

[00:00:00] <music>

Intro: Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson, and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

So today is a bit of a departure from what I originally had planned. Instead of a new episode, today, you're going to hear an episode that originally aired in 2019. And the reason that we're doing this repeat is because honestly, I needed to.

We have had a crazy, crazy few weeks in our house, traveling, a family wedding, the wonderful people who normally help us take care of the girls have been out of town. And then just when we thought life was about to get back to normal, we all got sick, which if I sound weird or suddenly start coughing, that's why.

But the fact that we're all sick has meant lots of time together as a family, which has actually been really sweet and really fun, but it's also meant absolutely zero time for anything else. Seriously, you should see my inbox and the piles of laundry in our house.

So while we're all recovering and resting and wading through piles of laundry and trying to pull ourselves back together, I thought that in the name of simplicity we should do a repeat episode, especially because it was such a good one.

Our guest for this episode is Emily Ley, and she's a woman I'm constantly learning from. Not only is she the maker of my all-time favorite planner, the Simplified Planner, but she's an incredible author, podcaster, speaker, entrepreneur, mom, she also has twins.

And in all these areas of her life, she's both an incredible teacher and student of what it means to live a simplified life. She also has a gorgeous new kids' book coming out here in a few weeks. I just pre-ordered my copy. It's called *You're Always Enough: And More Than I Hoped For*. And I cannot wait to read it to my girls.

In this episode, she teaches us how to make our lives more meaningful and less stressful. We're talking about how to live a simplified life—what that practically looks like. We're talking about how to rework our day-to-day routine to keep

ourselves from over committing, definitely guilty of that. We're talking about how to prioritize our time, so we're spending less time on things that stress us out and more time with the people we love. We're talking about practical tips for simplifying our use of social media, how to shift our mindset away from always wanting more to loving the amazing, beautiful life we already have and more. I can't wait for you to hear from her. All right, you guys ready? Let's dive in.

[00:02:37] <music>

Stephanie: All right, friends, I'm so excited for this week's episode. I'm sitting here with my new friend Emily Ley. And I just have to tell y'all, I have been such a fan of Emily's for so long, and so it's such an honor to have her on the show. I just love getting to share with y'all things that I love and people I love. So I feel like I'm getting to make a connection here where it's like, guys, Emily, Emily, these are the girls, you're gonna love each other. There we go.

Emily: Thank you.

Stephanie: For women who don't know you yet, can you tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact about yourself?

Emily: Okay, absolutely. Well, I am Emily Ley and I am the creator of the Simplified Planner, which has grown into an entire brand of products that help women organize their lives and simplify all the things that we have going on. I'm also a mom to three kids. So I have an 8-year-old little boy and then 4-year-old twins, a boy and a girl: Brady, Tyler, and Caroline. I'm also an author. So I've written a couple of books. We live in Pensacola, Florida.

Okay, fun fact about myself, I had to think about this one a little bit. My first answer was going to be well, I have two babies who are the same age because that is fun in and of itself.

Stephanie: Yeah, that is definitely fun.

Emily: But here's one that not a lot of people know.

Stephanie: Ooh, I want to hear it.

Emily: When I was in high school, I was in color guard. It was like the thing to do in my school. So I can throw a wooden rifle above my head and have it spin like five times and catch it. And we were actually world cham... I think we placed... was it fifth? It was like fifth in the world my junior year. We competed internationally. I can get out in the backyard with a rifle and show you a thing or two.

Stephanie: That last sentence is like a tad concerning. Like really cool or what...? What's going to happen?

Emily: Don't worry, it's wooden.

Stephanie: Yes, it's wooden.

Emily: Especially with a sword. So I can do it with a saber. It's so funny. My team—I have a team of eight women who all work with me—and they came to visit a couple of months ago. One of them knew this about me and she was like, "Go get it. We want to see you do it. We don't believe you can do it." And I was like, "Don't try me. I will do it." Got out in the backyard, and sure enough, it took me a minute, it came right back.

Stephanie: That is amazing. That is amazing. I'm so glad to know that about you. I was on the dance team in high school and it was the same thing where it was like a really huge deal. We looked like cheerleaders. Our outfits were exactly the same but we were dancers. And it was hardcore like two day practices all summer, 11 months season. We did great at Nationals.

But it's the kind of thing where my husband has never really seen me dance. I mean, other than at weddings. But he kind of doesn't believe I can. And I'm like, "One of these days, I'm going to go home, and I'm going to get my uniform and I'm going to show you what I can do."

Emily: I'm loving it. You totally should. It's so funny. Honestly, I don't talk about that part of my life very much. But a lot of who I am today came from being involved in that. We practiced 40 hours a week, we were super competitive like it. I think it made me have the drive to take our company where it's gone and to do some of the things I've gotten to do. But yeah, what a fun question.

Stephanie: I love it. Seriously, I was having that conversation just the other day where, I think, I was kind of a wimp, and my work ethic wasn't what it is today before that. And I got into a situation where we had to work so hard and had to put in so many hours, and you couldn't just make excuses or decide you didn't want to go. And it really taught me this work ethic. I love hearing you say that. I totally relate to that.

