



Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. You're listening to episode 1 of Praise Through It.



This is a podcast about seeing the praiseworthy side of our daily struggles. If you've ever gotten stuck in the mire of the daily grind, or if you've ever wondered, *will this ever be better? Will this ever be different?* This might be a space for you. I won't sugar-coat. I won't dress it up. I won't let us sit in the muck for long, either. I'll offer a perspective that shifts our eyes from that daily grind, those daily struggles, to seeing the beauty in the mess, the order through the chaos, the glimmer of hope that inevitably shines. If that's something you're working on or you'd like to be a part of, listen in.



We live in a world that praises multitasking. In parenthood, in work, in basic life chores, in texting expectations, in relationships. Everything. We read the news while we watch a football game. We scroll Instagram while we're using the restroom. (Secret's out on that one. It's okay.) We help our kids with homework and we cook dinner and we make their lunch for tomorrow and we answer a text from our Mom about the avocados for sale at the grocery store. We so value *finishing* and *producing* that we pull ourselves and our brains in a million directions every day. Well ... What if we slowed down? What if we did one thing at a time? One conversation. One task. One relationship. *I'll get less done*, you say. Or, *ain't no way; have you seen my life?!*, you say. I don't know. Let's see.



In the fall of 2020, I was winding down a life I had made over the previous 9 years. My husband and I were both changing careers, we were changing cities, peer groups, our daughter's education, everything. More than any recent time I could recall, the to-do list seemed to go on and on and on and on. Now, to be fair, we had just come off of a seerious slowdown in the form of COVID-19, so maybe the rush felt a little stronger, a little more than it actually was. But in addition to getting ready for the big move, we had to keep up the regular life stuff like getting our daughter to school, feeding everyone, keeping our house somewhat livable while we sorted

KEEP and TOSS, and doing things like dishes and laundry. Though, to be honest with you, I never put laundry on my to-do list because it *would never get crossed off*.

At work, for the first time in my nine-year school counseling career, I was the only counselor at my school. My two previous partners had retired and PCSed (which is military fancy for being reassigned to another installation); my new partner was in transit but I doubted she would get there before I was leaving. My work list was never done. I usually just moved items from one day to the next, every day. I walked in at 7:30, bracing for the day. I walked out at 3:30 wondering *where in the world did this day go?* I knew I was accomplishing things; I could tell from the items on my to-do list that I had crossed off, but they all just blended together. And even though I don't like to be interrupted, I often interrupted *myself* by switching prematurely between tasks.

Sound familiar?

At the same time, I had been having trouble breathing at home. Like, literally breathing. My chest was tight, I was jittery and I was jumpy. I noticed I kept having to remind myself to breathe. I thought it might be allergies because I always have allergies, but I had also just had sinus surgery that had opened up my breathing in a way that made me feel like a brand-new person. I was in the kitchen one afternoon having a discussion with my husband about something I wasn't doing that I really should have been doing, which is hard enough to admit in the first place. And I said these words - very strongly and like I was the only one in the family experiencing this - *From the moment I wake up to the moment I go to bed, I am moving and doing things. I have no time to sit. I can barely remember XYZ, let alone ABC.*

Hmm. Maybe I found the problem with my breathing. My husband reminded me of my tennis coach's words from twenty years before - I always *have* time. What am I *making* time for? And the time that I'm making, am I filing in those cracks of time with extra tasks that really either don't need to be done right then, or need more time and attention than just the sliver of minutes between dinner and homework and bed?

Because what would happen if I slowed down? I knew that the way I was spending my time was good - I was caring for my family, feeding them, transporting them, clothing them, etc. But maybe my in-between had to be adjusted if I wanted to *breathe* again. And I did *want* to breathe again.

In the midst of this conversation with my husband and the internal conversation I was having with myself, I also remembered a bit of brain info I had learned during some post-grad work: that multi-tasking is actually *not a thing*. Literally speaking, our brains can only do one thing at a time. We can jump connections quickly, but functionally - you are cooking dinner *then* you are answering a common core math problem *then* you are cursing said math problem *then* you are back to sautéing your onions. We perceive that as "at the same time" because the time between the neural connections is immeasurable, but really, it's four separate brain moments. Every task you do is a separate neural pathway. Think of it like a road in your brain. You can't travel down two roads at once; it is physically impossible. Whenever I think about this, I picture a circuit

shorting out, then sparking, then shorting out, then sparking. Over and over again. Sometimes I also picture trying to straddle one car over two roads, and some weird scene from Pixar's *Cars* comes to mind. But that's not reality; that is fiction. Because that's how I feel when I'm going *bambambambam*, one thing to the next, dawn til dusk, wake til rest. Like I'm stretching myself too thin, and my circuit is shorting out. Then sparking. Then shorting out. Then sparking. Over and over again. Because I keep trying to travel down those two roads at one time, and it just doesn't work that way.

