

Ep #341: Women's Retreats: Taking Time for Yourself (with Jen Mernick and Bernadette O'Grady)



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Jen Riday

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Hi there, my friends, welcome back to *Vibrant Happy Women*. We're talking in this episode about making space for yourself and taking that space without guilt.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey, my friends, welcome back to the podcast. I'm so excited to be bringing you two friends today that I met at the Vibrant Happy Women Retreat. Bernadette O'Grady and Jen Mernick. Both of them are sharing why it was essential for their lives to take space, to take a time out from the day to day.

A space where they could figure out what they think, and what they feel, what they believe. Where they could let go of all the stress and overwhelm and confusion of regular life and find clarity. And also to determine what they want to do next. What are their next best steps in life? Where are they trying to move toward?

So often women live in a way where we feel like we're in the deep end of the pool treading water, just trying to keep our head up. And that doesn't feel good because we start to think, "Is this it? Is this never going to end? Is this all there is?" And those feelings just feel awful to me. They break my heart that anyone would feel that way.

When we take space and get out of the pool and go somewhere where we can stop doing things for everyone else and handling and solving and managing, where we can just think. A place of solitude, a place of clarity, a

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place of friendship and support, we remember what we want to feel. We remember how good we can feel. We start to expand or infuse our capacity for joy.

That's why I host the retreat for women to have that clarity, that connection, and to know where they want to go next. It's also a great way to have kind of a milestone, another place to kind of assess where you are. A lot of women say, "I can't wait to see where I am at the next retreat. I can't wait to see how she is at the next retreat."

We have this community where we're all growing together year by year, figuring out our next best steps, getting clarity, spiraling upward rather than downward.

So my two guests today, Jen Mernick and Bernadette O'Grady, share where they are on life's journey, they were both at the retreat, and share how taking space, even though they each have kids, even though they each have jobs and careers and lives. Why it is essential for them to have this space to get the clarity they wanted.

So let's dive in and hear their stories. And I want to challenge you to think about how you can start to create space like this in your life. It might not be a huge retreat, but what would it look like to have more space where you're completely out of your home environment? Out of any environment that requires something from you, in an environment of solitude, safety, a space where you can get clarity? Juicy, right?

So without further ado, let's dive into this episode.

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Jen Riday: Hey, everyone, I'm with two awesome friends today, Jen Mernick and Bernadette O'Grady. And I met them at the Vibrant Happy Women Retreat. Well, honestly, I met them online before that.

We're talking today about being on a journey of growth and taking space from your regular life to kind of reflect and figure out where you want to go next. Both of them did that really well by attending a retreat. You could do that in a number of ways. Let's start by you, Bernadette, introducing yourself and then we'll have Jen go next.

Bernadette: Sure. So I'm Bernadette O'Grady, as you said. And I'm a New Yorker, born and raised in Queens. And right now I live just north of Manhattan. And I'm the mother of three grown children, two out of college and one going into sophomore year of college, and newly separated and did a 28 year marriage.

Just a lot of that was being true to myself and thinking about the example I was setting for my children. The relationship wasn't working. I'm finding my true happiness and I speak for my soon to be ex-husband, I think he's finding his happiness too. It just wasn't working, and I thought, I don't want to set the example of staying in something broken just because you said you would many years ago.

So right now I'm in a transition. I'm a registered nurse, I had stopped working in the profession many years ago and trying to get back into it. And I've gone back to school and refreshed my nursing skills. And then I have a second project, which I talked about at the retreat, it's starting a podcast called Nurses Inspiring Nurses.

And where that came from was with the pandemic, all the signs that said nurses are heroes. And my thoughts were nurses have always been

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heroes, but nobody knows what they do for a living. And I felt there was such a need to celebrate nurses.

Jen Riday: That is such a good idea. When you told me about this podcast. I said, "Yes, that's such a good idea." Thanks, Bernadette. Jen, introduce yourself.

Jen Mernick: Okay. Hi everyone, my name is Jen Mernick. I live in Waltham, Massachusetts. I am a mom of three of my own kids and I have two step sons, ranging in age from 6 to 24. I have been teaching seventh grade science for about 20 years. I come from a large family, mostly in the New England area. And recently did a yoga training certification last summer. I'm also a massage therapist from a previous certification prior to teaching.