Emily: Awesome.

Stephanie: Okay, Emily, you, you do so much, and so much of what you do centers around this idea of simplicity. So I would love to hear your backstory when it comes to living a simplified life. Like why did you become so passionate about this way of living?

Emily: Well, there's the short answer and there's a long answer. I think the short answer is because I'm my mother's child. She just always lived this way. And still does. She came to my house yesterday because we're having a photo shoot, and she was coming to help out a little bit.

I found her in the kitchen and I was like, "Mom, do you need something?" And she said, "No, I'm reorganizing your silverware because you have it all wrong." And by the way, with the most love and grace and humor in the world, but also like, why are you in my silverware drawer? So she taught me everything.

And as a child, I can remember someone saying to my mom, "Why do you teach Emily how to clean her room? Why do you do it with her? Why do you teach her how to organize things?" And my mum said, "Because you're not born knowing that. It's a learned skill and it's a trait that I want her to have as she gets older because life's going to be busy and things are going to happen, and she's going to need to know how to organize and simplify it to make it all make sense when she can't really control the rest of the world." So that was the shorter answer.

The longer version is that I just kind of grew up that way. I've always been passionate about organizing. It's something that I like to do in my free time. And I love looking at a situation that's complicated and saying, "How can we make this easier?"

That's why I don't think I was made for the job I had fresh out of college. I was 23 years old with a master's degree in nonprofit management and I got a job as the executive director of the City Ballet, which was great. I had to be the only woman in a boardroom many times and the only girl or the only person under the age of 30 in a rotary club.

But I just constantly kept saying, like, "What in the world? Why are we doing things in such a complicated way?" I carried that with me until I reached the point where I knew we wanted to start a family. And I said, "I'm gonna see if I can take my creative abilities and kind of create a company where... you know, I started off doing weddings and branding and anything I could do to earn an income to eventually transition from that full-time job.

When my son was born, that was when I just found myself really overwhelmed. And I was in that place where I remember my mom saying, "You're going to need these skills." And I thought, "I can't find anything to help me keep my life together." So I just took a binder and some notebook paper and I made a planner that was simple, not overwhelming. And it was born. It's gone through so many

transitions over the years. And it's just been so cool to see women in all different seasons of life kind of take this product and make it their own.

The coolest thing about our company and the brand and all that is that it used to be all about Emily Ley in our guest room. It was called Emily Ley a few years ago. And now it's not about me at all. It's so much about all of these users, this amazing community of simplified sisterhood, we call it. It's just really, really cool what's happened to the past couple years.

Stephanie: I love that. You guys listening, truly if you've seen a photo of me at some point or a photo of my workstation, you have seen Emily's planner because I've been a Simplified Planner user for years. I was just talking to my mom about this. I have an office but I never work in it. I am always a couch worker. And all the things that I need to get my job done are my laptop, a little bag of pencils, like I have a little pencil bag, and my Simplified Planner.

Emily: Oh, I love it.

Stephanie: And if I have those three things, then I feel like I can take on the world and breathe. If anyone else is a paper planner user, we'll link to it in the show notes so that you guys can join the sisterhood.

Emily: I love hearing that.

Stephanie: I'm the big, big cheerleader for it.

Emily: Thank you.

Stephanie: You mentioned that you're an author and you have some awesome books. You actually have a new one coming out really soon. It's called *When Less Becomes More*. Tell us about the book. Tell us the backstory for the book.

Emily: Yeah, oh, my goodness. It's a funny story. I wrote *Grace, Not Perfection*, my first book, and then I wrote *A Simplified Life*, my second book. And my publisher was like, "We're just loving this. We're loving you. We want you to write two more."

So book number three came around, and it was time for me to write. And I went to my husband and I cried, and I said, "I don't. I have no story. I am so overwhelmed." Business was just so busy, three kids under the age of eight. They were under the age of seven at the time. So busy.

I couldn't get my brain right. I had so many things going on and I just felt like I couldn't focus, and I didn't know what... I don't know, I was a mess. And I just laid

it all to him, and he said, "Emily, listen to you. You write about what you live and look at what you're living. It's not simplified, number one, and it's messy. You need to tell that story."

And I looked at him and I was like, "That is the dumbest idea I've ever heard. This is a disaster. This is not a story, this is a disaster." And he said, "No, like you need to go and you need to lean into that." And I gave myself a couple of days to just kind of sit with that idea.

And then it was New Year's Eve, literally the day before New Year's Day, I texted my whole team and I said, "Guys, I'm gonna quit for 30 days, like everything. No more team meetings, no more email, no more anything. I'm gonna sit in the mess that I feel like I'm in right now and I'm going to sort through it."

They should have been like, "What?" But they were like, "Yes, you absolutely go and do this. We'll take care of your Instagram account and the things that have to keep running." And I did. I unplugged. I took all the social media apps off my phone.

I just took everything away and I decided... Because I know we all can't take 30 days off of life, right, I decided I'm gonna write a book and I'm gonna dig into why in the world we're all so overwhelmed. All of us. No matter what season we're in. Whether we are fresh out of college or we're a high school girl, or we're a mom whose four kids left the nest, and we're in our 60s or newly married with no kids.

