



Episode 39: Don't Give Your Critic Words

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 39.

If this is your first time joining me here, this is a podcast for anyone struggling with decision fatigue.

Whether you are a natural second-guesser, chronically hesitant, or just a little overwhelmed in your current life stage, this is a place for those of you who may just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information or the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment.

You long for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step. That's why I'm here.

There may be nothing particularly new in these few minutes we have together, but in my experience, we aren't often looking for new, but we're always looking for *true*.

May these words ring true in your soul as you listen, a fixed point of clarity in the midst of a fast-moving world.

We stand on the corner of Randolph and Green after a breakfast of sourdough toast, house-made sausage, blueberry pancakes, and coffee with raw sugar. The Uber pulls up and we climb inside, falling into easy conversation with the driver.

"You know that chef Vivian Howard?" she asks, after learning I live in North Carolina, where Vivian is from.

I tell her, no, but I met her at a book signing once. “Oh yeah, she did write a book,” she says.

Turns out, our driver is also a chef but for now, she’s feeling burned out. Driving meets the need she has for conversation and she takes the long way through the city, to prove it. As she and my friend Shannan whom I’m traveling with make small talk in the front seat, I pull up the driver’s profile in my Uber app.

To be quite honest, I’m wondering if her oh-so-friendly decision to take the long way to show us the sites is going to run up the meter. Do Ubers work like cabs? I can’t remember so I try to find out.

While I’m in the app, I notice her reviews.

“You have great reviews!” I say it from the backseat, careful not to stare at my screen too long, my attempt to trick the backseat dizziness from catching up with me.

“Yeah, they’re pretty good.” She says. She tells us a few colorful stories about driving an Uber, the kinds of people she’s met, the stories that we wouldn’t believe they tell her. She seems to like her job, she likes the questions we ask, and the captive audience we give her.

“It’s a good job,” she says, “and I’ve never had a problem.”

She pauses now, and then she says this, “Except that one lady that one time,” my ears perk up, ready for a story. She’s already told us so many stories in our short commute, this one is sure to shape up as the best one yet.

But the story doesn’t come. Instead, she says this about that one lady that one time:

“We’re not gonna give her words, cause that’s exactly what she wants.”

Shannan turns around and looks at me, our eyes meet big and impressed.

“We’re not gonna give her words.” I repeat it instinctively, trying out the phrase on my lips, catching her wisdom, repeating it slow, a responsive reading in a backseat church.

Later, Shannan and I will have a conversation about that phrase, unsure of how it went exactly. I meant to write it down in the moment, but I got distracted by the driver's next story. She went in for an eye appointment and came out with a brain tumor and I'm still trying to decide if I believe her.

In the end, we'll agree this phrase captures the truth of what that Uber driver said about her critic in the car that one hot day in Chicago: *We're not gonna give her words.*

The critic only lives if we let her live.

And I don't mean the critic that is helpful and has your best interest at heart.

I mean the spiteful one, the petty one, the one who said those things way back when. Maybe the one that just lives in your own head. That time is past, and the only voice that critic has now in your life? Is yours.

I wonder how today would be different, I wonder how your next decision would change if you refused to give the critic words?

Shannan smiles as the car turns right onto Navy Pier, "This is gonna be your next podcast episode isn't it?"

This girl knows me well.

The critic is a tricky companion because all critics are not created equally.

Just because someone is critical doesn't automatically mean you should ignore them and call them haters. But it also doesn't automatically mean they're right.

We can learn a lot from critique, from correction, from critical thinking and direction.

But the trouble comes when we allow all critical voices to weigh the same amount.

When it comes to making decisions, combating decision fatigue, and learning to trust our own heart in the presence of God, we have to be careful who we allow in.

Here's something I've learned about the critics in our lives.

It's not necessary (or healthy for that matter) to have people always agree with you but the critique to most seriously consider is the ones coming from those who *believe* in you.

If someone who believes in you, your work, your art or your decisions is pointing out a weakness or trying to make things better, it's helpful and healthy to consider their words with humility and grace.

Resist the urge to close yourself off from them. Instead, open yourself in the presence of Christ and allow his words to partner with their critique in order to show you the truth.

This is the critic who gets to have words.

But if the critic not only disagrees but also doesn't believe in you, their words may be more difficult to sort out.

Like that stranger on the internet.

The off-hand opinion your brother's girlfriends sister's roommate has of your Instagram feed.

The angry customer who, no matter how graciously you apologize or how much you try to make it right, just refuse to be satisfied.

These are the ones who have the least right to influence your life but somehow, for some reason, end up getting the most power.

How do I know? Because right now as you're listening, I feel sure you can remember a particular critical voice in your mind, and you remember their words exactly.

So, what's your next right thing in this moment? It's time to call a truce.

We aren't going to change their minds. Instead, let's change ours. Let's stop giving that critic words. Let's stop handing her the mic. Let's take her seat away from the table and put it out in the hall.

Our friend Jesus knows what it means to be questioned, challenged, humiliated, and critiqued. Not once ever did he allow his negative critic to change one solitary decision he made on earth.

He was about his Father's business, and all was well with him.

His face was set like a flint.

His soul was always at peace.

His countenance remained kind.

His choice was always love.

Here is the thing it all comes down to, the thing it ALWAYS comes down to in the Kingdom of God one where our belief slams right into our everyday life the critic points out my weakness and my fear, but if I'm paying attention, she will also point out something else, a gift I would never dare to ask for and a motivation she never means to give.

The gift the critic brings, whether we like it or not, is a line in the sand. When the critic says words, we have to decide if we believe them. We have to decide who gets to say.

The voice of the critic forces us to face our biggest fears and, in turn, listen hard for the voice of God.

I can worry or I can work.

I can get stuck or I can move on.

I can get defensive, or I can be free.

Instead of giving the critic words, here are some new words to consider:

I believe in the power of life.

I believe in the holy resurrection.

I believe nothing can separate me from the love of God.

I believe I am set free.

If you have a decision to make today, don't give your critic words.

Be still.

Get quiet.

Know you are loved.

Lean your ear toward the heartbeat of God and let your own voice rise up in his presence.

Then? Do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to Episode 39 of The Next Right Thing.

If the voice of the negative critic is loud in your head today, I hope you'll receive the intuition to look her in the eye and send her on her way. If you need an idea of what that could look like, I have a whole chapter to help with that in my book *A Million Little Ways*, it's Chapter 6 and it's called simply, *See*.

And if you are dealing with a particular critic in your head and it feels like beating a dead horse, take the advice from Christine Caine who says, "If the horse is dead, it's time to dismount."

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman and you can also find me over at emilypfreeman.com.

We provide a transcript for each episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can download those transcripts at thenextrightthingpodcast.com. Just click on Episode 39 for this one.

This week as you decide not to give your critic words, receive this simple line from Violet Crawley, the Dowager Countess of Grantham.

“You must learn to leave some things behind.”

Thanks for listening, and I’ll see you next week.