So I'm always, I'm on this path of self-discovery constantly. And just always looking for ways to improve my surroundings, my relationships, and just myself in general, to hopefully raise my kids to be happy, healthy, vibrant, adults as well.

Jen Riday: Thank you, Jen, I love that. Aren't we all on a path? Yes. We just hope our path is moving in the right direction. And I know for both of you it is.

So both of you being on this journey of growth, Bernadette, you mentioned living your truth, I believe those are the words you used. Both of you took time out of your lives to attend a retreat. And it's interesting, both of you are really kind of heroes in my eyes, a teacher, and a nurse. Two professions where you're really giving, giving, giving.

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Both of you are also mothers. I would love for each of you to speak to the importance of taking space from that life of constant giving to find that clarity. So, Bernadette and then Jen.

Bernadette: Yeah, I think as a mother, everyone identifies as giving your life to your children. You know, best schools, helping them grow, helping them just navigate their own world, and wanting them to become independent people.

And then I think when they leave and move on, you realize, well, they're on the road to their dreams and are you on the road to yours? And getting married in 1994, a long time ago, I was a very different person than I am now, I had stopped working in my profession. So my truth shifted.

And even in a marriage, you can take on the dreams of your spouse, but not take on your own dreams. His career was growing, and he was very excited about it. But I was becoming the passenger and it wasn't fulfilling for me in my own way.

And you know what I feel? I feel I have so much more to offer. I have more to offer than being a wife and a mother. I have an entrepreneurial creative side that I want to bring with the Nurses Inspiring Nurses. I did medical sales for a number of years, so I'm used to running a territory and sort of having a blank slate in front of me and starting at the beginning and creating something big.

And I saw what's happening in the nursing profession as a real opportunity to give who I believe are heroes a voice to tell their stories because as I said earlier, nobody really knows what they do. You know, in a hospital just in a typical day a nurse, just in front of a patient is an engineer when the equipment breaks, is a pharmacist when there's a drug interaction, is a

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social worker when the patient finds out that they might have a grave illness, is a grief counselor if they pass away. It goes on and on and on.

The multifaceted tasks that are taken on an eight hour shift, nobody knows. And then there are nurses who started businesses, there are nurses that have PhDs. So it's really a wide scope of people that I think have a story to tell. I see it as inspirational to nurses who are in the profession that feel recognized, and then for people that are students and are thinking about the profession. There is so much out there that they just don't know about. So I see it as inspiration and education for nurses.

Jen Riday: Yeah, I love that. So I remember when I first met you, before you had decided you were leaving your husband and starting an endeavor, and your energy was very different. I don't want to put words to it, I'd rather you do that. But when I met you again at the retreat and you had found something that was exciting to you, which this project, but also your energy had completely shifted.

Speak to how that happened for you. Even if someone doesn't have a project that compels them forward, how did you make that big, energetic shift and make this decision to change?

Bernadette: The thing with the retreat for me was breaking barriers. That was one thing we had talked about, was like what are the things that stop you? Procrastination, fear, fear of failure, having the words in your head that someone else spoke about you that may not be true.

And several things had happened. One is we were doing workshops, and reflecting, and talking about it, and meditating. And then there were women coming up to me that said, "I've been in your place. I've started a business,

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I'm a nurse." They were showing me this is doable. And they were showing me that they had faith in me.

One really interesting woman I met was a dental hygienist who came up to me, she started her own business not linked to a particular practice. She became an independent practitioner that was going to doctors' offices and charging a top rate to be the "guru" of dental hygienists. And she said people were following her and requesting her.

So she said to me, get yourself out of the box in terms of nursing is one thing. So she was inspirational to me. And then there were other women who had come out on the other side of divorce talking to me. I was still in the midst of it, you know, trying to navigate my way through it, working with my own emotions, my children's emotions. And then there's always the question, am I doing the right thing? But I 100% know I am.