No matter what season you're in, we all hit these places where we're like, I am so burned out and I'm afraid to talk about it because it's not pretty to say that you feel empty, and it's not pretty to or popular to use words like "burned out" when in fact we have a lot to be grateful for. It's just messy. I felt very ugly about feeling that way, about being the leader of a company called Simplified when I felt like my life was a disaster.

And I just took those 30 days and I just wrote. And this story just poured out of me. One day, I had nothing to say, the next day I couldn't stop. I actually wrote too many words. I had to cut back. But I dug into this idea that less can truly be more. That we don't have to live the way the world is telling us to live. We don't have to constantly live our lives with our hair on fire. We feel like we have to keep up and we have to compare and we have to... There's just so much coming at us: noise, information, notifications, email, technology, just all things coming at us.

Honestly after writing this book and living through this and coming out the other side, I don't believe we're made to live this way. I don't believe that our world the way it is today is maybe what it was intended to be. For instance, you're on

Facebook, right? And you're scrolling on Facebook. And how often do we do that during the day, scrolling on Facebook?

Okay, yes, we all talk about social media can be too much and we need to cut back. But think about what happens when you're actually using it. In a matter of a few seconds, in the flick of a finger, you go from your second cousin's Bar Mitzvah to how to throw a gender reveal party to the best way to roast Brussel sprouts to like thing after thing after thing. And our brains are just fluttering and fluttering and fluttering.

So a lot of times, yes, we know that we need to simplify our schedules, we know that we need to do a good job meal planning and that sort of thing, but there are things running underneath those important and valid simplifying ways of life, there are things running underneath all of that that are deep and hard, and we have to untangle ourselves.

And if our brains are constantly flitting from one thing to the next, what's happening to us? Are we able to focus on the things that truly matter? So I just into under 24 pages dug into the idea that less can mean that we live a life that is full, more full of the good stuff, the stuff that actually matters.

Stephanie: I love that so much. The Facebook example is such a good one. All those things are even positive things. A lot of times we get on Facebook and we scroll and find out that, you know, our friend from high school has wildly different political views than we do and is sharing them in a way that's kind of offensive to us. And so then all of a sudden we feel kind of offended and upset. And then someone shares an article about how our entire world is falling apart and everything is... we're just going down.

Then the next thing is you find out that another girl... or you see five notifications in a row from people who are engaged or pregnant, and all of a sudden the world is going down. You know, you can't be friends with this person anymore or it brings up all this anger in you. And then also you're totally falling behind in life and you need to learn how to make Brussel sprouts the exact way. It's just a lot.

Emily: It's a lot. And it stems so far beyond just social media too. There are two chapters in the book about technology and then another one about social media. But the way that we rush through our lives, the way that we chase things. It may have been in another book, but I dig into it a lot in this book. This idea of, what is it we're all chasing so hard? Is it okay to raise children who are kind and inclusive and thoughtful and hardworking? Or do we need to raise the valedictorian? Is that our goal?

Is it okay to want good, not great is what I'm trying to say? I think so often we feel like in order to be successful or happy, or any of those things, we have to be pushing for this giant gold star. And what if we all gave ourselves the grace and the gratitude to say, "I'm gonna go after good." And that's okay. That's actually when we realize that good is pretty great.

Stephanie: There's so much in that. That's when we realized that good is pretty great. I think the thing that happens a lot of times when you said, you know, "What are we chasing?" feel like when you catch the thing you've been chasing, it moves.

Emily: Absolutely.

Stephanie: All of a sudden you lose that weight that you've been dying to lose and then all of a sudden, you are just as dissatisfied with your body even though you're that many pounds lighter.

Emily: So true.

Stephanie: Or you make that much more money, you get that raise, and then all of a sudden... I mean, you're still scared about, you know, am I gonna be able to pay my bills? Or is this going to be enough? Or "I should be pushing further." The benchmarks keep moving.

Emily: They do.

Stephanie: They're so frustrating. In that way, they never satisfy us the way that we think they're going to.

Emily: I love that you said that. Because there's a place in the book where we talk about I have found myself my most dissatisfied with life when I'm in the wait. So I'm in the wait to get engaged or I'm in the wait to finally have the wedding or I'm in the wait to have our first baby or our second baby or our third baby.

I was in the wait to move home. I wanted to move home to Pensacola for so long. When I look back now at the ripe old age of 36 and I look at all of the transitions that I've gone through and the things Brian and I have done together, I see that I was unhappy in a lot of the wait.

And what happens just like you said, you get to that thing, you have your first child or you finally get married and you are like, "Okay, but this isn't enough. I have to push on to the next thing." And that's good. Growth is good and moving forward and pushing hard is good. It's very good. But man, what we lose when we don't just pause and look around and think like, "Is this actually pretty good?"

Stephanie: I love that. I'm going to tell this really quickly. But the year after I graduated from college, I went on an 11-month mission trip around the world, which was awesome. I'm a huge traveler. It's just the cry of my heart. So it was a dream come true to get to do that.

