



Episode 71: Let Time Be Your Friend

O. Hello there! Before we get into today's episode, I want to extend an invitation to you. Six weeks from today *The Next Right Thing* book will be available in bookstores. You guys when I started this podcast I never planned for it to lead to a book. I did not know we were going to be doing this. But here we are, weeks away and I cannot wait for it to be available, for real.

The last time I launched a book was over four years ago and one of my favorite parts of that launch hands down was interacting with my book launch team. To this day when I meet launch team members at events or hear from them via email, I'm overcome with gratitude and a sense of camaraderie. There is nothing more humbling than to create something and offer it to the world and have kind people come alongside you and say, "I like what you've made and I want to help you share it." Man, what a gift.

If you've loved the podcast and would like to help spread the word about the release of the book, by being on the team, all you have to do is go to nextrightthingbook.com/launch and you'll see all the details. I'll put a direct link in the show notes. By being part of the team, you'll get some fun goodies, and lots of behind the scenes ridiculation, which I don't know, is that fun? It's fun for me.

So, that's it, you have until this Friday to join and I wanted to be sure to tell you about it as a listener of *The Next Right Thing*. It would be an honor to have you. Alright, now for today's episode:

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to *The Next Right Thing*. You're listening to episode 71.

This is a podcast all about making decisions whether you're chronically hesitant and tend to be a decision-avoider OR if you're someone who makes a lot of decisions on the daily and, while you may be confident in making them, the sheer volume of decisions has worn you slap out.

This is also a place for you if just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment. For a few minutes each week, you've come to the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

If you've ever felt like you could make better decisions if only you had more time if you've ever wished for time to stop just for a while so you could catch your breath, well, today's episode is for you. Listen in.

A large clock hangs over our mantle, standing about 2 feet tall. We've had it there for years now but, for a brief week just before Christmas I went temporarily insane and replaced it with a piece of artwork I had bought and loved.

I thought no big deal, it will be great. Well, you would have thought I removed a full wall from our house or cut a hole in the ceiling by the way my family responded. Without that giant clock on the wall, no one knew what day it is, where they came from, or their very own name. We walked around our house in a daze of confusion, our entire family identity in question with the lack of this clock. It threw our family rhythm completely off.

Every time someone looked above the mantel to see how much time we had until dinner or to see if it was time for our show to start, or to see if it was time to leave for church yet, the absence of the clock threw us into a tiny confusion. It's like we don't know if we were tired or hungry without the clock telling us the time.

We didn't realize what a grounding presence that clock was to us until it was gone.

Last summer I took my first trip to London (you can hear more about that trip and what I learned about collaboration in episode 49). I'll never forget the moment we emerged from Westminster station, patchy gray clouds hanging over the Thames, the London Eye across the bridge, and the Elizabeth Tower where Big Ben strikes the hours, standing tall above us. It was all right there - London!

When I got home from that trip, I read a little bit about the Big Ben chimes and then I read a little bit more until I totally geeked out on the whole thing. Evidently and perhaps not surprisingly, they are the most popular chime tones for bells that mark time. I dove deep into the internet reading all about the chime tone that was first written in 1793 for the bells at St. Mary's Church in Cambridge, England and supposedly inspired by the tune from Handel's "I know that my Redeemer Liveth". Then in 1859, the same chime tone was used in the clock tower at the Houses of Parliament which was constructed under the reign of Queen Victoria I, what is now called The Elizabeth Tower but really everyone seems to just call the whole thing Big Ben even though technically the bell itself is Big Ben.

According to the House of Commons information page on the parliament website, the note for the hour bell is an E natural - that's the one played by Big Ben to mark the hours - and the four quarter bells that play every 15 minutes are G sharp, F sharp, E and B. Different parts of the tune are played at quarter past, half past and quarter to the hour in Westminster. Those same four notes played in a different pattern every 15 minutes.

Why Emily? Why? Why? Why am I geeking out about this clock and these chimes? I'm so glad you asked. One of the most stressful parts about making decisions for many of us is often the timeframe involved. Whether it's a deadline, a change of plans, sudden good news, or an unexpected tragedy, time (or the perceived lack of it) tends to play a role in every decision we make.

Because of this, it might be tempting to lament the quick passing of time, to wish for more time, more margin, more space to think and figure out our way through a thing whatever it might be.

But reading about the history of chimes in London reminded me of the gift of time it's consistent, non-chaotic, rhythmic, and dependable. Those quarter chimes ring every 15 minutes and Big Ben rings out every hour. Like clockwork. Literally.

Lately, I've been shaking my fist at the clock because of all there is to do. I've been wishing my boundary lines fell in different places. I've been wishing I had more of all things that I don't seem to have enough of lately. But the truth is boundaries and rhythms are good and they have been good since the very beginning.

In his book, *The Dusty Ones*, author AJ Swoboda points out that boundaries were set in creation before there was ever a fall, before sin was even a whisper. God set sky apart from land, land apart from sea,

darkness apart from light, all was set in time and time was set in us. He said this not that, here not there. And it was all good, even very good.

