

Faith Interview with Allyson Lewis | The Practical Disciple

John: Hi my name is John Arnold and I'm your host today at The Practical Disciple. Our guest is Allyson Lewis and she'll be sharing with us how to use principles from her book "The Seven Minute Difference" to help us grow in our faith, so let's go ahead and get started. Hi Allyson, welcome to The Practical Disciple.

Allyson: Hi John, how are you?

John: I'm good, I'm excited because I'm getting to talk with you about "The Seven Minute Difference" which is a book that I have really enjoyed and I've applied some in my own life and I'm excited you're willing to share with my readers a little bit about that. Could we start, Allyson, for listeners who maybe are unfamiliar with "The Seven Minute Difference" by just taking a moment and giving us a little overview if you would please.

Allyson: Of course. I'm holding the book "The Seven Minute Difference" in my hand and it is a book on time management and productivity and purpose. It's about rediscovering who you are and how you can make those little segments of 7 minutes at a time, laser in on what's most important so your life can have meaning and purpose and fulfillment. So "The Seven Minute Difference" was written in 2006 to help people rediscover all those things in life that they're really hoping to be excited about and to regain control over in their lives.

John: Great well I know that throughout the book one of the themes that popped out over and over again for me is that change happens in an instant and I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about what that means because I think a lot of us work really hard at change and I don't think you mean that it's necessarily easy- well it is easy- but there's kind of an oxymoron there, tell us what that means "change happens in an instant".

Allyson: Well that phrase happened to me at the age of 43. It actually happened in a church service, I was walking in the door and one of my friends came up to me and they said 3 words that really startled me, one of my friends at the age of 46 said "I've got cancer" and when she said that it's like there was a line in the sand and for her life she had just found out that she had 6 months to live and all of a sudden change does happen in an instant.

John: Right.

Allyson: It can happen when you face any kind of crisis or any kind of joy in your life and so literally I think you can wake up and be facing one direction in life and have an awakening, almost a realization that you can be different tomorrow than you are today and make a decision to step one or two steps forward and literally do a 180. In fact, in the Bible as we studied, that's what repentance is. Change can happen in an instant when we make a decision

to go a completely different direction in our lives and that's the message of hope in "The Seven Minute Difference".

John: Right and that's why I really wanted to interview you about this book because while it is a book that's in general about productivity, and it's not explicitly aimed at a Christian audience, it really benefits anyone. To me as I read it all I kept thinking is wow this is so helpful in terms of- like repentance. We know we have things in our lives that we want to change, we know we want to grow in our discipleship and sometimes that can be overwhelming but one of the great things about your book is it's very practical and it's a practical way to bring people hope on how to go about making that change. So one thing that I would love for you to explain are micro-actions, that also leapt off the page at me cause that' one of those little practical tidbits that I loved, talk about micro-actions for a minute if you would.

Allyson: Well seven minute micro-actions are those tiny little things that you can do every day of your life because we believe it's the little-bitty things added together in the string of life that can make these huge difference in how productive you are, how much better you feel. And actually when I wrote the book – I'll be 50 this year I know that's kind of middle age, I'm freaking out – but I was 43 when I started all of this and at the age of 43 I was out of shape, I was a little bit overweight and I really wasn't happy with my life as a whole and trying to change that all at once would have been too big.

John: Sure.

Allyson: And so what we said is what are those little things? What are those micro-actions that we can do every day? So I'm going to give a few examples of micro-actions.

John: Okay.

Allyson: The number one micro-action that we're known for is that we encourage people to have a written daily plan of action. We believe that the subscribers to the seven minute life theory need to wake up every morning, take out a sheet of paper, and write down three or four or five things that they will commit to doing before 11:00, in fact we've trademarked that comment and we call it "5 before 11". We want people to take the micro-action of saying here are the 5 proactive, high-value things I will do before 11:00 each morning. Imagine how much you would reclaim of your day if you would do 5 proactive things before 11:00. Other micro-actions might be something as simple as writing a handwritten thank you note to a friend or someone that just needs to be uplifted.

John: Right.

Allyson: It could be something such as getting up 15 minutes earlier and a fifth one could be just adding more water, staying hydrated throughout the day by picking up water instead of a soda. So these tiny little micro-actions, taking the stairs, drinking extra water, going to bed on time, reading 10 pages of a book, all of those things are micro-actions.

