



Episode 36: Stay In Today

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 36.

If you're new to the podcast, I'm so glad you're here. I hope our time together will become a habit you look forward to every Tuesday like a welcome speed bump in your week reminding you to slow down and simply do the next right thing.

A welcome speed bump...is that a thing? We are going to make it a thing.

I heard from a lot of you after last week's episode - episode 35 - where I had a conversation with actor and author Candace Cameron Bure. I wanted to quickly say thank you for the encouragement I received from many of you in messages and emails. It was my first time trying an interview format here. While it won't be a regular practice, I super appreciate your willingness to go with me as I tried something new.

I realize we've developed some trust between us and I always want to do my best to honor that trust by delivering what I promise: space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing.

Everything I do here will be to that end. This week, I feel compelled to take us back to the basics, the phrase our podcast is built upon: *let's practice doing the next right thing.*

I've mentioned before it's difficult to find an original source for this phrase because so many have said it, from Mother Teresa to Theodore Roosevelt, Anne Lamott and Martin Luther King, Jr. It sounds like such an obvious statement, after all, that's what we do every day is just the next thing, right? What's so inspiring about that?

Well, I don't know about you, but no one needs to tell me to make things complicated.

No one is tapping me on the shoulder and saying, Whatever you do today, Emily make sure it's harder than it has to be, okay?

No one has to tell me that because I do that all on my own. I am pretty much a professional at making things complicated and then trying to do them all at once.

Instead, what I need to be reminded of is to keep things simple, to stay in this day, and to simply do the next right thing now.

If you need that reminder too, listen in.

Sometimes our minds need time to process our realities, even when our reality is obvious to everyone else. No amount of lecture or explanation will ever help us to see something until we're ready to see it for ourselves.

That's why it's possible to be the last one to know that you're in love with that guy you've been hanging out with. And when you finally admit it, everyone in your life is like, *Duh we've known that for months.*

It's why when you finally admit it's time for you to quit your job or change majors or start something new, often times the people in your life who know you best will just nod their head knowingly, relieved you've finally realized what they've known for months.

Several years ago, I was that person who didn't realize something that was obvious to everybody else.

I still remember the moment it happened.

I was walking home from taking my girls to the neighborhood school and as I walked up the hill to our house, I started going over in my mind all there was to do.

Several things were normal house-y things: I had to go to the grocery store, do the laundry, finish the dishes, call the tree guy, price stuff for a yard sale we were having that weekend.

Other things were work-type things: I had to finish some photo edits, and turn in something my publisher asked for, I had an article to write, and I needed to prepare a blog post.

As I approached my front door I could feel my heartbeat start to speed up. My breathing got a little bit more shallow than it had been, my craving for coffee shot through the roof.

In short, I was stretched too thin and but I didn't fully know why.

And so there was a moment when I was loading the dishwasher while I was also planning out an email response in my head that I heard this phrase kind of ping in my head, and everything came together. *Emily, it said, you have a job.*

I know it sounds crazy to not know that, but when you work from home and you're also a mom, it's easy to believe the illusion for a pretty long time that you are a stay-at-home mom.

It was especially tricky because when I agreed to write a book and partner with a publisher, it didn't feel like a job in the way my past jobs felt like jobs because I didn't go into an office, meet with HR, or have to clock in or out.

I didn't have workmates or a cubicle or paid time off. I didn't even have a boss, not really.

These aren't complaints, they're just to point out how gradual the change was. The lines between home and work were hard to see and I was the one who had to draw them. At that time, I wasn't drawing them well simply because I didn't realize I needed to.

The result for me was frustration, overwhelm, and that feeling that I was trying to do everything but not doing any of it very well.

On a good day, I could only do most of it by half.

Admitting I had a job required a bit of grieving for me personally. Looking back, I never planned to start working at the time that I did. But I did just do the next right thing and each of those next-right-things ended up leading to several book contracts.

Those book contracts were a gift and the income I've been able to generate mostly from home has blessed our family.

But even good things come with shadows, and I'm learning to hold both the gifts as well as the burdens at the same time. For me, admitting I had a job was an obvious important first step. And it was that first step that led to some much needed freedom for me.

After that, my conversations with John started to change. The way I looked at our schedule started to change. And most importantly, I became kinder toward myself, realizing the only person who expected me to do "it all" was me.

No matter your life stage or your circumstance, when things begin to change, it's important to be vigilant about the expectations you might be carrying around.

This is an example of a time in my life where my situation changed but it was slowly and over time but my expectations of myself didn't shift along with it.

If I haven't admitted or am unaware of my current life situation, I am going to continue to expect things of myself and other people as if things are as they've always been when, in fact, they are not. The result? Stress, overwhelm, and trying to do too much at once.

This leads to an inability to discern my next right thing.

Another thing I do?

I move into the future predicting outcomes, and these outcomes generally don't turn out okay in my mind. I feel guilty about missing days with my kids in a summer that hasn't happened yet. I lose sleep over a conversation that I **might** have to have with an acquaintance. I imagine how someone might perceive me, and then I defend myself in my mind against that pretend perception.

