



## Episode 65: Take Off Your Crown

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 65.

Irish poet, author, and priest John O'Donohue describes stress as simply a perverted relationship with time. In some ways, you could broaden that to say that *stress is simply a perverted relationship with everything*.

One of the major causes of stress is the sheer number of decisions we make every day. That's why I created this podcast to help create a little space for your soul to breathe so you can discern your next right thing in love.

It's great to be back with you in this space and I have to tell you - I'm looking so forward to all that 2019 has to offer most specifically the April 2<sup>nd</sup> release of our book, *The Next Right Thing*! If you haven't placed your pre-order yet I put a link in the show notes to make it easy the book will arrive the week of release and you won't even have to leave your house.

I'll tell you a secret you probably know, but I'll repeat it now for you, just in case. If there's one thing you can do to help support an author you love, it's pre-order their book. I will work hard to make it worth your early efforts as I've been spending the last several weeks working hard on a bundle of decision-making resources to offer when you pre-order - so stay tuned for those. I'll tell you about those in the coming weeks.

In today's episode, I'll share one question I often ask myself that can make the difference between living with all consuming daily stress or a lighthearted sense of hope. Listen in.

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There's a small plant that I keep in a planter just behind our sofa in our living room and a few nights ago I caught our son studying it.

"Wait, is this plant real?" he asked me?

"Oh, it's real," I told him. Then I went on to explain how much I loved this plant because I only water it every now and then it looks so great. I bought another one just like it actually because it looks so great, but it can go months and months without being watered.

Well, in that moment, John looks up from his book. "No it can't," he says, "I water that plant all the time."

I can not articulate to you how hard I laughed in this moment. It wasn't necessarily that that was so particularly funny as it was revealing. I took all the credit for being smart enough to buy plants that can live without water. Meanwhile, John was faithfully working to keep the plant alive and never said a word.

Now, while that, in a plant shell if you will, is the perfect picture of our marriage, it also illustrates something even bigger.

In so many ways, I can move through my days not only taking undue credit but also carrying irrational blame, only vaguely aware of these two poles within me while the low-grade buzz of pride and shame do their best work beneath the surface.

When this mindset prevails, it's no wonder decisions can quickly feel heavy and overwhelming. When it's all up to me to get it right, what choice do I have but to worry, control, and outcome manage?

There is a new way and here in this first episode of the year, I want to offer this reminder to all of us. It's a question, in fact, and my answer to this one question in any given moment could make the difference between stress and acceptance, striving and resting, worry and glad hope.

Here's the question.

Do I live in the kingdom of Emily or do I live in the Kingdom of God?

I don't mean that to sound trite or Christian cliché. It's just that each moment I have a choice to reign in my own kingdom or not. We all do. Just this morning I folded my clothes, tidied my room in my house on my little plot of land in the cul-de-sac. I found the keys to my car, drove to the coffee shop and ordered my coffee, an order the barista got wrong by the way.

"It's the wrong color," I told her when I got it. I was nice about it and I didn't like super complain but I did see if she could remake it. She kindly did because I paid for it with my money and wanted to get what I paid for.

When I got my order, I walked to the back of the coffee shop and I chose a seat next to a woman that had her stuff spread out around her kingdom, so she moved her bag a little closer to her out of the way because we are strangers after all and our kingdoms need not be so close.

On the one hand, personal boundaries and responsibility are all part of being wholehearted humans and it's good and right and just as it should be.

But when it comes to my relationships, to my vocation, to the choices I make on the daily, if I fail to recognize all the ways I see myself as the queen of my own queendom, then I am responsible for my own success as well as my failure. I'm responsible for securing my own freedom, affection, and well-being, not to mention managing the freedom, affection, and well-being of those whose kingdoms I am assigned to help co-reign, for example, the kingdoms of my children.

My kingdom is anything my will has power over. We all have a God-given need for security, belonging, and worth. When I'm wearing my crown, I'm responsible to get those needs met and they can quickly morph into not just a need but a demand for approval and control.

We all have a kingdom. Dallas Willard says whenever we become angry it's because we believe our kingdom just got invaded. Of course, not all anger is selfish anger. The good kind of anger is when God's kingdom has been invaded. We join with Him in fighting for justice for all.

In many ways, every spiritual practice - communion, prayer, fellowship, silence, and solitude - all of these we could say are simply ways in which we practice taking off our crowns.

When I returned home from my first week-long residency of grad school, John asked me what my biggest takeaway was from the week and without hesitation, I told him one phrase that had a profound impact on me. I've said it here before I promise I'll say it again, but it's a reminder of the true kingdom of God and our welcome place in it.

My teacher Jim Smith said these words I instantly memorized and will never forget.

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I am one in whom Christ dwells and delights. I live in the strong and unshakeable kingdom of God. The kingdom is not in trouble and neither am I.

Does this new year come with a handful of new challenges you've not yet had to face?  
Have you been putting off an important decision and your colleagues are waiting for an answer?  
Do you have to make a choice about schooling? Living arrangements? A job, a placement, a major purchase or transition?

If you aren't sure what to choose today, how about first you simply practice taking off your crown?  
What if it wasn't all up to you?

What if you didn't have to figure, manage, control, maintain, plan, scan, measure, weigh, or manipulate?

What if all you had to do was take off your crown in the presence of God and do one next right thing today with your friend Jesus?

You are one in whom Christ dwells and delights. You live in the strong and unshakeable kingdom of God. The kingdom is not in trouble and neither are you.

In an effort to practice this together, I'll read a welcoming prayer by Father Thomas Keating to help lead us in our own de-throning today.

Welcome, Holy Spirit.

I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know it's for my good. I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.

I let go of my agenda for affection and approval by receiving my belovedness. Welcome, Holy Spirit.

I let go of my agenda for safety and security by resting in your abundance. Welcome, Holy Spirit.

I let go of my agenda for power and control by surrendering to your grip on my life. Welcome, Holy Spirit.

I let go of my desire to change anyone or anything or even myself. I open to your presence and action within me today.

Amen.

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Thanks for listening to episode 65 of The Next Right Thing.

I'm grateful for the opportunity each week to share my stories with you - I hope beyond anything else they always create space for your soul to breathe so you can (say it with me) discern *your* next right thing in love.

As always, you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or on Instagram @emilypfreeman where I post almost daily, either a photo or a video in Instagram stories. Of course, I'd always love to see you there.

If this podcast has been helpful for you and you want to make sure you don't miss an episode, I hope you'll subscribe, of course, it's free but that way each new episode will show up automatically in your podcast app on Tuesday mornings when they release. You won't have to do a thing except hit play.

We'll close with a verse from the Gospel of Luke chapter 17, with Jesus' answer to the Pharisees who asked him "When will the Kingdom of God come?" Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you."

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.