About halfway through, I find myself sitting there at breakfast thinking about all the food back home that I miss. When you're in the middle of really rural central Africa, of course, it would be really nice to be able to eat kind of whatever you want. But I caught myself going down that road, and then going down that road a little bit more and thinking about how great things will be once I get home.

And I'm so glad that... Honestly, I feel like God put a hand on my forehead and just was like, "Stop for a second." Because I was able to see... just for a second I just had this glimpse of what was going to happen if I didn't stop thinking that way. Like, when I get home, one, I would have missed this whole year of getting to travel around the world. Like who gets that opportunity? Because I was thinking about what was next.

And then I could see in that brief moment that if I was always thinking about what was next, then once I got home, my eyes will still be looking ahead, and I think, "Okay, what's next?" So I would miss the sweetness of coming home from this really big trip. I started to kind of play that out, like, "Okay, my life would be so much better when I meet this guy."

Okay, but then once I meet him, that won't be satisfying. So I'll miss out on the full sweetness of getting to fall in love with this person I've been waiting for forever because I'm looking at engagement. Well, then when engagement comes, I still won't be satisfied. And I just got to realize in that moment, and then really got to practice the fact that when we can just be where our feet are, we learn all the lessons God has for us.

We interact with Him, we get to grow in the ways He has for us and we get to really soak every bit of that season in. So that when we get to the next one we're practiced at that. And so we get to actually savor all of the good things every season instead of missing out on them.

Emily: I love that. It's so true. It's so true. I think the biggest season for me where I missed some things was when we were newlyweds. I just wanted to have a baby so badly. And we struggled with infertility for all of our kids. But that first baby, man, we just went right for it and it didn't happen. And it was really, really, really hard.

I think we missed some of that early newlywed, you know, those moments because we just ran right to it. I look back at things and I wouldn't change a thing, but I know that I have the chance now to say, I have little kids, I have this company that can really dig into this idea. Now's the time to make changes, you know, to look at life and say, I don't want to look back at my life and think I rushed all the way through it, or that I over-committed to everything, or that I allow all of the noise of the world to drown out what really mattered.

One random thing that we talked about in the book that I always think about, it's one of the most important stories I think in the book. And it's about the way that we sometimes will take the path of least resistance. In our efforts to simplify or organize things, a lot of times we'll say, "Okay, you know, this modern convenience has been created, and so I'm going to say yes to it reactively not proactively, we're going to say yes to it because it makes life easier, and life is busy, so let's just keep adding these things to make it better."

When I was a little girl, my mom would take me to the bookmobile. So the bookmobile was an effort that was created by our Public Library here in Pensacola. And it was an old RV, and they had turned it into a mobile library. And they filled it full of children's books. And they would take it to the Kmart parking lot by our house and they would park the bookmobile. And if you saw it, you never knew when it was coming, when you saw it you knew it's time to go.

So my mom would take me and we would go in there. It was a tiny thing, but it had a little beanbag chair. And I would sit in the beanbag chair, I would look through the old books and smell of the books, the pages and choosing my three that I was allowed to take home. I would carefully choose my three books.

And then my mom would take me home and I would race to the backyard to sit outside and I would read my books. And then would be done and time to go back before they moved it. And what do I do now when my kids would like a book? I pull up my phone and I hit one click "buy" on Amazon and it comes the next day. Something is being missed when we opt for the path of least resistance. And it shakes me to my core every time I think about that because I'm doing it all over the place.

Stephanie: I feel like I could sit on that.

Emily: I know.

Stephanie: Girl, you have to just pause and think and reflect. Thank you for sharing that. I'm really glad you did.

[00:24:49] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Our sponsor for today's episode is an amazing female-founded company called [Olive & June](#). Now, I don't know about you but I love having my nails done. I just feel more put together when I have a fresh manicure. But to be honest, I rarely do it.

A few times a year I do treat myself to a salon mani-pedi, I always walk out of the salon having spent like \$100, and I usually end up chipping my newly painted nails as soon as I get in the car. So then I go through a period where I decide I'm just going to do my nails myself. But no matter how hard I try my nails always end up looking like they were painted by a 6-year-old. That's why I'm so happy to have found Olive & June.

Olive & June's founder spent a year doing and redoing and redoing and redoing her own nails, identifying all the reasons it is impossible to make them look good on your own, and then she fixed it. She created their Mani System that helps you achieve beautiful salon-quality nails for just \$2 a mani. And the polish truly doesn't check. It lasts for seven days or more.

The Mani System comes with all the tools you could possibly need for salon-quality nails, and they're all in one box. It includes the poppy which you put on top of the nail polish candle to make it easy to grip and to paint your nails on both of your hands. This is a game-changer. With a poppy I can finally keep the nail polish on my actual nails instead of getting it all over my fingers. Anyone else?

You could also customize Your Mani System box with your choice of six polishes. Recently I've been wearing their nail color called Pink Sands, it's this gorgeous white, pink neutral color that I love. You guys, I truly love this company so much. I actually enjoy painting my nails now and the end result is seriously so good.

