



## 122: Speak A Good Word

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 122.

This is a podcast about making decisions but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment while you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

A brief word of gratitude for all of you, our friends, family members, service and healthcare providers who are continuing to do your good work so that we can stay home: You are all on the front lines of this pandemic, and we honor you, your families, and your commitment to fight it. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Late last week, I started thinking about the importance of good words, beautiful words, true words in this time of devastating daily news. Then a few days later on Sunday, one of our pastors at church said almost the same thing that I'd been thinking about, and that's when I knew this was our next right thing. Listen in.

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On Sunday at the beginning of our church service, to clarify that is the online church service that we watched from our sofa while eating cinnamon rolls in our pajamas. But anyway, while we were watching, our friend and pastor Daniel Northrop talked about how vigilant he's been lately about looking for good news. He said, "I feel like this week I've been trying to find a good word to proclaim over myself, or I've been looking for any kind of good word or good news."

Well, when he said that, I nodded my head. I think most of us can relate to that, but the part that especially resonated with me was how he pointed out that that is what our call to worship is. That's what our benediction is for. God speaks his good word over us. He speaks it. And this is what I started to think on.

I've told this story before, but rewind three years ago about this time, I was working hard to figure out how to write a book about decision making and it was going horribly. No flow, no rhythm, no inspiration, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I had something to say. No, it was more like I had something to discover and explore about how the process of decision making is not only important to our spiritual formation but could actually be foundational to our life with God.

What if the way we make decisions is equally as important as the decisions we make? That was a question I couldn't shake. It felt important. Still does. But at that time, three years ago, I was having a lot of trouble

writing my way into the answers. In a way I couldn't explain until many months later, even now I have a hard time explaining it, this work I was doing didn't want to be written. It almost felt stubborn within me. Like there was something there and it was rich and it was deep and it was so fascinating to me, but it was just out of my reach.

This message felt like a beautiful table set on the other side of glass, but I couldn't find my way into the room. There was no door. All I could do was stand outside and look in. I tried to describe the taste of the meal, but I couldn't take a single bite. I tried to tell about the smell of the feast, but I had no frame of reference in the cold hallway where I stood. I tried to feel the warmth of the connection and that candlelight and conversation, but all I could do was see it. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't experience it. I couldn't communicate or translate or explain this idea that seemed to want to grow, but also seemed out of my reach.

All right. All that metaphor aside to simply say I was trying to write something that didn't seem to want to be written.

Finally, I realized I was strong-arming this idea to fit into a medium that I was comfortable with, which was writing, but the words didn't want to be written. They wanted to be spoken. When I finally, finally understood that everything made sense and this podcast was born.

I haven't done the research myself, but I've heard smart people say that our brains process language differently when we hear it compared to when we read it. If you think about creation, the Bible says that God spoke the world into being and it was. The spoken word carries a lot of power. It's true for negative words. We already know that. It's why we can still remember verbatim the hurtful words spoken over us in our past, the unkind nicknames that were given to us as kids. The offhand comment from a parent, the harsh reprimand from a teacher, the accusation of an ex. Positive words stick too, but it takes five times as many of those to outweigh the negative ones. And so today is I think about my next right thing, I'm becoming more and more convinced of the importance of speaking the good words out loud and in English or the language of your choice, including sign language, that counts too.

Because maybe during the past several weeks, your anxiety level has shot through the roof and fear is the bedrock for everything. If that's true for you, pay attention to the words you're saying out loud. Sometimes the words we speak when we're afraid sound like fear. That's true, but other times, even though we're afraid, the words might not sound like fear at first, they may sound like control or irritation, confusion, manipulation, ambivalence, shame, discipline, guilt or research. Wait, did you just say fear can sound like research? Yes, I did. And listen, I'm not here to convince us to try to be happy or to say that there's a such thing as having positive or negative emotion.

Listen, hello. Have we met? I am all about naming the things that are true about how we feel no matter what they are. But what I am saying is it's typically the fearful words that come out naturally in all kinds of ways, in the words that we speak, but the good words, we have to work for the good words. The fearful words find us easy, but the good words are found by us. We have to look for them, and then when we find them, we have to choose to receive them from God and from other people.

So this week, let's speak the good words out loud. Let's fill the air around us with words that are true,

noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or worthy of praise.

Let's speak the good words out loud into the air in our living rooms, our bedrooms, our kitchens, and our tiny front yards.

Let's not just think about how the Lord is good. Let's say it out loud. Let's remind each other that he is our dwelling place, that we have been given a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind.

Let's tell our children how smart they are.

Let's speak love and support to our friends.

Let's look at our spouses and thank them for all their good intentions.

Let's be believers not only in our minds and in our hearts, but with our words.

Let's be believers who say true words, beautiful words, good words of hope, even when we don't believe them, even when they don't feel true.

So what is a good word you can speak today? Maybe this is your next right thing.

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Thanks for listening to episode 122 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of speaking a good word can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because it's true. This is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As I mentioned in our last episode, last week was the one-year anniversary of the release of *The Next Right Thing* book, and my companion class Discern and Decide is available for one more day. The class will help you design a rhythm of life to support soulful decision making because the way you make decisions is just as important as the decisions that you make. Those unmade decisions, well, they hold a lot of power. And the secret to making better decisions is to learn to make them in a better way, and that's what Discern and Decide is all about.

The class is self paced, so you get it now. You can go through it later. We'll close it up tomorrow. Just visit [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) and click class in the top navigation or you can click the direct link in the show notes.

As always, you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or an Instagram at [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). I'm going to close with words from a memoir that I've been reading. It's called *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* It's by Sean Diedrich and the quote I'm going to read is a little bit longer than the quotes I typically end with, but man, as I was reading this book this week, I read this section and I'm not kidding you, I read it three times over because it was just that good. If you don't have the book, I highly recommend it. This is not an ad. This is just me telling you about a book I like.

In this section, he's thinking over his life and all of the difficult times he slipped through and then he comes to a realization. And that's what I'll quote here.

“I’ll be honest with you. The variables that construct my existence are confusing, like handwritten math equations jammed together on a sloppy page of homework. They don’t make any sense. One math problem leads to another than another and so it goes. One day, you realize that your life is one whole page of problems, and nothing ever gets solved. One ongoing equation with no equal sign at the end, but it occurred to me, beneath the canopy of a starlit heaven, that I’d been looking at my life all wrong. It wasn’t a math equation. Things weren’t supposed to add up. There was no solution. In fact, there was no problem.

Life’s variables and numbers and pages of chicken scratch weren’t mathematical marks. They were art, a drawing, an abstract painting. It was meant to be beautiful, not sensical, and embedded within the mess of it all were miracles. Small ones. I’d never paid attention to them because I was too busy, but it didn’t make them less real.”

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