective when it comes to our journaling or our mindset. It can also look very literal, like a slower journey, meaning you can put up your tree December 1st, but then you wait a few days and then you put on the lights and then you wait a few days more and you just put a few ornaments on and then a few days more, a few more ornaments. You're taking the time to literally decorate your tree all season long or the same with the rest of your decor. You can have a little bit out slowly over time to where by the time it's Christmas day, your house is fully decorated.

Instead of feeling that rush of get it all up, hurry, hurry, hurry. You know? I really love that there's also this thing you can do with your nativity scene where you just have a little bit out and then you slowly introduce, you might have the animals out and then you slowly introduce Mary and Joseph. And then not until Christmas day do you put the baby Jesus into your nativity set. Then I'll talk about Christmas and a little bit, but then not until January 6th do you put out the Wiseman because it's Epiphany,

that kind of thing. It's this idea of there's no hurry here and Advent gives us permission to slow down. It gives us permission to remember the holidays true focus, that it's not about having this picture perfect magazine scene that we can post on Instagram and feel good about ourselves.

Not that all those great things are bad necessarily, but it helps me remember that the holidays aren't about impressing people. It's about me remembering the gift given to us by God through Christ. Also, I mentioned earlier that some traditions even think of it as a mini Lent and part of that is because Advent reflects on this paradox of already and not yet. Because if you think about it, here we are anticipating the birth of Christ, but in 2019 the birth of Christ already happened, right? It happened over 2000 years ago. It's already happened. But yet, anticipating the birth or the recognition of the birth reminds us that God's work on earth is not fully complete yet. That we are still in that in between stage before he makes all things new in the final completion of things, which is our true hope of what we wait for. Advent reminds us of that tension that we live in in the already, not yet-ness and if I were to just jump all into Christmas without thinking about it, all the cookies and all the celebrating, I would miss that. I think I would miss the opportunity opportunity to reflect on how life is challenging. There is tension. There are some gray areas, there is some inner pangs of loneliness and a desire for justice and redemption that hasn't been fulfilled yet. Slowing down to remember it's Advent and not Christmas gives us permission to do that.

Another great thing is celebrating Advent aligns our rhythm with most of the global church. Most of the church actually recognizes Advent as a separate season. Now, of course when we talk about just more generally the secular world, it's hardly recognized anymore, right? We might have those calendars you can buy at the grocery store with the chocolate [inaudible] that's not bad or anything. But that's what most people think of for Advent. But when it comes to the actual church, like capital C church around the world, most of the church recognizes the four Sundays of Advent before Christmas. It's our way of aligning ourselves with that, of remembering that we belong to a global family, both past and present. Advent is a very, very old tradition. It's a very old part of the calendar, which is old itself. It's our way of actually connecting ourselves to the past as well, and I love that.

This might be my Enneagram 4 side, but I love that Advent gives me also permission to tap into my more inner reflective, maybe even like the moody melancholy side of the holidays. I don't know how you feel Andrea, but there's always a bit of that low grade tension between this is great, I love Elf and I love paper snowflakes and sugar cookies. But also, I feel angsty about it all as well and I want to take time to journal or think or enjoy the gray weather with coffee and stuff like that. Advent allows that because that's sort of also indicative of Advent, do you know what I mean?

Andrea: [42:27](#) Definitely. I'm a 4 too and I actually didn't know that this is a part of being a four but that makes perfect sense because I mean, in general I'm drawn to like moody reflective things. But around this time of year, one of my favorite Christmas songs is "In the Bleak Midwinter," and it's such a, first of all the name, but then also it's just this longing, contemplative song. I love dwelling in that space this time of year, like you said, and just thinking about that part of life too, not just the decking the halls, but the other part.

Tsh: [43:02](#) Right. Speaking of music, my Advent playlist has a lot of music like that. It's not all dirge and somber funeral music, but it has a lot of those more quiet or reflective songs that I really enjoy and it plays nicely in contrast to the other type, which is actually my final point of why I like Advent so much is because it gives me permission to enjoy Christmas more and not less.

If you're listening to this and you might be thinking, yeah, but what about Christmas? Christmas is actually fun. I don't want to miss Christmas by only focusing on Advent. Well, the good news is that traditionally Christmas is actually 12 full days. It's not December 25th. Christmas is December 25th through January 5th. It is 12 days of feasting. It is a feast day or it's a feast season according to the traditional calendar so it's technically Christmastide as a season. After recognizing Advent for several weeks, the feeling of Christmas morning and beyond is rather epic. It turns it up to 11 that feeling that you get when you're a kid getting all excited about Christmas in the days leading up to it because if you hold back on some of those traditional Christmas activities leading up to it, you get permission to go full on during those 12 days. As an example, a group of my friends and I, we've done this longstanding tradition of doing a cookie swap where our families get together and we each make several dozen cookies and we trade so we all have a variety of

cookies without having to make a whole variety of cookies. We celebrate that during the 12 days of Christmas. This year's cookie swap isn't until several days after December 25th. That's because we all separately as families recognize the 12 days of Christmas. And that's fun. That gives us something to look forward to, especially after the commercialized Christmas leading up to it dies down. It makes us feel a little like, yay, we still get to celebrate and still enjoy it. There's just something that really is fun about going all the way to January 5th and then January 6th being Epiphany just because of holding back a little bit, not hardcore, but just a little bit in a day is before that in Advent.