Not only that. Their Mani System is going to be my new go-to gift for all of my closest people so that we can all use them together at our girls' nights. Friends, painting your nails can actually be fun and affordable, all because of Olive & June.

Visit oliveandjune.com/girlsnight for 20% off your first Mani system. That's oliveandjune.com/girlsnight for 20% off your first Mani System. Olive & June thank you so much for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

[00:27:04] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! I am so excited to introduce you to today's sponsor. Our sponsor for today's episode is a company I love called [Babbel](#). There's something you may not

know about me is that I have a huge passion for learning other languages. I started learning Spanish when I was just 10 years old, and I continued to study Spanish throughout middle school, high school, and college.

I've had the amazing opportunity to study in Spain and to travel to other Spanish-speaking countries. And along with that, I also minored in French in college because it's always been my dream to speak Spanish, French, and Italian.

I had the best teachers and professors in school and so for the longest time that dream actually felt achievable. But all that changed when I graduated. It's hard to learn languages on your own. But now thanks to Babbel, the language learning app that has sold more than 10 million subscriptions, there's an addictively fun and easy way to continue my language learning journey.

Whether you want to travel abroad, connect in deeper way with family, or you just have some free time, Babbel teaches bite-sized language lessons that you'll actually use in the real world. I've been using the app for a while now and I seriously love it. Right now I'm using it to brush up on my Spanish and it has been so fun. Their lessons only take me 15 minutes to complete. So it's the perfect way to brush up on my language skills when I'm on the go or when my twin girls are napping.

You can choose from 14 different languages including Spanish, French, Italian, and German. And their lessons were created by over 100 language experts so you know you're getting the best, most accurate teaching.

Friends, if you're interested in learning another language I highly recommend starting your journey with Babbel today. Right now you can save up to 60% off your subscription when you go to babbel.com/girlsnight. That's babbel.com/girlsnight for up to 60% off your subscription. Babbel, language for life.

[00:29:01] <music>

Stephanie: So, as we're talking about simplifying and making space for the things that are most important and clearing away to things that aren't, I want to talk about just a couple of our areas of life. Because one thing I love about you and the work that you do is that it's so practical, and that you're like, Listen, this is not big ideas. It is big ideas sometimes, but then we're going to drill down. One thing I know that you say is if you're organizing something, don't go to the container store and buy all the things.

Emily: Yeah, terrible idea.

Stephanie: That's like last. First, get rid of some things and figure out what you actually have. I know that you're super practical that way. So I want to ask you first really about our schedules. I know that no matter what season of life we're in, so many of us are just battling with our schedules, feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed and stressed out. So what are some practical things we can do as we look at our days and our weeks and our months to really say yes to the right number of things and really keep our schedules open enough to be able to experience the best parts of life?

Emily: Such a good question. I think that superficially we can say, okay, you have to make sure that you're not overcommitting and say yes to things that are important to you. But really, really getting a hold of your schedule, and really understanding and properly managing time, which is our most valuable resource, it takes some real work. I think it takes a lot of hard work.

And that's why with the Simplified Planners we have the simplified prep work in the front—it's these worksheets to get you thinking about like, what are you actually committing to? And are you committing to these things out of obligation? Are you committing out of fear of not being included? Or are you committing because it's the way you want to live your life?

I think what it comes down to is you have to put the planner down, put the iCal down, walk away for a little while, get quiet, and answer the question: what does the good life look like to you? Does it look like, you know, lunch dates with friends all the time? Or does it look like traveling a lot? Or does it look like working in a great company or solo working?

You have to go back to the basics and give yourself permission to question everything. And to say, what is it that I want my life to look like right now? Yes, you can ask yourself that question, what do I want to look back at my life and say that I did when I'm 80? But what about right now at 15, 25, 35, 45, however old you are?

What do you want your life to look like right now? And what kind of margin do you want to have in your life? Do you want to have days with nothing to do? I do. I love those days. That's when I just recharge and get the most done. Probably. But what do you want it to look like?

And then once you've made up your mind about like, "This is the standard. This is the life we want to create. This is the life we want to have," then go back to your schedule, and just take inventory and say, "What am I saying yes to? What am I going to say no to?" But you can't do that yes or no thing, you can't do that tactical part until you have done the hard work of like, where am I coming from with these decisions? And what is it that I'm after anyway?

I'll give you a practical example. My kids are in preschool, my twins, and then my oldest is in third grade. I can't believe he's in third grade. But that's how old they are. My husband and I have said that even though I'm running this company and I'm writing these books, I want the flexibility to be the classroom volunteer, to help teach Sunday school, to do those kinds of things, to get involved in our community a little bit now that we've moved home.

So knowing that and knowing what it is that I want, I looked at my schedule and decided I'm not working on Fridays. For somebody running a company of this size and writing books and doing these things that I do, that might sound crazy. But says who? If I have the flexibility to do that and the ownership of my role to do that, then that's what I've put into place.

Does it mean that I work at night sometimes? Yes. Does it mean that on Saturdays during naptime I'm working? You betcha. But that's the life that I want to have, and so I carve out the time to make it happen. And I think it's also easy to hear a story like that and to say, "Well, that's great, but like I'm not an entrepreneur, I don't have that kind of flexibility. I don't have that kind of ownership." But where you are, no matter your situation, if you give yourself permission to slow down and think it through, I bet you there are a lot of ways that you do actually have ownership.