Jen Riday: Just explain how you know it. What does it feel like? What happens in your body? How do you know it's the right thing? Because we all struggle to know, is this really the right path? How do you know?

Bernadette: A sense of peace. I just had a, before starting the divorce process, just a sense of sadness like, is this it? You know, just feeling that the other person can't change, that is who they are. And I also think for a lot of women the man is the dominant role in the relationship because you're not working sometimes, and you can lose your self-esteem.

And I think, for me, it was going from sadness to peace with the retreat women saying I believe in you. Or feeling like some of the women were younger moms and they were like, listen, it is never too late to start all over. So I think there was a tremendous amount of reinforcement from the people around me. And that was great.

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Jen Riday: Thank you. I appreciate you answering that. Okay, let's go to you, Jen. Kind of the same question, we're all on a journey of living a self-actualized life and doing what's true for us, right? Hopefully, if we're not I've found people become very empty. And Bernadette mentioned feeling like, is this all there is?

I think those feelings kind of propel us to some of the purpose we're meant to have while we're on the earth. So for you, Jen, how have you known what is right for you? And how did the retreat help with that?

Jen Mernick: I'd probably go back and start with, Bernadette just made me think of this actually, in my first marriage I was, about 10 years ago I got divorced. But I was in my late 30s, had a couple kids already, going through the motions, but I didn't feel like myself any longer. I had like adapted to a surrounding that wasn't fit for me.

And I didn't know how that had happened and how I had become this other person, just a people pleaser, you know, an empath, just trying to keep the peace and navigating all of the struggles. And I just had to really listen to my inner voice and be quiet enough and patient enough. And for me, I always find that through journaling. That's how I really can tap into my thoughts. And talking to others, definitely women, like those are my two go-tos, talking with women or a therapist and a journal.

So yeah, it definitely drew a lot from the strength of getting through the divorce. And fortunately, my long lost love from my early 20s popped back into my life and it was kind of like a meant to be scenario. He and I had never really stopped loving each other, it's always one of those things that just will never go away, right? Love is forever.

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So when we got together we realized how do we do this? Do we have another child? So we actually added another one to the mix, which again, just kind of threw a wrench into this stable life that I had finally kind of recreated. It was like add on another pregnancy and all that goes with it and blending two families. And it just, again, who am I? What am I doing?

And I just continued to go through the motions. And then just got really sick with pneumonia a few years ago and realized, I think that was kind of a wakeup call for me. I was in the hospital, I was out of work for six weeks. But I realized if I don't take care of myself the universe is going to send a message and somehow someone will get me to just stop and rest and do some self-care. So I used that, I learned a lot about how the pace that I was keeping up with was just too much.

And then when the pandemic hit, I feel like it just took it to another level where past traumas were resurfacing. And everything kind of got really cloudy again and I was just kind of lost and forgetting everything that I had learned getting out of my divorce. I was again looking for guidance, looking for redirection, my attentional issues were keeping me scattered, and everything was piling up at home.

And I was feeling like I wasn't very good at being a mom and a teacher and all of it full-time. And a life, and I knew I wanted to make this relationship work. So I definitely benefited from discovering the *Vibrant Happy Women* podcast because number one, I learned a lot from listening to many of your shows and learning techniques that I still practice today.

Feel it to heal it is probably the biggest that I utilized this past year. I have a teenage daughter who had a lot of mental health struggles, and it really got me through. I mean I ended up with a leave of absence this year because

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of my own mental health struggles dealing with her mental health struggles. It just all snowballs.

And if you don't have the tools to help you navigate, like everything I learned in February, I can't tell you how much I've looked back at the resources and looked again and refreshed my memory about my core values, and what's important to me, and setting boundaries. It all seems so easy and simple, but if you don't go back and you don't really practice it and don't pay attention to what's happening in your life, and how things can just spiral and go back to the default.

So just really being active and keeping up with it. So I'm really excited for next year and the thought of all the learning to help my journey and help me continue to process and feel, and ultimately shed the shame and just all the negativity. Anything that's holding me down and help me not be there fully for my kids, and for my students, and really my family, my aging parents.