John: Okay, super. You know the Bible is filled with micro-action we're supposed to do every day and so much of it is just being intentional about it, I think is one of the things I gathered out of your book is getting intentional about what needs to be done, painting a picture of that, and the defining those micro-actions that are going to get you there. I know you speak all around the country, your book has been out now for 3 years so you've had a lot of expose to how people respond to it. I would guess that as you trained folks that you see some common struggles people have or common resistance, what are some common things you see where people get tripped up in trying to move forward?

Allyson: The biggest thing that we see – and I do have the privilege, it is an honor and a privilege to be invited to churches and schools and of course my main target is corporations and non-profits, but the main problem we see as we try to help people through all of this, is that they have a lack of vision and a lack of clarity of what it is that they want to accomplish. We are very big, there's an entire chapter on goal setting, that until you can with crystal clear clarity know exactly what you want to accomplish in your life and be able to translate that into a written format, until you do that you don't understand your purpose or know where you're going.

John: Sure.

Allyson: If you don't know where you're going then you're going nowhere so I think the Bible is very clear on that too, that each one of us has been created uniquely, that we're given unique gifts and talents, that we need to have a deep and abiding love for how God created us, we need to understand that, we need to translate that into a vision of where we're going and I think we need to then further translate that into a written goal. Our book literally gives you step by step by step ideas for putting your life goals into a methodology and an action plan that you can implement.

John: Nice.

Allyson: So the biggest problem I see is a lack of vision and clarity.

John: Okay I can see that. Now I haven't seen yet, cause I think it's fairly new, the seven minute life daily planner? Is that your system to be able to put that to paper if you will?

Allyson: Do we have to be truthful on this call John?

John: Sure.

Allyson: I guess we do, we're talking about The Practical Disciple.

John: Yeah that would be really good.

Allyson: It is so fun to stand in front of an audience and people think I'm Master Organizer, they think I am great at time management and organization. And the reality is that I wrote the book almost as a 12 step program for me because I was so disorganized and I didn't have the clarity and the vision and understand my purpose and so this is really an exploration on where are you to go. So "The Seven Minute Difference" the book is really the concept of time management and purpose in your life.

John: Okay.

Allyson: But you know we read books all the time and we never turn that into action.

John: Right.

Allyson: And so from these classes that we've been teaching, since 1993 is when I went on the road and started teaching these concepts, since 1993 people have been begging for "okay how do I take these ideas and translate them into actions?"

John: Right.

Allyson: So the daily planner is very similar to any kind of planning system that you would use on a daily basis like something you would hold in your hand that takes the concept from "The Seven Minute Difference" and turns them into an action plan.

John: Yes.

Allyson: It gives you the paper, the pencil, the tools to really do what you said you would do. Nike said "just do it", the seven minute life planner says "did I do it?"

John: Oh okay.

Allyson: So it is very practical. If you go to our website thesevenminutedifference.com we have about 30 minutes of training video all, I might add, in one or two minute increments that can show you how you can translate time management ideas into really practical activities and the seven minute life daily planner which you can see there on the website through these videos.

John: Wow so it's like a life workbook.

Allyson: It is a life workbook and I really keep it by my side all the time and how it's made a difference for me as a disorganized person is it put structure in my life that I needed. I actually list my 5 before 11 and 5 high-value activities, it has a place for people I want to stay in contact with, it has a place for all the unfinished tasks, it even has a place for what you spent every day, how much water you consumed every day, what you've eaten, how much time you spend in prayer, it's very comprehensive, it has room for all the voicemails you need to do, how many thank you notes you've written.

John: Oh.

Allyson: So every page helps you keep your life on a path that you really set before yourself and what's great is if you map out this path and you walk down it, you're going to go down the path of purpose and fulfillment and meaning that you've set forth in this vision and clarified goals that you've set. So we're very excited about these tools that are very very real.

John: Oh that's awesome because I educate a lot within the church and it's so often that I see people, they get a vision, they get an idea of something they want to do or they have an insight from a scripture lesson maybe in Sunday school, but then it seems like there's a disconnect or this great gap between having that insight and realizing it in their lives and I could see something like the seven minute life daily planner being a perfect tool for quantifying that, putting it before them, keeping it before them. I have to do that daily in my life, I've got goals around The Practical Disciple and I'm not quite as organized as a seven minute life daily planner I have to confess, my goals are written in dry erase marker on my bathroom mirror and get updated daily but there's a lot to be said for just tracking your progress to keep you motivated so I'm looking forward to that, that's definitely one of the tools I'm going to have to pick up and add to my tool box.