It may not mean not working on Fridays, but it may mean taking your lunch hour to go and take a yoga class or carving out some time to have coffee with the girlfriend once a week or doing the things that fill you up and making your schedule look like the way you want it to look.

Stephanie: I love the word "ownership." I think so often we just start kind of walking through our lives letting other people dictate what should be important to us. And it's in big ways and small ways. It's like, "Can you do me this favor or take on this extra project?" It's totally optional, but you're gonna say yes, because you want to make me happy.

It's saying yes to requests like that, and letting people put things like that on us. And it's also big things like you should want to travel. If you don't want to travel, if that's not part of what the good life looks like to you, then use your time and your money and your freedom elsewhere. I love when you said, "Says who?" Why are we allowing someone else to tell us what life should look like? We get to choose.

Emily: So true.

Stephanie: I love that. Another thing that I think can feel really chaotic in our lives is our homes and our space. I know for me when my insides feel chaotic, my outsides get

more chaotic. And then when my outsides get more chaotic then my insides get more chaotic. I just really believe that there's this strong connection between our spaces and our insides. I know that you share that.

This is one of my favorite things that you talk about and do. I know that you do a Ruthless Declutter Challenge. I'd just love to hear, like, as we are trying to create space in our lives for the good life, how do you do that in our spaces also?

Emily: That's so good. This new book that's coming out, there's a special edition at Target, and it has a special chapter at the end called the *Keeping of Home*, and it's about this very thing. There's content in the book actually, a chapter about this, too.

Stephanie: That's so cool. "Yeah, there's a special section in my book at Target that talks about this." This is so cool.

Emily: [inaudible 00:36:05]. I don't even know.

Stephanie: That's good. I love it. I love it. Okay. Okay. So the special chapter.

Emily: Yes, there's a special chapter. I am just such a believer that physical clutter is mental clutter, just like you said. And it's cyclical. If it's cluttered in your house, it's probably cluttered in your head. And if it's cluttered in your head, it's probably cluttered in your house. And it just requires us to really pump the brakes, and say, "I'm gonna give myself an hour," or "I'm gonna give myself a day or a week or a month, all you need to really just dig in and get rid of all the extra, you know, all the noise, all the stuff that's happening in our homes."

Especially because what happens inside the four walls of your house, you can't control a lot of what happens outside of it. You can control a lot about what happens inside of it. Whether you are in a giant house, a tiny house, apartment, whatever, dorm room, you could control this.

I think it just starts with tactically going around your house with a trash bag and a donate bag and just clearing the clutter. As much as that is a physical exercise where you are physically taking things and saying, "I'm going to say, Thank you very much for being in my house, now you're gone," as much as that's a physical thing, it's very much a mental game, too.

So I always encourage people, yes, we do this Ruthless Declutter Challenge every year in the spring. I always encourage people to start with that simple task. Take two trash bags throughout your house, a donate bag and a trash bag, and start filling them up. It will get your brain into that place of, Okay, I can do this, I don't have to

hang on to these things. There are other people who could use them or I can get rid of them.

Honestly, it is the fastest, easiest way to give yourself a fresh start. Even if you're not feeling it mentally, if you're craving a fresh start and you're like, "I don't even know where to begin with my life. There's so much going on," doing it in your home, saying yes to some things and no to others will set you up and give you the fresh start you need physically to do it in your life, to do it mentally.

Stephanie: The yes and the no thing, that's so... It's easier... It's still hard, which I want to ask you about in a sec. But it's easier to say, Is there room for this lamp in my life or is there not room for this lamp in my life? That's an easier yes or no question. And when we can practice doing that... Like, that's something I've really discovered in decluttering my house is that the more I can say no to this sweater, that practice of deciding what there's space for in my life makes it so much easier to say, "I don't have the margin to commit to this." Practicing no really is helpful.

I know, though, as people are going through their homes, that there are things... I mean, there's some things that are just obviously trash or obviously get rid of. But I think depending on sort of our threshold of how much clutter we can take, for some of us we're looking around and we don't know what to get rid of, or we're having a hard time deciding if something should stay or go. Do you have a filter for that?

Emily: Well, I think it's twofold. Number one, if there's something that you're not sure about, maybe put it away and see if you miss it. If it's something that you think like, "Oh, I really have a regret about that" or whatever, pull that out, tuck it under a bed or somewhere where you don't see it.

I do that with clothes a lot. Like if I know that this is not something I'm going to wear, I have a basket in my closet and I'll put things in there, you know, my kids' things in my things. And I let them sit there for a couple of weeks usually just in case, you know, "Why did I do that?" I want to get it back out.

But also you have to go into the mindset not just that you're clearing your clutter and making your house look nice and getting rid of the excess. You're going into it because you are going to simplify your days. So you are not cleaning your closet just to make it look pretty for an Instagram photo. You are cleaning your closet out and getting down to what makes you feel good in your actual body right this minute, you're getting rid of the feelings you have every morning where you're like, "I used to fit in these jeans and now I don't fit in these jeans." You don't need those jeans. Get rid of those.