I allow my emotions to walk into the future without my rational mind, like a gang of toddlers without a parent.

I can't possibly do the next right thing because I've traveled so far into the future, that my next right thing is far back in my imaginary past.

So essentially first, I underestimate my current situation and then I overestimate my future ability to handle things.

So where do we go from here? Well, the only place we can go, the only place accessible to us.

We go to now. So, let's practice doing that together.

First, look at your life and see what's there. Name it. Recognize it.

I'm going to ask you a series of questions and I want you to answer them without judgment, condemnation, anger, blame, or shame.

Now, I say that because sometimes we need someone to remind us to simply be with what's true without trying to change it, fix it, or put a spin on it to make it sound better or worse.

So here we go:

Is there something in your life that has changed that may be causing some extra overwhelm?

Have you had an injury or a sickness that has changed your energy level or ability in some way?

Are you having work done in your house for renovation or upkeep and this has brought extra people in your home at odd times?

Does someone close to you need you more now than they have in the past?

Is a child or a loved one struggling with anxiety? Sickness? Heartbreak? Or pain?

Are you waiting for results that are out of your control? How long have you been waiting for those results?

In general, have you added something new to your schedule without taking anything away?

Or, have you taken away something from your schedule that was life-giving to you but you had to take it away in order to make room for something necessary but maybe not as life-giving?

If these are hard to answer, consider asking someone close to you to answer them on your behalf. Maybe they will see something you're unable to see for yourself.

Now, take all of these things you've named, or you've asked someone else to name for you and sit with them for a moment.

Let what is true today be true for now.

Here's one simple practice I'm doing that sounds so elementary I'm almost embarrassed to share it, but I will because number 1. You're my people and number 2. I know my tendency to make things more difficult than they need to be and maybe simple is just what we are all looking for today. And this one is pretty simple.

First, take one thing on your mind that feels overwhelming.

State what it is. And then, turn it into a question and add *today* on the end.

For example, my twin girls start high school in the fall and, while I'm not exactly worried about it, it is something weighing on me in the back of my mind. I think about that time that's coming, I wonder if I'm prepared, if I've gotten them prepared, if there are things I haven't thought of that we need to do.

For this simple exercise, I would say: "I'm thinking about my girls starting high school in the fall."

Turn it into a question and add today: “Are my girls starting high school in the fall *today*?”

If the answer is no, I can set it aside.

If the answer is yes, ask yourself what is the next right thing I can do right now as it relates to this concern? If that feels confusing or maybe it’s so simple it’s confusing, I’ll give you another example.

Later this week, I’m traveling for a short overnight trip. It’s kind of hanging over my head and I’m feeling a bit scattered about it.

So, to state my concern, I’m thinking about my trip to Raleigh.

Turn it into a question, is my trip to Raleigh happening today?

No, but it is happening this week and I do need to prepare for it.

Okay, so what is one next right step I can take today to prepare for this trip?

I can’t do it all, but I can do one thing. And then I can do one more thing after that.

What about you? What is something on your mind?

Turn it into a question and add *today*.

Sometimes the thing on your mind *is* happening today. The answer is still the same — what is one next right thing you can do today?

Because that’s all you can do anyway. You can only do one thing at a time. Even better, *you have permission to only do one thing at a time*.

Let’s ask our Father to remind us of what’s true.

We come to You as our insides shake with constant activity.
We are distracted and we're making things harder than they need to be.
We aren't sure what big task to tackle next.

Instead of carrying shame because we can't figure out how to calm this hustle, we rejoice with confidence that we don't have to undo ourselves.

We don't have to figure our way back to the light and easy way of Jesus.
Because You have already made Your way to us.

We have Your Spirit living within us, which means there's hope for us after all.

You give us what we need to stay in today.
Like a Good Shepherd, you have prepared the green grass so we can lay right down on it.
You lead us beside still and quiet waters
And you always restore our soul.

You are the patience we need to finish each task, one step at a time.
You invite us with love into each moment and enable us to simply do the next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to Episode 36 of The Next Right Thing.

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.

You already know on Tuesdays I bring you *The Next Right Thing*, but you might not know that on Saturdays, I send out *One Last Thing*.

This is a mercifully short list I send to the email inbox to subscribers of good things to read, watch, and listen to kind of like your benediction to end the week before you start your weekend. I'm a big believer in sharing things that are meaningful to me and those Saturday morning emails are where I tend to do it.

If your soul subscribed to a newspaper, this would be it. I've been curating content for the weekend for years now and I just realized if you only know me from this podcast, you might not know about that.

If you'd like to get that short email there's a link in the show notes to sign up for it.

As always, everything I point to will always help create space for your soul to breathe.

If our short time here together on Tuesdays has been helpful to you, I would love to ask a favor? Would you be willing to leave a short review in iTunes? It doesn't have to be long, but those reviews help other people find the show and any words you could offer there, well, it would be super encouraging.

Now some final words from Psalm 118:24, a simple reminder to stay right here without rushing into the future

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

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