Allyson: Let me add one thing cause you said something and this is so practical along the Christian path we're dealing with here, there's really a new science – well it's not a new science, it's been out since 1878 – but it's called the science of neuroplasticity which means that the brain is plastic or changeable. And so the good news is people that just wake up and say "I'm chronically disorganized, I'm chronically a procrastinator, I'm always behind on my time management", the good news is you don't have to remain that way, you can change and the same is true in the Christian faith. When people look at themselves and say "I'm not worthy, I don't measure up", God says to us "No in my eyes, with my blessings we can become all things" and so neuroplasticity is just a fact that the brain is changeable and can change. But the way it changes is through repetition and boy you can really have a whole 'nother series on this with prayer, daily scripture reading, daily prayer.

John: Sure.

Allyson: It's the daily activity, and the same thing is true with time management. It is that daily goal setting, that daily vision, that daily doing what you said you would do, the daily exercise of your physical body, the daily drinking enough water. So neuroplasticity is just being daily and, as you said, intentional about what you focus on but boy I am so excited about the things that – here's the exciting part is that the more you do something, the easier it gets.

John: Right, right.

Allyson: So I want to tell people that the point of having this daily planner in front of them is that after they've used it for 3 days they can't help but want to use it because it's making a difference in their life.

John: Right.

Allyson: So repetition will build success it's a point of fact.

John: Right, well I love that – what was that term again, neuroplasticity?

Allyson: It's neuroplasticity, it's a wonderful wonderful tool and term.

John: Sure.

Allyson: And we're going to be writing it more on our blog so there's more to come, it's a great great opportunity to understand how God's created the human brain to be open to change and grow.

John: Sure, I mean I hear that and my mind goes to Romans where we're told not to be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, to me that's neuroplasticity in a biblical nutshell you know as our minds are being transformed.

Allyson: It is, but isn't it good news that we don't have to choose to remain the same? We can choose to look out and say "I can be different tomorrow than I am today".

John: Right.

Allyson: And I can take these tiny little steps, just drink one more bottle of water, go to bed 15 minutes earlier, take the stairs.

John: Sure.

Allyson: That's what the seven minute difference and the seven minute life is all about.

John: Sure and in our faith I bet there's a lot of people listening right now who are saying "I've always wanted to read the Bible". I run into that constantly and I'm always helping folks with

getting started on reading daily, and what a great seven minute difference, what if today I decided and I chose I'm going to read for seven minutes or even five minutes today and I just consistently did that, reading the Bible would resolve itself. In fact I often tell folks "don't worry about reading the Bible just worry about getting in the daily discipline and eventually you'll read it dozens of times if you want" if you can get in that daily discipline of a few minutes a day.

Allyson: That is so good.

John: Yeah and that's true for any aspect of our Christian life, prayer, Bible reading, we're told to encourage one another, I mean how long does it take to encourage someone? To give them an encouraging word? And imagine what the church would look like, the body of Christ would look like if everybody was taking 7 minutes a day to do things like be engaged with God in prayer, be engaged with God in reading scripture, encouraging one another, living out our purpose. I've got to ask – and I bet you get asked this a lot – why seven minutes? Why not 30 or 2 or 3 or, I mean I just have to ask. It's a flukey question but I'm sure it's not the first time somebody's put it at you.

Allyson: No it's a great question and it comes from research that shows that the average adult has an attention span of 7 minutes.

John: Oh my goodness.

Allyson: And I think that's stretching it, in fact now new research that I read says that the average adult has a true attention span of 2 seconds.

John: Gosh.

Allyson: So research will vary from 2 second to maybe 20 minutes but the 7 minute segment really comes from the fact – and this goes back to neuroplasticity - because of television, the commercials come on about every 7 minutes.

John: Right.

Allyson: Every 6 to 7 minutes there's a television commercial, so you're paying attention and then there's a commercial and you're not paying attention so I think our brains have really been programmed to pay attention in these tiny little segments. So the seven minute difference really that came from the fact that if we can only pay attention for seven minutes, what am I going to choose to be attentional about in my life?

John: Right.

Allyson: Because if I can only focus on a few things, I'd better focus on things that matter.

John: Right.

Allyson: I want to focus on my faith, I want to focus on my children, I want to focus on leaving a legacy to the world, so this 7 minute thing is very very important, even if it's only 2 seconds I want to make sure I'm focusing on the things that matter.

