



Episode 23: Release Your Agenda

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to *The Next Right Thing*. You're listening to episode 23.

If this is your first time joining me, I'm especially glad you're here. I often say this is a podcast for the second-guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue.

But even if you aren't one to second-guess yourself or if you never have trouble making a decision, it could be that you may just need a little white space in your day, a speed bump in your week, or a few minutes break from the constant stream of information and entertainment.

The previous four episodes during the month of January we talked about how to manage your time like a soul minimalist. If you are curious about that phrase, you can check out our very first episode, [Become a Soul Minimalist](#).

Since I enjoyed casually circling around one topic in January, I'm going to try that again in February.

Out of all the decisions in the world we have control over or at least perceive control, there is definitely one whole category of our lives that we can't predict, manage, or bullet point.

What is it? It is our relationships. No matter how organized we get, how much we plan, how prepared we are for what might come, one thing we can always count on is that the people in our life will surprise us, delight us, disappoint us, overwhelm us, or confuse us.

How do we move forward in love? How can we discern a next right step with the people in our lives when they can be so unpredictable and. . . *people-y*?

This month we'll be carrying those questions with us. Starting with releasing our own agenda. Listen in.

Last week John woke me in the morning saying there was a two-hour school delay. I was confused as to why. For some reason my first thought was I wonder if there was a water leak or a gas leak at the school.

As it turns out, there wasn't a leak at all, but a surprise layer of snow on the ground. It wasn't enough for sledding or for the school to be closed all day, but just enough to delight and to remind us that we can't be prepared for everything. And because there was no rush to get the kids to school, I decided to take a walk and see what kind of beauty the snow had left behind.

Lately, I've been taking more walks, actually, the kind where I put on shoes and go outside and refuse to respond to the ping. It takes more work than it should, at least for me, to release an hour of productivity and replace it with something unknown.

Will I feel refreshed after? Will it really clear my head? Will I regret this wasted time later?

I never do.

These questions are always a good sign that narcissistic Emily is threatening a mutiny and it's time to get into the woods and be small again.

Generally, when I walk, I try to go empty-handed, although sometimes I tuck my phone between my skin and the elastic waist of my yoga pants so I can monitor how long I've been walking and how far I've gone. My measuring ways are hard to overcome. And I also lack cool technology and watches and armbands and tiny, invisible iPods that you can take with you. I don't have all that.

I remember a walk not so long ago where I took nothing with me and within minutes I began to think on things above rather than the things on the earth, thinking about love, about what it really is. I began to mumble the verses to myself from 1 Corinthians 13. I know it's relevant in an obvious sort of way when you are thinking about love. I didn't have my Bible or my phone, so I had to rely on my own memory to consider what this passage said about love.

And I whispered the verses to the rhythm of my footsteps, *Love is patient, love is kind.*

When I started out, I was prepared to recite a list of all the adjectives describing what love is,

but instead, I heard the words as if for the first time. In the entire chapter about love, it only provides two words for what love is – patient and kind.

In other words - **Love sits with and love isn't a jerk.**

Aside from those two words, everything else in the verses is either what love isn't, what love doesn't do, or what love does.

Love isn't jealous, love does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, it is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love moves toward.

And finally, as I rounded the corner near the wooden walking bridge, I began to whisper the three words that describe what love never does.

Love never fails.

The words brought tears, partly because I know they're true and partly because I don't always see the evidence of their truth in the world. What does it mean that love never fails in light of the pain and injustice around the world in North Korea, Syria, Washington, and our own hearts and in our own relationships?

Sometimes I want love to be whatever I want, whatever I think sounds nice today. But love is specific, spelled out here in the middle of 1 Corinthians. And I know these descriptions of what love is, what love isn't, what love does and doesn't do are true because when I am loved for real, *the love works. It doesn't fail.*

I desperately need someone to sit with me, to not be a jerk, to remind me of truth, to bear and believe and hope and endure all on my behalf. And when Love moves in my presence, I know it.

But love isn't just something that happens to me, Love is someone who moves within me and invites me to move toward others.

A few years ago, John and I walked with one of our daughters through what was for her a profound disappointment. The bottom line is she longed for something that, in the end, belonged to someone else.

As her mom, I saw all the necessary parts of growing up happening in this one disappointment — the spiritual discipline of letting go, the practice of faith, the understanding that smallness is not always something to run away from.

We have the desire for the people in our lives, especially our kids, to develop wisdom, to be strong, to take up for themselves. We want them to be kind, to be brave, to have courage, and not carry shame.

We want them to know that when hard things happen, they can get through it, they can bear the pain and they can come out on the other side with character and strength of heart.

All of these are of course wonderful, but they can also easily turn from good, loving desire to a controlling fear-based agenda.

In my daughter's most vulnerable moments, lessons don't help her, at least not the kind I try to teach on purpose.

I sensed the tension within myself, on the one hand, I felt like I *should* be teaching her something in all this, helping her to see the markers.

On the other hand, though, I just wanted to comfort her and to remind her she isn't alone.

It's true, learning is good and disappointments are an opportunity for growth. But I've grown weary of trying to squeeze a lesson out of everything, of always asking what God is trying to teach me in every circumstance, of seeing the world through lesson-colored glasses.

I am guilty of managing my own experience of difficulty so my struggles don't feel wasted. In this action, I fear I've missed sacred times of healing in the darkness because I've wanted to rush ahead to the more understandable light. I have attempted to bullet-pointed my soul so that things make sense and have regarded God only as my teacher, forgetting he is also my friend.

School is good and necessary, but in my heart, I long for home.

The words of Paul come to mind as I remember he didn't say "To live is to become Christ-like."

It sounds almost right, but it's not quite.

Instead, he said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain". To live is a person, Christ himself.

Sometimes I teach my kids stuff on purpose. Mostly, though, I just enjoy their company.

Today let's practice walking into the great mystery of God.

Let's practice encountering Jesus as a person and not a character.

Let's practice releasing our agenda to perform, perfect, and prioritize.

Let's live this day as a daughter first and allow the student to tag along behind.

Today let's grieve the losses, laugh at the jokes, sit in the silence, and move through the routines.

Let's keep our eyes open for Christ's presence rather than trying to figure out his plan. And as we carry each moment as it comes, we will release our obsession with learning or teaching a lesson and instead begin to learn the person of Christ, whatever that might mean today.

Love is personal. Love is relational.

I get it wrong, blame others, forget to listen and fail to see.

But Christ moves me not to push but to lead; not to force, but to invite; not to tell but to listen.

Bear, believe, hope, endure.

May it be so in us. May it be so in me.

Thanks for listening to episode 23 of The Next Right Thing.

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A final reminder as you move toward the people in your life today.

When their load becomes too heavy, love invites me to bend down low and bear their burden.

When their faith becomes foggy, love invites me to come alongside and believe on their behalf.

When they can't see possibility for hope, love invites me to stand on tiptoe and cast vision for a future we can't quite see.

We are not promised that one day we will know the answers, have explanations, or see a detailed map. Instead, we are promised that though "we see in a mirror dimly, then we shall see face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."

This is the word of the Lord.

Thank for listening and I will see you next week.