That leads me to just a few of my quick rules of Advent. The first one that I think is so important is that there's no need to be a purist here. You're hearing this and you might think, okay, that sounds great, but that is so counter-cultural. If I want to celebrate Advent, what do I do? Do I tell my extended family, sorry, we can't watch A Christmas Story yet because it's December 12th and remember...don't be that guy, just go with it. It's okay. We watch Christmas movies during Advent and we're not big sticklers about it. We listen to Christmas music during Advent and it's fine. I think the difference is we don't dive all in and try and suck the life out of all those things too soon. I perhaps don't play my Christmas dinner party playlist until maybe halfway through December and maybe only once or twice before the holidays. I really focus more on my Advent music, that kind of thing. But I'm not a purist saying absolutely no Christmas beforehand.

I think that's really important because doing this model is pretty counter-cultural. Most of your family around you, most of your neighbors aren't going to think about Christmas being 12 full days and that the season before that isn't Christmas. Say Merry Christmas to the cashier. It's really truly okay.

This is reflective of the book I wrote. It's okay to jump in and out of Advent based on your needs. It's really a fun tradition to get to light a candle every day and to read a bit every day and to reflect. But really and truly, if you have a week of just nuts stuff on your calendar for the holidays, it's fine. Just push the pause button on Advent and jump back in when you can.

The third and final rule I've learned to embrace in our family is that action leads to the mood, not the other way around. If you're going to wait for

your kids or for you even to have the just right mood for Advent, like we're going to reflect now on this passage, we're going to quiet down the excitement. It's just not going to happen. Especially kids. We've done Advent several years now. They still care more about Christmas. They still care about the sugar and the lights and the treats and anticipating December 25th and that's okay. That's just totally fine. Don't wait for them to have their act together and to really understand Advent before participating in it. And same with you. If you don't really feel like doing it, maybe do it anyway and see if your mood changes. I know it does for mine. The first few days of Advent always feel a little bit tasky to me, like task oriented. I'm checking the box here and more than yay, this is my favorite thing ever. But before I know it several days in and I'm really starting to slow down and let my mind process more the inner stuff of Advent. Those are my three rules.

I know that was a huge takeaway for a lot of people listening and if you feel overwhelmed, I understand. I'm going to just share my personal takeaway for you. You take it or leave it.

The takeaway is between now and the first day of Advent, which if you remember, 2019 is December 1st. Find some candles. Do what you want, however you want to do them. I'll put a link in the show notes to the candles we use. We use these bees wax candles that come in a strip that you can roll up and it's kind of a fun, it's a non craft craft. It's like you really don't have to do and it takes less than a minute. You roll up sheets of bees wax and it's done. Find a "wreath," like you said Andrea, yours isn't a wreath. It's a tray with, with greenery. Ours is a log. Many years ago Kyle cut a tree branch and then drilled holes in the top. That is our "wreath". I really like that because it's natural and from the backyard so it's super local and that just feels Advent-y to me. Do whatever you want. There's tons of ideas on Pinterest. Just get candles and a wreath. That's all you need.

The second thing to do is find my Advent playlist. I'll put a link in the show notes, but it's the music that goes with the book that's forthcoming and you can start listening to it now.

The third thing is download week one of my book for free. You can find the link in the show notes of that as well and start using it if you want a starting December 1st and just see what you think. If you have to save it for week three, totally fine. Do what you need to do.

The fourth thing is if you want beyond that, if you're feeling like, well, week one was great, but there's three more weeks of Advent, what do I do? I recommend either if you happen to have bought my previous Advent guides in the past, you can use that or use the Revised Common Lectionary or the Daily Office Lectionary readings that you can find online anywhere. I can put a link in the show notes or from the Book of Common Prayer, just to pick a part of the scripture. If you want to go with the Psalms, do the Psalms. If you want to try some other ones, go with that. Just read a little bit and give yourself permission to just read and then sit and reflect and that's all you really need to do.

Those are my takeaways for you for Advent. Overall, keep it simple and keep it something that's genuinely helpful for you and not because you feel like you should. Give yourself permission to go smaller, not bigger here.

Andrea: That sounds great and I'm so glad we're talking about this now. I feel like you said, Advent sneaks up on us and I feel like we have time to prep before it all begins, right?

Tsh: Right. If you want to order those bees wax candles, I'll put the link in the show notes is great because it's through Amazon Prime, so you can get it in just a few days. But if you're listening to this on December 1st or even beyond, it's still okay to jump in with whatever you have. Find tea lights around your house or run to the store and just get whatever candles work for you. There is no need to be a purist here. Do whatever works for you. Enjoy the season, enjoy the permission to keep it imperfect and simple. That's what I'm all about.

[51:42](#) You can find Andrea at AndreaDebbink.com and on Instagram [@andrea.debbink](https://www.instagram.com/andrea.debbink). To keep up with me, I'm on Twitter [@tsh](https://twitter.com/tsh) and Instagram [@tshoxenreider](https://www.instagram.com/tshoxenreider) and of course at theartistsimple.net where you can find my writing as well as Andrea's. Head to the show notes for this episode number 222 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 an insider and support my work as well as how to connect with Andrea and myself. Don't forget, you can also get week one of my new Advent book called *Shadow and Light* for free. Head to the show notes to find a link or a head straight onto shadowandlightadvent.com. I'd love to hear what you think. 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.