There's a lot of people depending on me and it's, as most moms, but it's extremely challenging even now in the summer. Oh yes, teachers get the summer off, but I can't tell you how exhausted I am. I can't wait to go back to work because it's just all-consuming all the time.

So I think one thing I learned from the retreat especially is just knowing how to pay attention to your own needs. Like I know I am somebody who needs alone time just to recharge. Having the permission and the validation that you get from everything I've learned from your podcast and the retreat and other women to just continue to put your best foot forward, take lots and lots of deep breaths, change some patterns, right? Rewire the brain. It's a lot you know?

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Jen Riday: Yeah, a phrase I've been thinking about in regards to just what I do is we're essentially expanding our capacity for joy. We get used to a baseline, you kind of mentioned this, Jen. And an event like the retreat is like an infusion of tools, and skills, and patterns that can help.

I'm curious what you hope to gain from the next retreat, both of you. What infusion are you looking for next time? Why would it be beneficial to go again for you?

Bernadette: So I have to tell you one thing that popped into my head just listening right now, was the difference between staying in a stuck marriage and getting out was reactive versus proactive. Those are the words because I lived reactive to my husband and reactive to my children. And to put the brakes on that, I am now proactive designing my future.

So that was something that popped up for me. And I have to tell you one very sweet thing that some of the women said because I had talked a lot at the retreat was, "Hey, we can't wait to see what you're like next year." So, again, the faith in me again.

So right now I am hoping that divorce is over because I need to know the knowns about money and my future. I've been interviewing nurses to line up people for the podcast, but I would love to have actively started it. I went back to school and, you know, I'm a registered nurse, hadn't worked. So I actually went back to college and took a refresher course, I've always kept my license.

And then I took two additional certifications on infusion nursing. So there's a lot that can be done in home care, that's a shift that's taking place in the healthcare industry. They want to get people out of the hospitals faster so

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they're sending them home with IVs, you know, central lines in. So it's very important to have that skill and an area that I'm interested in pursuing.

So I think for me, it's having an up and running podcast. And then I would like to make some money in addition to that doing the home care in nursing.

Jen Riday: Oh, awesome. I love that you used the word infusion because infusion of, you can get infusions of vitamins and minerals. But the retreat, yeah, the retreat is an infusion, I guess of joy. Yeah, I love that word. That's really cool.

Bernadette: And one last thing I want to say, like one of my biggest obstacles was self-talk. You know, like the thought tables have been very helpful to me because I can stop myself in my tracks. Here's a fact and there re my thoughts about the fact, you know? And I've stopped myself before I even get started. So that's, that's been tremendous. So I think for me in a year, yeah, get that self-talk under control.

Jen Riday: Yeah, self-talk. And you know what? Jen mentioned spiraling, I think we cannot sit still. We can either spiral slowly down or we can spiral slowly up. And I think having tools, people, community, space can help with that.

So, Jen, where do you hope to be by the next retreat? Why are you going again, I guess?

Jen Mernick: It's funny, I signed up with the assumption that there would be some major crises going on in my life that I would need help with. I just expect it, maybe I bring it on myself. But there seems to always be something, right? Isn't that life?

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So I feel like with a 6 year old, a 14 year old and a 16 year old, there will be something that I'm kind of teasing out and looking for help with navigating, for one. The other thing I worked a lot on was my environment, like the chaos that ensues around me. And it would be nice to go next year and think about the state of my house and feel like I did improve a lot and made some strides in controlling the clutter.

And that also my relationship with my husband, I think a lot of things that I wrote about and hoped for last year have already, have really kind of worked themselves out and we're both some work in progress. But the emotional safety I feel in the relationship now is really strong. So I'm hoping that next year when I'm looking at what I need to work on, that my marriage is not even on the list, hopefully.

Jen Riday: Okay, very cool. And that's saying a lot, you know, during a pandemic to heal those things. I think there's a lot of power just in having space to set the intention of what we do want, the ripple effect of simply intending to change something is humongous. So that's cool.

Well, for both of you, aside from the personal growth, what were your favorite parts about the retreat, the resort, et cetera? So, Bernadette?

