



99: Tear Down the Old, Make Room for New

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 99. This is a podcast all about making decisions. It's also a podcast 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, you're in the right place.

I'll bring you a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step. We may not talk about this often, but just because we don't say it out loud doesn't make it any less true, and that is that we are, everyone of us, carrying pockets filled with pain, add in a major life transition that requires energy and attention for decision-making and it's tempting to deny any heartbreak we carry just so we can move forward without falling apart.

But of course, we don't live in this world alone, we're surrounded by not only our own stuff that we carry, but also the pain of the world. From the devastation we see on the news, from the Syrian border and the coast of Japan, to the abuse of power in so many systems in our own country, to the prejudice that hides in our own hearts. Sorrow swirls among us, doesn't it?

We don't want to be people who shut our eyes to reality, hiding in comfortable corners and declaring that the world is not our problem. We also realize every story has nuance and there's no such thing as an issue. It's all people, it's all stories of people, and I'm learning to pay attention. If you're learning, too, or at least want to learn along with me, listen in.

For the first 11 years of my life, I shared a room with my big sister. That room in the front corner of our little Indiana house holds a decade of memories that blur together in a swirl of Barbie pink and Michael Jackson glove silver, and the rainbow label on the Kool & The Gang's 45 record.

So many memories from that childhood bedroom, but one that stands out above all the others is how many hours my sister and I spent on the floor with our Barbies. We'd scoot all the Barbie stuff in the middle in categories – the clothes, the furniture and the dolls themselves. We even had a specific category for all the extras, what we affectionately labeled the little junk, which included things like shoes and accessories, pillows and blankets for the Barbie sofas and beds, and else that in a real house would be considered a tchotchke.

Summertimes were the best Barbie playing times because we could start in the morning, and we would pick all the stuff then, and then we could spend the whole day setting up the houses and the stores, the school rooms and the hideouts, not to mention we could see how all the drama would unfold in the Barbie world.

Side note: I'll give you one guess as to which sisters spent the most time on the houses and which one of us spent the most on interpersonal Barbie relationships.

We didn't have the Barbie mansion that was for the rich kids, but it didn't even matter. We used the bedroom floor, creatively positioning furniture to create walls and dividers in our imaginary houses. The play would break only for meals, so after fried bologna sandwiches and three flavored ice cream, we would sometimes play until bedtime only to continue in the morning.

One of my great delights of my childhood actually was that our mom never made us clean up our room at the end of the day. I mean, she didn't suffer filth, don't get me wrong, but she did understand the hard work it took to craft an entire Barbie world on the floor of our bedroom. So we were always allowed to play, sleep and then wake up to the pink floral world untouched in the night, ready for our imaginations in the morning.

But hear me now, keeping those Barbie living room decorations intact for days on end, that took some commitment on our part. We had to be sure our creations left a bit of a path for walking through, how

to make sure the cat didn't come in and wreak any monstrous havoc. We had to be sure that that plastic China cabinet that was missing the fourth leg was positioned neatly against the wall so it wouldn't topple over.

Walking through the maze of plastic furniture without knocking anything down was a skill we perfected. We knew how to keep things intact so the play could continue. This is just one story of many to illustrate this simple fact. I know how to keep things together. I think a lot of us do. We see a certain reality we want to maintain and we do anything to keep it that way. Even tiptoe through systems, we suspect maybe corrupt and relationships we fear aren't as healthy as they seem.

This episode just took a turn, didn't it?

Well, here's the thing. If I can't have actual wholeness, I'll do what I can to maintain the illusion. I am not a tear-it-down kind of person is what I'm saying, but keeping things intact is not a character trait, it's a decision and it's not always a good one.

The painful truth is that sometimes in order to experience wholeness, first we have to tear something down. It sounds counterintuitive and you'd better believe it often feels that way, too, but God himself understands the necessity of being torn down to be remade. He is making all things new and that is our great hope in this one life we've been given. Notice though that scripture doesn't say he's making all new things. He's making all things new, taking what is and remaking it new, different and whole.