Boundaries are not the enemy. Our unwillingness to accept them are when we get into trouble.

In my reading about the chimes, I learned from several different sources the chimes that play every 15 minutes are called the Westminster Chimes, or the Westminster Quarters, and actually, have lyrics:

“All through this hour, Lord be my Guide. And by thy power, no foot shall slide.”

(Emily hums)

This pattern of the quarter chimes in London is a rhythm for our days — this rhythm, or parallelism, shows up in Scripture. On a website called Oblate Spring, I read an article called “Times Poetic Parallelism” where the Westminster chimes were compared to the poetic parallelism found in the Psalms.

You guys, I told you I went in deep. But this author talks about having Big Ben software like an app on his computer that he uses to mark time throughout the day. I’m going to quote him, he says this: “Big Ben chimes in our home mark every quarter hour. (side-note, that seems like it would be kind of annoying, but I’m going to continue because this is his quote) Hearing the chimes throughout the day turns my mind to see God’s call and opens my heart to hear His voice.

The progression of chimes through each hour creates a kind of time parallelism. This is similar to the way Hebrew parallelism in the Psalms organizes and structures ideas.

Knowing the parallelism of a particular Psalm helps orient us to the thoughts just as hearing a Big Ben chime anchors us in time. Hearing chimes on every quarter hour also tells us a summary of the time.”

I cannot explain to you the thrill of interest that rose up in me as I read this on this obscure website - I haven’t completely teased out my interest so I can’t tell you why I’m fascinated by this connection

between the rhythm of time, the sound of the bells, the call to prayer, the parallelism in the Psalms, the rhythm of Hebrew poetry.

What I can tell you is that cloudy summer day I came up from the tube for the very first time, the London Eye across the bridge, and the Elizabeth Tower where Big Ben strikes the hours, standing tall above us? Well, Big Ben didn't chime that day. In fact, we wouldn't even see the Tower because it was covered in scaffolding for repairs. It won't chime again until 2021.

Maybe that's part of it, since I was unable to hear the chimes in person that day, when I got home and started reading about the history of it, I decided to look on YouTube for a video of the last time the chimes rang out before they were silenced for repairs and sure enough, there were plenty of videos.

I chose one and watched the quarter chimes ring out first, then the twelve chimes of Big Ben marking noon. I expected applause or cheering after but instead, complete silence, nearly 8 seconds of silence before the cheering started.

Now, I admit that I'm an odd duck, but the reverence moved me to tears. Not because of the clock or the chimes or London but because of what it all represented. With all of our technology, with all of our advances and mechanisms and smarts, the passing of time is something we all experience but cannot tame, cannot slow, speed up or control. We are all in this together and that day at high noon in London, over 1000 people gathered to hear Big Ben chime for the last time.

Just before I closed out the window on my computer, I happened to notice the date of the video, the last time the chimes rang out over London, it was August 21, 2017. I immediately recognized that date.

On that same day here in the US, millions of us had our eyes trained toward the sky, a day when we marked history, a day where we had to accept a thing happening beyond our control to slow, change, or manage.

Because August 21, 2017, was the day of the Great American Eclipse, when the moon crossed directly in front of the sun, casting a long shadow from coast to coast.

I only saw a partial eclipse that day, but I remember the feeling of awe while, for a brief time, everyone was filled with a kind of wonder that isn't always accessible to us. There was no celebrity who could

outshine it, no amount of money that could control it, no power that could stop it, and no politician who could take credit for it. The scientists could explain it, but no one could hold it back.

No one could vote for or against.

We could only bear witness.

The same goes for the passing of time. When it comes to making decisions and discerning our next right thing, maybe there's an invitation here for us to welcome time as a kind friend rather than an enemy we're trying to outrun.

Maybe there's an invitation for us to hold some sacred space to bear witness to the truth of our existence, to remember that we are small in the presence of God, and that is just as it should be to take the time that is given to us and to move with it rather than try to fight against it.

O God, remind us of the gift of our boundaries.

May we see the passing of time as a rhythm to depend on, not a rule to rebel against.

May we receive our boundary lines as ones that come from You as we continue to do our next right thing in love.

May we remember from Psalm 16:

The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup;
You support my lot.

The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places;
Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.

I will bless the Lord who has counseled me;
Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.

I have set the Lord continually before me;
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will dwell securely.

For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

You will make known to me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

This is the word of the Lord. It is absolutely true and given to us in love. Thanks be to God.

Thanks for listening to episode 71 of The Next Right Thing.

And thanks for hanging with me and my strange fascinations with the marking of time and the history of bells. May we be people who embrace the rhythms set in time because time is set in us. And a preview into next week, I'm working on a resource to help you with that very thing, so stay tuned!

In the meantime, you can find me on [@emilypfreeman](#) on Instagram or at emilypfreeman.com

Hey, and if you are interested in helping launch The Next Right Thing book into the world, don't forget to visit nextrightthingbook.com/launch and sign yourself up. I hope to see you there.

We'll close with the lyrics of the Westminster Chimes:

“All through this hour,
Lord be my Guide.
And by thy power,
no foot shall slide.”

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