John: Sure, sure. Well you stop and think about neuroplasticity you were talking about and this change in our ability to focus is a negative example of that, we've been conditioned by being constantly interruptable with cell phones and by watching TV programs that run at amazing paces. People now instead of watching TV they're watching YouTube which is never more than 10 minutes, in fact it's surprising to find a YouTube video that it 10 minutes they're usually much shorter than that. And I'm seeing it play a part in people's development around their prayer lives as I've interviewed or as I've taught people over the last 20-25 years around prayer, 15 years ago the number 1 difficulty with people having in their prayer life would be being able to find the time to do it. I'm seeing a shift now, that's still a big issue but somewhere around 3 to 5 years ago the number 1 answer I get now is people struggle to focus in prayer. But if you practice that focus, if you practice taking those 7 minute time increments, you can really grow that and there's some wonderful benefits and blessings that come out of that.

So, wow well we're not quite out of time but we're getting close, what are some things that maybe you would like to share that I haven't asked about and also - maybe even before you do that - let's say someone's listening to this, they've heard this, what is something that you would encourage them to do immediately once they've listened to this, what would probably be the first step for them to take?

Allyson: Well I think it all goes back to having clarity.

John: Okay.

Allyson: I think they have to listen to their heartbeat and when they can hear their heart beating we call it the drum beat of their life, every day waking up with this excitement where they're heart's pounding, their palms are sweating, with that heartbeat of their life. I think most people go through life not even knowing what that heartbeat is.

John: Sure.

Allyson: And so they're not attentional about anything or not intentional about anything and they just literally miss life and so I'll tell one story as we begin to close out that one of my dear friends at the age of 50 decided that she wanted to jump out of a perfectly good airplane for her 50th birthday and I said "what was it like?" and she said "Allyson it was great, we got there and I was given 15 minutes of ground school and the man who I was going to be jumping with

said “here’s what going to happen, we’re going to suit up and we’re going to be tandem together and then we’re going to get on the plane and when we get on the plane it’s going to happen very quickly, the plane is going to take off and it’s going to go to 10,000 feet and we’re going to get to the correct altitude.”

John: Oh my goodness.

Allyson: And then he said “then I’m going to stand up but because we’re connected together when I stand up you’re gonna stand up” and he said “I’m going to yell at you ‘put your arms across your chest’ and you’re gonna put your arms across your chest” he said “then the door of the plane is going to open and this is a tiny little plane.”

John: Sure

Allyson: “So when the door opens you’re going to feel this rush of cold air come in and when the cold air comes in I’m going to yell ‘put your toes out the door’” and she said she was going to put her toes out the door and then said immediately he was going to grab a hold of the doorjamb and go “rock one rock two” and on three they’d be out the door and I said “Well Karen what did you do?” and she said “Well Allyson it sounded like a really good idea when we were standing on the ground”

John: Yeah.

Allyson: Cause she said she had always wanted to do that, she wanted to feel alive again.

John: Right.

Allyson: She really did, she suited up, she got on the plane and she said “it did happen very quickly.”

John: Yeah.

Allyson: “I got to the correct altitude, and the man stood up” and she said when he stood up her heart almost quit beating cause she wanted to do this and then he yelled “put your arms across your chest” and so she did, she put her arms across her chest and then the door opened. And John this is the point of the seven minute difference is, even in this call, I want people to get on the plane, I want people to suit up, and boy doesn’t that just bring you back to scripture.

John: Yeah.

Allyson: Put on the whole armor of God, I want them to suit up and I want them to be (indecipherable -8:22) not to another man but I want them to be (indecipherable -8:17) to God so that when God calls them to stand up in life they stand up with him.

John: Right.

Allyson: And they're just standing in front of God and God will call out "put your arms across your chest" and you do, and then God calls out and says "it's time, let's put our toes out the door" and boy don't I want to be willing to put our toes out the door.

John: Sure.

Allyson: And then let God Almighty grab a hold of the doorjamb of my heart and my life and say "rock one rock two rock three" and then go wherever he calls me to go. I just love that picture of excitement.

John: Yeah I'm getting excited just sitting here you know.

Allyson: And I tell you what she went out the door and she absolutely loved the experience of skydiving with this man and I want that in my life and as a teacher and a trainer and a person of hope I really think people want to feel that feeling of living with their toes out the door.

John: Right.

Allyson: The wind in their face and God holding on to them, God Almighty holding on to them and lifting them up throughout the rest of their life. If I could leave your listeners with something today I would tell them that God is calling out to them and saying "come with me, get on the plane, let me help you put your arms across your chest and put your toes out the door."

John: Sure.