Bernadette: The dancing in the morning to wake up. Body movement, meditation, working on the feeling wheel so that it really, and you know what was interesting in starting that, was where I thought I was going to be when I started it and with values and priorities was not where I ended up when I finished it.

And just the community with this group of women that had done many things with their life, and everybody was at a different stage. Sometimes I was talking to women who had already accomplished what I wanted to do,

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and then there were others coming up to me saying, this is sort of sad, how did you end your marriage? And just sort of talking about doing it in a positive way and having children.

My goal is to be an inspiration to my children. I want them to say, Mom, you went through something that was courageous and I'm learning courage from you.

Jen Riday: Yeah, well said. Kids are watching, right? And how about for you, Jen?

Jen Mernick: I definitely enjoyed the speakers and just the conversations with other women who were going through similar things that we just don't talk about. Whether it's hormones, and menopause, and teenage stuff, but just that connection. With people that you just met, we had that connection.

And my favorite, I think, is journaling. I love to be given the time and space because it's very rarely, and I'm an educator and I feel like I don't even do it enough for my students. It's just having that time to connect with your own thoughts and kind of figure out where you're going, what you're thinking, what you want, what you need.

Otherwise, you're just going through the motions and having attention deficit. Like my mind wanders a lot and the thoughts are constant. And there's so much going on in this age of constant phone checking and distractions, it's critical that we just have that pen to paper connection with our heart. I love that.

Jen Riday: Absolutely. What a gift you give your students, creating a container or holding space for someone else to hold space. And thinking

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about all of you at the retreat answering journaling prompts with the exercises, and the times I've been at a retreat were something similar.

There's just something beautiful about someone saying, "Hey, here's a space for you to think, figure out what you're feeling, figure out what you want." No interruptions, it's so sacred. So I think that's cool you do that for your students too.

Jen Mernick: It is the way, yeah, it's the way you present it though was with such confidence and the music in the background. You created a really wonderful container.

Jen Riday: So for both of you, I often imagine as I podcast or do anything, the women out there who are thinking, I want something like that, but I can't, or it would be selfish, or what would my husband think? Or my kids need me, or all the excuses we come up with that end up keeping us stuck in that fog. I'd love to hear the advice you would have for them about how to justify to themselves, how to think differently so they feel good about doing something like this for themselves. So, Bernadette.

Bernadette: You know, I think I said to you I was focusing a lot on the example for my children. And that because somebody thinks something about you that might be negative, it doesn't mean it's the truth. You will know your truth and don't, what do they say don't die with the music inside of you? You know, for them to just know that you have opportunity and there are people to support you. So I think that's something I would like to say.

And there's one other thing I wanted to add about the group of women at the retreat, they were amazing listeners. People really paid attention to each other's stories. That's why they would come up and they'd find you at

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lunch and they would say, "You know what you were saying earlier?" And they really listened to what was going on for you and gave input and helped each other.

And I would say it was a very selfless group. Like really encouraging. And, Jen, I want to tell you, and you ate dinner with us, you didn't hide.

Jen Riday: Well, did you think I would hide, Bernadette?

Bernadette: No, it's like, you know, the leaders always got phone calls, or they have to be somewhere else. So it was it was great, like Jen is eating with us.

Jen Riday: The women who haven't done something bigger, like the retreat, for themselves who worry that it's selfish, essentially.

Jen Mernick: Yeah, I totally get that. I feel like this was my very first time that I did something like this that was so bold, and so brave, and courageous. And just I think having done the Zoom, you had a retreat during Covid that I discovered through the podcast that was over Zoom and that was safe, right? So it's nice to have something that's affordable, safe, and give it a try.

So after that I felt like I just knew, I guess I had that gut feeling. I was like, you know what? I think having the cancellation policy was definitely helpful because you could act impulsively and then know in the back of your mind you could cancel. But then you play the mind games with yourself and say, "Oh, no, no, no, no, you're not going to go and cancel on yourself. This is for you. You need to put yourself first more often as a busy mom."

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So I say you just kind of do it with blindfolds on if you have to. But just, you just got to dive in. And the song that always goes through my head at these times is a Ziggy Marley song, True To Yourself. It will keep killing you little by little if you don't deal with it.