Tearing down can be dramatic and sweeping and obvious, but it can also be daily, intentional and slow. Sometimes the tearing down happens to us in a way we can't avoid. Other times the tearing down will never ever happen unless we make a choice. The process is not easy and it's not always beautiful, or is it? And I've just forgotten how to see.

Am I trying to move from beginner to expert denying the real work of apprenticeship, learning and messing stuff up?

Do I want to push people from offense to forgiveness, skipping over the justice and the consequences that may need to be faced?

Am I looking for blooms before the roots are ready?

I don't have to dig too deep to find this confession. I want to move from brokenness straight to wholeness forgetting the necessary work of struggle in the process of our personal and communal formation.

So why all this talk of struggle? Don't we have new life in Christ? Absolutely we do and look what it took. Our friend Jesus mocked and condemned, broken for the sin of the whole world and me and you.

I have a friend named Stephen Roach and I read something he said the other day that I'll share with you. By the way, if you recognize his name, Stephen is part of a band called Songs of Water. He's the founder of The Breath & The Clay creative arts movement, and he's the host of the Makers and Mystics podcast.

So Stephen said these wise words recently about creativity and destruction, and here's the quote.

He says, "The opposite of creativity is not destruction. The creative process requires we tear down preexisting structures before we can build or innovate. The opposite of creativity is passivity."

In our last episode, I talked about the importance of listening to our emotions and in that conversation that's episode 98 if you haven't heard it, I said emotions are allowed to have a seat at the table. They just aren't allowed to sit at the head. But what I failed to explain though, now that I look back, is that while emotions aren't allowed to sit at the head, neither is any other part of me, not alone. The truth is I also don't trust my thoughts and ideas to sit at the head all by themselves or my gut or my intuition.

I can't allow any part of me to be passive when it comes to making decisions especially ones that may potentially involve confronting the way things have always been done and tearing down systems that run counter to the kingdom of God.

I want to show up fully awake to my heartbreak and fully aware of the facts. I want to show up present and self-aware and whole, but that doesn't happen instantly and so I'm learning to be gentle with myself even while I push myself to continue to move toward what might be uncomfortable space.

This takes work done on purpose with eyes wide open and y'all, it's the kind of work that can't be done alone. We need male and female, heart and head, action and contemplation. We have been made new and we are being made new. We meet Jesus and then we walk with him and each other for the long haul. I'm learning from the prophets how the true ones don't just tear stuff down, they have love enough for people and for the truth to stick around to see things made new.

In closing, I'll gently ask you as I'm asking myself, what needs to be torn down?

What false stories am I believing about people of color, about women, about men, about children?

What misconceptions do I have surrounding mental health or chronic illness?

What stereotypes do I believe about those whose faith looks different from mine? Whose families look different from mine? Whose calling looks different from mine?

What systems have I bought into that run counter to the foundation of the kingdom of God?

What false narratives do I have about God that are keeping me from believing in His goodness?

What's one next right thing I could do today to begin to untangle lies from truth?

Let these words written by Sam Yoder be our prayer together.

“God we'll sing how through your son you turned this loss and hurt into glory. How when scorned in death, you raised him up. His gains become the whole world's story. Son of God, in you we've taken up the way of love's occupation. Oh, the joy to share in your reward, the stunning turn of new creation.”

May it be so in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Thanks for listening to episode 99 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this invitation to tear the false

things down can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because it's true that this is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

If you're looking for me, you can find me at emilypfreeman.com. If you're looking for my book, you can find it at nextrightthingbook.com or wherever books are sold. If you're looking for podcast transcripts of this very one, you can find this one and all the other ones at thenextrightthingpodcast.com and if you can believe it, I kind of can't, but our next episode is our 100th.

I don't have a huge party planned, but I don't know. Maybe there will be an announcement. Maybe there will be a surprise, who can say? Well, in closing, here's the chorus from that song by Sam Yoder that I quoted in the prayer.

Let all things rise and bless your name. All things made right and new again. Oh Lord, our God, your goodness is free and boundless is reaching endless through it all.

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