I think we also live in this culture of like, we feel like we have to have a whole lot, a whole lot of things because it's like safety or something. When you remove all the excess, your daily decisions are easier. Getting dressed is easier. There's less negative talk when you have things that fit you that make you feel good.

Same can be said for your kitchen drawers and kitchen cabinets. You go in there and you're looking for an ice cream scoop and you don't have 45 carrot peelers sitting there, the one that your mom gave you, the one that was on your wedding registry, the one that you bought at Target because it had gold on it. You know what I'm talking about.

Stephanie: I do. Everyone's like, "Emily is in my drawers."

Emily: I know. You have the one that is the best, the favorite or the necessary. So that's the filter for me. Like, is it the best one? If you have to carrot peelers, choose the best one or the favorite one or the necessary one. And the same can be said for any kind of heirloom or something that was given or gifted to you. Is it the best, favorite, necessary? and you don't need all that other stuff.

Stephanie: This practice has been so game-changing for me. I feel like my daily life is easier and better and happier because of it. And it's little things. I think in some ways we've talked about how this practice does something in our hearts. In some ways we can explain it and in some ways you can't really explain it.

So there's some deep stuff that goes along with it. But then also the simple joys of life I think are able to rise to the surface more when the things around us are our favorites. It's everything from getting rid of that kind of ratty blanket that sits on your couch and replacing it with one that just makes you sigh with joy every time you wrap up in it because it feels so good. There are blankets that feel that good.

Emily: Yes, there are. They're called Tourance blankets. Like I'm gonna give you a product to link to. It's called Tourance blankets. It's T-O-U-R-A-N-C-E. It was Oprah's Favorite thing one year. And I kid you not, it's the blanket that will make you feel the joy.

Stephanie: We're 100% gonna link to that in the show notes. That is amazing. That is good.

Emily: Because they go on sale on Black Friday. So keep your eyes on.

Stephanie: Oh, my gosh. And we all just mentally set aside money for that. That's amazing. But truly when we're intentional with the things around us... Like my coffee mugs bring me joy and my, I don't know, the chair I sit in to have my quiet time in the morning brings me joy. And it's because I'm not sitting in the chair that's

uncomfortable or itchy or whatever. It's because we're making the space around us the space we want to actually be in. And it just really makes a difference.

Emily: So true. And just like you said with mugs. So you have mugs make you happy in the morning with your coffee, and so you have three favorite mugs, and you don't have 15 extra mugs hanging out around those three favorites. You don't need those because you're not drinking 15 cups of coffee at the same time. So having just those three, it makes your decision-making easier, it's easier to find things.

Stephanie: Like trying to jam... Like get it out from the back of the cabinet and being frustrated when something falls out.

Emily: And suddenly you have so much more space.

Stephanie: Oh, yeah, breathing room, breathing room. I think having breathing room in your space just makes some breathing room in your soul.

Emily: So true.

Stephanie: That's not the Bible, but I feel like... It's Stephanie and Emily's translation of the Bible.

Emily: I love it.

Stephanie: You mentioned this a little bit ago with Facebook and social media. Give us some practical tools for that. Because it really is such a problem. We can open our phones and all of a sudden be blind... And usually I think we're blindsided by something we didn't think we were going to see. And it really has such an impact on our days in our lives. I just would love to hear any tips you have for that.

Emily: One of my weird experiences with Facebook in particular was that I would experience what I later learned was called compassion fatigue. It's this thing where we all know our triggers, we all know are things that make us worried or kind of send us into a little bit of a worry spiral. For me, it's sick people. Sick children especially, I start to worry about my own children and I borrow the unfortunate awful worries of other people onto myself in a really big way.

And I had to learn that it was okay to see something, say a prayer for that whomever, and hide it. And that I could filter my feed. That I was not a bad person for filtering my feed, for guarding my heart because it's the wellspring of life. I felt very bad about the decision to do that the first time I did it. And then I thought of that verse. And I thought, "I have to guard my heart. Because who knows what will come into my life at one point or someone close to me?" I need to be able to see

those things, say a prayer and move on from those things because they absolutely would send me into a little bit of a spiral.

And I had this conversation with one of my best friends who we were talking about infertility. And I was like, "I have so many friends who are young who are not married, who have not yet tried to have a child, but are very concerned they're going to suffer from infertility. Why is this happening?" And she said, "Because it's everywhere." We're seeing it everywhere on social media.

In one sense, it's great because people know they're not alone. But in another sense, we're borrowing worry and concern and just so much from other people that many years ago you didn't hear about these stories unless it was told to you from a friend. You didn't read about it in the newspaper until a few days after something happened.

So I just had to get to a place where I said, it's okay, you can guard your heart in that way. And who knows if that verse in the Bible was intended for social media, but if it was... I'm sure it was intended for a lot of things, but I've taken it to that context and said, You can guard your heart.