So you just have to dive in, you got to be true to yourself. It got me through my divorce. Last night as I was decluttering I was like, if you don't deal with it, it will kill you little by little. It just gets under your skin, and you have to confront these things. So just do it. Yeah, we all deserve it.

Jen Riday: Well, I want to thank you both for taking time out of your busy lives to chat. You made me so excited for the retreat, which is obviously in Punta Cana this year, in the Dominican Republic. It will be even warmer than Florida, which excites me. Warmth in February is a good thing.

Bernadette: Yeah.

Jen Riday: All right. Well, love to both of you, I'll see you in a few months. And thank you for being on the show.

Jen Mernick: Awesome, thanks for having me.

Bernadette: Thank you so much, Jen. It's an honor to be here. Thank you.

So let me ask you, now that you've heard this interview, how are you doing with creating space and taking time for yourself? Not just a nap, not just a mani-pedi, or a girls night out, but true solid space where you remove yourself from responsibility, from obligation, from the constant mom, mom, mom, or honey, could you help me find the... Removing yourself from all of that where you can simply be and tap into your inner knowing of what is right for you, what is true for you.

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We need to do this regularly. We can't continuously tread water and try to keep our head out. It drains us not knowing who we are and where we want to go next. That's why I founded the retreat. That's why I even do this podcast, so you can take courage and be brave to say, hey, I'm taking a week for myself, I'm taking a weekend for myself. I'm taking, you know, whatever you need for yourself, because I need to figure out what I want next, I need to hear myself think. You need that.

And guess what, your kids are watching. As you do those brave and courageous things that allow you to take space, that allow you to be in solitude or in communion with friends who support your growth, your kids will do the same thing as they grow up. We all become a little bit better as we all become a little bit better.

What do I mean by that? As you do the things that allow you to spiral into greater happiness, expand your capacity for joy, others take permission from that and do it for themselves. Our society, our community, our families heal in proportion to the work that each individual does.

And I can tell you this, I know because you listen to this podcast you are likely the heart of your family, the heart of your home. So model having a pure, radiant, joyous, and light filled heart because you take space to clear out all the clutter that can get lodged there.

My friends, I love you. I appreciate you listening. Take that space for yourself. Of course, if you want to do it with us at the retreat we would love to have you. It is in Punta Cana, the Dominican Republic this year. We have transitioned from Florida to an even warmer place and I'm excited.

Lots of palm trees, white sand beaches, shallow Caribbean blue water, and all the same workshops, friendship, and growth that really helped me to

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heal my heart and help all the attendees to heal their hearts. There are many flights that travel nonstop from the US to Punta Cana.

The resort picks you up right at the airport. It's a 10 minute drive to the resort and then we spend our time there with all you can eat gourmet food, beautiful rooms, an infinity pool, an adult only pool. And of course all of our workshops, and our growth, and our journaling, and our friendship. So if you'd like to join us, we still have spots. You can sign up at jenriday.com/retreat.

Now, if the retreat doesn't feel right for you, what else can you do to take space for yourself? Think of something. I challenge you to go and do that thing. Take a weekend. Not just a weekend when you're with friends but time, dedicated time, and space to think, to feel, to release, to declutter your soul so you can expand your capacity for joy so you can know where you're going and what you're doing next.

That is what fuels, and pulls, and brings us joy so we can radiate living a vibrant and happy life. You deserve that. Your family needs you to model that. And don't let any messaging about that kind of thing being selfish or wrong, distract you. Those are giant lies that we need to disregard.

Let your inner knowing, your intuition, the truth inside of you tell you what's right. If you've been feeling drained, and exhausted, and stuck, that is your inner GPS saying something needs to shift. Taking space, taking time for yourself is exactly what will clean that stuff out so you can find you again. Begin to feel like you're moving forward and on a path and making progress. You deserve that.

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I love you, my friends, you've got this. You are in charge of and responsible for your happiness. So go grab it. Do it. I will see you again next time. Until then, make it a vibrant and happy, clarity, solitude filled week. Take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.