

the
NEXT RIGHT THING

with EMILY P. FREEMAN

Episode 29: Remember The Real Art

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 29.

This is a podcast for anyone who struggles with decision fatigue and could use a reminder to simply do the next right thing. When I am in a season of transition, waiting, or just general fogginess, this is the best and most approachable advice I've ever received.

Today, we continue this weekly practice of making room for our next right thing by letting go. We're in the middle of the season of lent and many people are talking about giving things up. The small obsessions that hijack our focus and the larger ones that keep us numb and disengaged.

In some ways, it's a season of moderation and, and so I'll enter the conversation with a question. What does it mean to let things go?

Because the letting go is not always obvious. In fact, sometimes we don't want to face the letting go because the thing we're holding on to, well, maybe it was something we worked really hard for, dreamed up over a long period of time, and letting it go feels like more than a loss. It feels like failure.

But, maybe it doesn't have to.

Today I want to tell you a story of a dream realized, lived, and then let go. What happens when the thing we long for happens only to begin to change. Listen in.

The store smells strong of paint and wood. Adele plays from a speaker in the back and I have a compulsion to touch everything I see. Story is thicker than the paint in the air.

The shop owners greet me when I turn the corner. She waves from behind the desk steps around to offer a hug. He smiles from across the store and holds up his paintbrush as hello. They are easy and comfortable, married as long as I've been alive.

The room overflows with furniture, pattern, wood and decorative windowpanes. This is what they do. They keep this shop and sell these goods and remake things already made.

The man, Steve, is a long-time family friend. You'll find his name in the acknowledgments section of every book I've written because his influence weaves through our story so tightly that I'm pretty sure the fabric would be different if he wasn't in it.

He listens like an artist and laughs like Jesus.

Years ago, before the store was a store, she had a dream to create a place where they take the old, beautiful things, the wooden chairs and side tables and other broken pieces people tend to throw away, and give them new life. They wanted a place to do what they always did: *make the used into art*.

He was up for the adventure and she went to bed dreaming of a name for their shop. *Chartreuse* came to her mind, a word that hugs both *art* and *reuse*, though she won't realize that until later.

She kept the name to herself, fell asleep that night dreaming.

When they woke up the next morning he told her he thought of a name in the night. "What is it?" she asked, curious.

Surely you know where this is going.

That's when he said it, the same word she came up with before. "Chartreuse," He said.

The same word, the same night, two different people. And so it was.

They had a dream to create a place where they could take the old, beautiful things and give them new life.

So after some time they opened that shop and sold their wares, both the ones they made and re-made with their hands and the various finds and work of others.

More time went by and one morning a few years ago, they opened their doors for the last time.

They had their last big mark-down sale and cleaned out the back rooms both the crannies as well as the nooks.

Our community said goodbye to the little shop called Chartreuse.

I can see how that might seem like sad news, that our friends who had a dream have now closed down their shop. If you only looked from the outside, you might lose hope.

Ah well, that story was too good to be true in the first place.

But looking again, paying attention to the full story arc, I remember they had a dream and they didn't let fear keep them from making it come true.

Because the dream wasn't just *let's have a shop!*

The shop was simply evidence of a couple brave enough to move toward what makes them come alive. It was one piece of proof that these two are together becoming more fully themselves.

The art lives on because the true art was not the shop.

Dreaming together, moving toward one another, and making plans for their future, this is the true art. The shop was just the evidence.

They closed the shop for a reason. Now, they have a new dream.

They found land just outside of town with a house to live in and a barn with space to host weekend sales of all their goods. This allows them to not have to staff a shop for a certain number of hours a week but also gives flexibility to their schedule.

This dream fits even better than the shop called Chartreuse.

When you hold your dreams with open hands, you let them breathe, grow, and have life. This can be scary because living things move, they change, and they take shapes we can't predict or control.

But what good is a dream if it doesn't grow along with us? We want our dreams to be living. Even though sometimes, they grow in ways we can't predict or bullet point or plan for. But wouldn't you rather have a dream that's living than a dream that's died?

When Steve and Paula made this newest transition, I was reminded that the true art isn't the thing we can point to, the shop, the barn, the book, the song. The truest art is listening to a living God and relating to real people as the person we most deeply are.

And sometimes that means letting go of what we thought the dream was supposed to look like and being opened up to a new idea.

I've thought a lot about change and transition especially as John and I continue to watch his vocational landscape shift and move and take new shapes some we planned for, and some we didn't.

So, if the shop fails? It's sad and difficult. But the art lives on because the shop is not the art, it's only the evidence.

Instead of seeing it as a letting go, maybe instead it's a making room.

Let go of what no longer fits. Make room for something good.

Take a moment to reflect on your own life.

Is there something that has come to mind as you've been listening?

Maybe it's a big dream you've hoped for and realized but now it's starting to take a different shape in your mind?

Maybe it's a smaller dream or idea that you've had carrying around but it hasn't happened in the timing or the way you hoped.

As the idea comes to your mind now, don't judge it or shut it down.

Just take a few moments to listen to it and see what it has to say to you today.

Here is the thing about letting go. It doesn't necessarily mean what you think. Maybe the thing just wants to take a different shape but your grip is so tight on it it hasn't room to move or breathe.

May you have the courage to loosen your grip and to believe in a God who does not want to take things away from you.

Never believe anything bad about God.

No matter what, He will not tease you.

He will not trick you.

He will not mislead you.

He will not lie to you or laugh at you or leave you.

Remember the world says the dream is the thing, the shop, the show, the book, the song, the painting, or the degree.

But the real thing, the truest art, is you, an image bearer of God, finally becoming yourself.

The shop, the show, the book, the song, the painting or the degree? These are just the evidence of the art that is already alive within you.

So if something no longer fits, it's okay to let it go. Because that thing is not the thing.

You're making room for something good. You're making room for you.

Thanks for listening to episode 29 of The Next Right Thing. If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, there are several ways to do that.

I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman.

To connect weekly stay right here and subscribe to the podcast if you haven't yet. For the month of March we'll continue to talk about things we can let go. As we make our way through this season of Lent I hope this theme will be an encouragement to you, especially if you feel disconnected from the season or maybe you haven't even had a chance to think much about the collective journey that we are all on together toward Easter, renewal, and new life.

The good news is new life is available to you right now, even if you don't feel like you have time to remember it.

Hopefully, you know by now that we provide a transcript for each episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can always download those transcripts at thenextrightthingpodcast.com.

If you're ever in North Carolina, time your visit with the monthly opening of the Chartreuse Barn Sale in Thomasville. It's usually the first weekend of every month. Tell them I sent you or maybe I'll even see you there!

Now for some closing words from my own book *A Million Little Ways*, which is all about uncovering the art that is alive within you:

“The upside-down mystery of God is that you can still be a miracle gift even when you have no idea where your giftedness comes from, even when all you can bear to do is know you are loved and live like it's true. You are art and you make art, but you are not your art. You are God's art. As you continue to embrace the Spirit of Christ in you, as you continue to bend your ear toward the deep desires of your heart, trust that God is intuitive enough to move in and through you no matter your fear or insecurity.”

May it be so in us today, and then again tomorrow.