You can also guard your heart with who you follow. You can guard your heart with your friends in real life. You don't have to follow your actual friends on Instagram if you would rather have a relationship with them in person. You can follow someone and mute them and they don't have to know it.

You get to take ownership of it because these are all things adding to our burnout and our overwhelm. And even if we're not yet claiming that we're burned out or overwhelmed, at times we feel it. And sometimes we don't want to say it out loud. And sometimes we're on the train heading right toward it, and we don't realize it.

So I think proactively managing social media is so important, not just letting it happen to you. Going in and looking at your following. Who are you following? Unfollow people. I do that probably once a month or so. I'll go in... because I'll randomly follow whoever has the thing I saw that day. And eventually, I'll think, okay, I need to just filter this a little bit and dial it back. And it's honestly made a really big difference.

Stephanie: I love that. I've experienced the same thing. We shouldn't do this. But I think often we do have our phones in really intimate, quiet times in our lives. So an example is right before we go to bed or right when we get up, we should not be on our phones during that time. But a lot of the times we are.

Emily: That's true.

Stephanie: When we're looking through Facebook or when we're looking through Instagram, we have invited that person or that story into our bed. They're like in our bed. And we get to decide. And really I think there are so many things in the world that we can consume them all and it's not beneficial for us to consume them all. And so we get to choose.

One of my favorite examples, and I had to learn this the hard way, you know, really I think I started learning this in college was following ex-boyfriends on Facebook or Instagram. I will never forget the feeling of opening up my Facebook and seeing my ex-boyfriend with a girl who I didn't know. Yeah, it just popped up on my feed and blindsided me. And before I know it, I'm having a terrible day. I mean, certain things can send you into a spiral.

I think sometimes we think, "Well, I shouldn't be following this person. What will it mean if I don't? Or what will it do to the relationship if I don't?" But nobody needs to see that. It is not good for your heart ever to be blindsided that way. So unfollowing or muting an ex-boyfriend. Or you know that girl that as much as you're working on it so that you're not comparing yourself to her you still are, in the process you can mute her or unfollow her.

Emily: It's so true. It's so true.

Stephanie: I love that question.

Emily: You just take ownership of it.

Stephanie: Yes. Ownership is really, I feel like, the theme here. So as we're thinking about these different parts of our lives and wanting to clear away the extra and leave room for the good, I know that a lot of that has to do with being present and gratitude. Can you talk to us through like, what is the heart posture? What are some things we can do in our day to soak in the good instead of trying to shove more in?

Emily: I really think that boils down to removing the noise. For instance, we'll be in the car with my kids after school. And I've just picked them up from school and all of them have something to say. One person will be talking, another person's talking. And it occurs to me that the radio is on. And it's so tactical, but me just knowing before I pick the kids up from school to turn the radio off so that I can hear them when they get in the car. I mean, it's kind of obvious, but not something I've put into practice. And now I always make sure when they get into the car, I turn the radio off so that I can hear.

And it actually affects my attitude, and their attitudes because they're not competing to be heard. And that can be said for anything in our lives. If our marriage is what we want to savor and really enjoy right now, then we need to turn down the noise, you know, the proverbial noise on the other things that are causing your marriage to compete for its attention.

So it just comes back to that thing of saying like, what do I want the good life to look like? And what is it that's most important to me right now in this season? And then giving that thing its place to shine. And to do that, we just have to turn down the brightness, the noise, the distractions. Tactically it's actually a lot easier than we think.

Stephanie: I love that. So last, but seriously, not least, if there are women sitting here listening, which I know there are, that are feeling stressed out or overwhelmed or burned out, do you have any last words of encouragement for them?

Emily: Yeah. Take a nap. Take a nap. It's not as complicated as we often think. Sometimes we think, like, "I'm overwhelmed. I'm so overwhelmed. I need to move houses. I'm overweight. I need a new outfit or a haircut, or just... I don't know, I need something really, really big to make me feel new again."

And what do we know about our devices, our phones? If you unplug them and you turn them off, and you turn them back on, more than likely they'll be working right again. And what we don't give ourselves is the opportunity to unplug, to take a nap, to go for a walk outside without our phones, you know, to do things that fill our wealth.

If we look at ourselves as women who are pouring out onto other people, be it our spouses, our children, our communities, our work, we are constantly pouring out. And if we're not pouring in, unplugging, taking a rest, that kind of thing, we're not going to be pouring out anything good. So give yourself time. Just give yourself time to set an alarm and go lay down for 15 minutes and close your eyes and take a rest.

Stephanie: I love that. Emily, thank you so much for being on the show today.

Emily: Thank you for having me. This has been so much fun.

[00:52:59] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't Emily amazing? I just love her and I love this conversation and I'm so happy I got to share her with you. One thing I wanted to mention quickly is I know we talked about a lot in today's episode. So if you want to find links to any of

those things, all you have to do is go to my website. It's girlsnightpodcast.com. And for every episode, we have a blog post with the show notes. All the links will be there for everything we talked about, including all of Emily's contact info so you guys can follow her and so y'all can be friends.

Hey, thanks so much for listening to this episode and for putting up with my voice. I'm hoping to sound and feel a lot better for our episode next week. I'll see you then.