So, what would happen if I slowed down? If I calmly said to my daughter, "Just a moment, let me finish this task," before checking her spelling? Could she wait twenty seconds? And if she acted like she couldn't wait, could I ignore the whining and make her wait anyway? Could I control the moment by simply *breathing*? By slowing down and doing one. thing. at. a. time. By slowing down and finishing my text message, standing right there, where I was, and then going to check her spelling? Would it teach her to remain in a moment long enough to complete a task before moving on to the next thing? Would it teach *me* to remain in a moment long enough to complete a task before moving on to the next thing?

I guess I started wondering how much time I was actually saving by keeping that timer right in the front of my mind. That task-clicker that I seemed to take so much pride in clicking, especially if I could click off three items at once. I started wondering if I should put *breathe* on my to-do list. I started wondering how much my kid and my husband were *actually* getting from me when I was already onto the next task instead of being in the moment with them?

There will be some days when moving it along is just par for the course. We say *scoot-a-doots* in our house when that's the case. But I would argue that most of the time - it doesn't have to be that way. What's the glory in going fast anyway? What's the glory in making sure all of you is stretched to all of the world around you? If we have learned anything in this past year, let it be that life still went on even when it slowed down.

What's true is that we often feel like we have to answer every call that comes our way - from the homework table, from our text strings, from our Facebook messenger, from our DMs, from our spouse, from our children, from our parents, from our siblings, from our co-workers, from our boss. Especially in our virtually-connected world we are currently wading through, we feel this obligation to answer every call just because we *can* answer every call.

Let us remember that just because we *can* do something doesn't mean we have to and it doesn't mean we should. The reality is: You can't do ALL the things, ALL the time. Taking a break is okay. Being tired, and saying so, is okay. Saying, 'I can't do that today' or 'I can't do that right now' or 'Give me just one moment', is OKAY.

What's also true is that the world goes on even if we don't answer *the very second* our name or number is called. What's true is that we were given the privilege of breathing *for a reason*. And what's true is that life can be exhausting. But it's less exhausting when we *breathe* through it instead of *pant* through it.

After my sinus surgery, there were a good number of weeks when I took long, deep breaths just because I could. I would say the name of whoever was around me and say, “Look,” and then make a big show of drawing in a deep breath. I was so into how amazing it felt to breathe alllll the way. One of those times, my husband laughed with me after I breathed in and out. Afterwards, I said, “I just didn’t know how much oxygen I was missing out on.”

How much oxygen - life-giving, life-sustaining oxygen - are we missing out on because we’re rushing and hurrying and *bambambaming* from one thing to the next?

Now, how fortunate we are to have so many blessings to rush to and from, right? How lucky we are to have a life filled with people who love us so much that they’re reaching out to us left and right. And how blessed we are to live in a time where connection can happen with the click or touch of a couple buttons. So that when our name or our number is called we can jump into whatever relationship is beckoning for our attention.

What’s also true, and what is good for our souls, is that we are in charge of our moments. And if we need a moment to breathe in some much-needed oxygen, the world can wait.

It’s okay to breathe. Put it on your to-do list. Set a reminder in your phone. Make it your background. Whatever works for you to remember that it’s okay... to breathe.

It’s okay to say, “One moment” and then give yourself that moment. In the midst of a hurried, whirlwind week, it might be the only reset you get. Use it.

As you go forward in your day, in your week, in your season of life, may you find space to take a breath. And if you have to force that space, may you take that breath deep, all the way to your toes, and remember how valuable that oxygen will be.



Thank you for listening to episode 1 of Praise Through It. Life can be messy and chaotic and hard. We can see that side, and we can find the glimmers of light that shine through our everyday. No rose-colored glasses, but true things that bring hope and joy and peace.

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Thanks for listening, I'll see you next time for episode 2 of Praise Through It.