Allyson: That's what the seven minute difference is about and the beauty of where I am in life is I feel like I'm leading a life of purpose by sharing this message, I want your listeners to know what they are called to be, to feel that heartbeat in their lives and to really submit to the leading of God and to go with whatever he's put in their heart. And we believe that if they can translate that vision in to daily activities, even 7 minutes at a time, it can transform not only their lives but transform the entire world and that's this message John.

John: Oh hoe exciting. Well and this is so timely Allyson and it struck me as our interview is going on, somebody may listen to this later, but as we're recording it we're a little less than 2 weeks away from the season of Lent and I know not all churches recognize or celebrate that but that's a 40 day opportunity for somebody to select a micro-action and put their toes out the door if you will. And to folks who are listening you can go to my website thepracticaldisciple.com and I have a page with a link at the top of some suggestions around

activities that you could take on during Lent and I highly encourage you listening to go to thesevenminutedifference.com and that's THE seven minute difference correct Allyson?

Allyson: That's correct.

John: thesevenminutedifference.com and you can find the resources that Allyson has shared with us today. I'm so delighted that you were willing to come and do this interviews and I'll be anxious to hear from my readers I'll hope they'll come and share some of the micro-actions that they have coming up in their lives that they're going to take. Anything else? We've got just about 3 or 4 minutes, I'm so excited by the plane story I kind of almost want to stop here and go stick my toes out the door but I do want to offer you just one last chance here if there's something we failed to mention.

Allyson: You know John I just want to say that I am so appreciative of what you're doing .The Practical Disciple is about the dailyness of it and I do think I can get people pumped out about life but the world is not a Pollyanna world.

John: No.

Allyson: Life is going to come crushing back in on them and it's that every day, it's the taking what you believe deep in your heart, that drumbeat of life, and it's executing it every day, day after day after day.

John: Right.

Allyson: And being faithful in that. That's where this becomes either harder if you make it hard or through neuroplasticity if you make it easier.

John: Sure.

Allyson: Think of neuroplasticity and the fact that your brain is like a tall grass field and the first time you try to do anything, if you're trying to walk through chest-high grass it would be hard to walk through chest-high grass.

John: Right.

Allyson: So anything new in your life is hard of difficult but if you do it the first day, you lay some of the grass down and if you wake up the next day and say "here's my 5 before 11, here's my purpose, here's my vision, this is what I'm going to accomplish" and you walk that same path the second day, the grass bends over a little and the third day it bends over a little more and the thirtieth day it bends over a little more and that's part of why Lent isn't one day long.

John: Sure.

Allyson: That's probably why Lent is 40 days long because after 30 or 40 days there's a path and so the seven minute difference and the seven minute life is about creating these paths in life that are repeatable and measureable and exciting.

John: Right.

Allyson: So that's what I want to encourage is don't be discouraged if the first day it's hard to pray or it's hard to read or it's hard to come up with a list or 5 things, stick to it and be willing to go day after day after day as part of this.

John: Right. Well perseverance is such a core theme in scripture and I think it's cause God knows that the challenges we face in life are difficult but he walks alongside us with those changes and as scripture says "he makes all things new" and I take a lot of hope in that it doesn't say "he makes all new things", that he doesn't give up on us and if we drop the ball you just pick right back up where you left off. I find that when you counsel people in reading scripture the biggest place where I see them fall down is they'll miss a reading or two and they'll get caught in a mindset of "I have to make it up" or "I have to catch up" and I just tell them "let go of that and just get started again" because otherwise it becomes this massive obstacle for them and the next thing you know they're not reading at all but if they just pick up right where they left off or pick up right where they were to be next and just keep at it and sure enough those folks persevere and they see radical change in their lives but done gradually over time.

Allyson: You know you make a great point. We started this interview today with the comment that the key theme or the catch phrase for The Seven Minute Difference is that change happens in an instant and the rest of that story is that change happens in an instant, it happens in the moment you decide to change.

John: Right.

Allyson: The real "happening" in this is when you decide and so if I could have a call to action it is that people listening today would make a decision that they don't have to remain the same, that they could choose to be different tomorrow than they are today and so that they could embrace change, be excited about change, if the decision to change happens in an instant, change obviously does not happen overnight. Change is a wonderful process of little incremental things that happens every day so it's the decision to change that happens in an instant and I get pretty fired up about that.

John: Yeah I could see so. Well hey I think I'll stop this on that, that's a great ending point and once again I want to thank you and once again this is Allyson Lewis the author of "The Seven Minute Difference" and you can learn more about her or order that resource from

thesevenminutedifference.com and I'm your host John Arnold, The Practical Disciple, and Allyson I just want to say once again thank you so much for being with us today.

Allyson: Thank you John.

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